

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

13 March 2015

## Northern Ireland public sector strike

Public sector workers in Northern Ireland, organised by the Unite, Unison and GMB unions, are holding a one-day strike today. Workers employed in health and education are taking part, alongside other public sector staff, including Translink public transport employees who operate buses and trains in the province.

The action is in opposition to the Stormont government plans for austerity cuts that will slash 20,000 jobs. The Northern Ireland province is heavily dependent on public sector employment.

Rallies and marches are planned in major cities and larger towns including Belfast, Derry, Enniskillen, Omagh and Newry.

## Ongoing dispute by London art gallery staff

Staff at the National Gallery in London are due to begin a two-day strike on Saturday, followed by five further days from March 24.

They first took strike action in January against the gallery's plans to privatise two-thirds of the 600 jobs on site.

## Emergency call operators in south east England escalate dispute

Telephone operators taking emergency calls for the Essex County Fire and Rescue service in south east England began an eight-day strike on Tuesday. They are represented by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

The action is in response to the authority introducing new shift patterns for the telephone operators. A majority of the operators are women with young families and the newly introduced shift patterns make it difficult for them to balance their work and family lives. Some of the operators have had to leave their jobs or cut their hours as a result of the new shift patterns.

## Airport ground staff at two German airports walk out

Ground crew staff belonging to the Verdi union at Dusseldorf and Hannover airports began a six-hour strike Wednesday at 8:30 a.m. The action affected mainly check-in desks and baggage handling services.

According to Verdi, 90 percent of its 230 members at Dusseldorf joined the action, while 60 workers walked out at Hannover.

The employees are in dispute over a wage claim with their company, Aviapartner, which provides ground services. The strike follows four days

of fruitless negotiations.

## Sympathy action by Finnish air staff

The Finnish Aviation Union (IAU) held a 14-hour strike on Sunday, in sympathy with striking pilots at budget airline Norwegian Air, in a dispute over working conditions and job security.

The IAU strike led to cancellation of some flights from Helsinki. Baggage handling and customer services were the main areas affected.

On Tuesday, the Norwegian Air strike was suspended after 11 days, after the union and company officials announced they had reached a deal. The strike had grounded Norwegian's flights, affecting 200,000 passengers. The union claimed to have secured a three-year employment guarantee, while agreeing to more flexible working hours.

## French ferry workers bring Channel port to standstill

After staff held a meeting on board the cross channel ferry Berlioz, on Tuesday morning they decided to go on strike till 6 p.m. that day. The Berlioz is owned by the MyFerryLink company. It was berthed in the port of Calais and the action meant other ferries were unable to leave or enter the port, bringing all sailings to a halt.

The action follows a decision by the UK competition authorities that the company must cease running its ferry services between Calais and Dover because the company has a partnership agreement with Eurotunnel.

## Irish retail staff vote for action

Staff at the Irish retail store chain Dunnes voted by a two-thirds majority to strike on Thursday, April 2. Around 5,000 staff at 107 stores throughout Ireland are expected to take part in the strike. Management at the privately owned company have threatened to carry out layoffs and redundancies should the strike go ahead.

The shop workers are members of the union Mandate. The grievances include failure of the management to negotiate on previously agreed terms, low pay and the use of contracts with no fixed hours. Such contracts result in Dunnes employees having uncertain incomes, making it impossible to enter into financial arrangements such as mortgages.

## **Strike by Maltese public transport workers**

The Union Haddiema Maqghudin (UHM) held a two-hour strike of its members at Malta Public Transport (MPT) on Thursday evening.

The UHM is in dispute with a rival union General Workers Union (GWU) as to who has the most members at the company. There is a similar dispute at the Malta Freeport where the GWU had ordered a go-slow and work-to-rule over the weekend. In this case, GWU is claiming to be the majority union of the employees.

Middle East

## **Egyptian cement workers demand profit share**

Six hundred employees of the Suez Cement Company came out on strike on Sunday after management refused their demand to have their full share in the company profit share scheme. Management had cut back on one month's payment out of twelve of the share scheme.

The workers are based at the company's Wadi Hogul branch in Suez. Their colleagues at the Moqattam branch and at the company's main headquarters are also taking part in the action.

Suez Cement is one of Egypt's leading cement manufacturers and employs 3,500 workers in total at five sites.

## **Israel trade union general strike call**

Israel's trade union federation Histadrut was planning to proceed with its general strike call in south Israel in the lead up to the general election. The action is due to affect the area from Ashdod to Eilat and will include major public corporations such as Israel Mail, the Eilat airport, the water and electric companies and Israel's largest bus company, Egged. Local government authorities, government offices and some private companies will also take part.

The action is to protest plans by Israel Chemicals (ICL) to lay off 140 workers at its Bromine plant in the south of Israel, as part of an efficiency drive. South Israel suffers higher unemployment compared to other parts of the country.

A challenge to the strike brought by manufacturing interests was being heard at the national labour court in Jerusalem on Wednesday to outlaw the action. At the time of writing the decision was not known.

## **Defiant action by migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates**

Several hundred migrant workers from South Asia held a defiant strike and march in the affluent business district of Dubai on Tuesday to demand higher wages. They are employed in building the Fountains Views development, a project for Dubai-based Emaar Properties. The development is to create prestigious apartments for the rich.

According to press reports, the strike and demonstration were brought to an end after one hour following negotiations between the workers and police. Riot police were called to the scene but again, according to press reports, no arrests were made.

Africa

## **Nigerian university staff strike over unpaid wages**

Nigerian lecturers and other workers went on strike on Monday at Benue State University demanding payment of outstanding wages.

They began their indefinite strike after the state governor reneged on an agreement to pay February's wages. Union members will not get paid while out on strike as the Academic Staff Union of Universities concluded a previous strike with the signing of a 'no work no pay agreement'. The union has declared there will be no return to work until the outstanding salaries are paid.

## **Nigerian steel workers sacked after strike**

Four hundred Nigerian steel workers who took strike action at the Abuja Steel Mill, Niger state, on March 4 have been sacked.

The workers had gone on strike demanding a 2013 negotiated agreement be implemented. On returning to the mill to continue their protest, as they have been doing daily, they found armed police guarding the entrance with a notice on the gate announcing their sacking.

## **Nigerian journalists plan picket over missing pay**

Journalists at the Nigerian *ThisDay*, *Newswatch* and *Times* newspapers are set to picket the company over non-payment of wages.

The journalists have not disclosed the day and time of the action.

On a previous picket of the company premises, the managing director set armed police on them.

## **Nigerian state workers in Ogun demand unpaid wages**

State workers in the Nigerian state of Ogun, members of the Joint Negotiating Council (NJC), have begun a three-day warning strike. They are demanding five months unpaid wages.

They came out on strike after an agreement brokered by the union for the Ogun state government to pay February's wages did not materialise.

The agreement had been based on the state government using workers' own cooperative funds to cover February's pay, but it turned out that the payments could not be accounted for. This led to the collapse of the agreement.

Similar action is underway in several other Nigerian states.

## **Namibian mining service workers continue dispute**

Members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia responsible for maintenance of seawalls, mining services and fuel management at B&E International, Luderitz, Namibia, have been on strike since February 16.

The company provides services to the Namdeb diamond mining company, which is 50 percent owned by the state and 50 percent by DeBeers.

Of the 200 strikers who initially took action, 79 workers were sent back to work after a labour court order ruled their jobs were essential services.

The workers have accepted a 15 percent pay increase and 50 percent rise in medical cover but there has been no agreement on pay negotiations and allowance for 2015-16, so the strike continues.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**