

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 April 2015

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Europe

## German bank staff strike

Bank staff in eastern Germany employed by Postbank, a subsidiary of Deutsche Bank, began an indefinite strike on Monday. The strike was in response to possible plans by Deutsche Bank to sell off its Postbank subsidiary in a boost to streamline its operations and enhance profitability.

The states most affected were Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and parts of Brandenburg. Postbank employees from the cities of Leipzig, Dresden, Halle and Cottbus attended a demonstration in Berlin on Monday afternoon.

Postbank staff are seeking a 5 percent pay rise and reassurances that if the sale goes ahead, there would be no redundancies from the 9,500 workforce until at least 2020.

Verdi, the union representing Postbank workers, said it would spread the strikes to other states in the course of the week. The board of Deutsche Bank is due to meet Friday and an announcement is expected regarding Postbank's future.

## UK National Portrait gallery staff continue action

Gallery staff at the National Portrait Gallery in London are striking this week over plans to privatize their jobs. They are members of the Professional and Commercial Services (PCS) union.

The gallery management want to privatise two thirds of the 600 jobs. The tender for the privatisation process is due to go out just two days before the general election on May 7.

The employees have taken 18 days of action to date over the issue.

## Bus drivers in Bradford, England to walk out

Bus drivers working for the First Bus Company in the English town of Bradford voted for a 48-hour strike beginning midnight April 27.

The dispute is over the re-allocation of staffing duties relating to one of the routes between Bradford and the nearby town of Halifax. The workers are members of the Unite trade union.

The reallocation results from a shortage of drivers employed by the

company. A Unite spokesperson said: "There is a big shortage of drivers with no recruitment of new drivers and this is coupled with the movement of jobs without consultation from Bradford to other towns."

## Icelandic workers take general strike vote

Around 10,000 workers, represented by the Federation of General and Special Workers in Iceland (SGS), have voted by a 95 percent majority to hold a series of strikes. The union said they would be held over the next five weeks, culminating in a general 24-hour strike on May 26.

The employees are seeking a rise in the minimum wage to 300,000 ISK (\$2,200) per month over the next three years.

The strikes are expected to affect the wholesale food industry, where 42 percent of the workforce is represented by the SGS union, and the tourist and cleaning industry, which has around 32 percent of its employees in the SGS union.

## Irish bus drivers ballot for action

Bus drivers employed by the state-owned Dublin Bus and Bus Eireann have voted to strike in May. The strikes are in response to Dublin Bus and Bus Eireann's plans to open 10 percent of their routes to private tenders.

Drivers represented by the SIPTU trade union are due to strike May 1 and 2 and May 15 and 16. Bus drivers in the National Bus and Rail Union will strike on those dates and in addition will hold strikes on May 29, 30 and 31. The unions are also proposing further strike dates if talks with management produce no agreement.

Minister for Transport Paschal Donohoe has called for the Labour Relations Commission to become involved in the dispute.

## Irish teaching unions boycott training sessions

Irish teachers are boycotting training sessions, organized by the Education Department, in relation to continued professional development (CPD) for the new junior cycle programme it is attempting to impose.

The teachers are represented by the ASTI and TUI unions. The new programme affects secondary school education and will "feature newly developed subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting."

Teachers are concerned the changes are being imposed with inadequate

discussion and will have a detrimental impact on the education of children.

The initial training sessions were for English teachers, but to date only 12 non-unionised teachers have taken part in them and eight out of 14 of the sessions had to be cancelled.

### **Portuguese air pilots announce strike**

The Portuguese Civil Aviation Pilots Union has announced 10 days of strike action from May 1 to May 10. The strike will involve their members employed at the state airline TAP Air Portugal.

The government intends to privatise TAP, a condition demanded by the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank in exchange for loans of €78 billion made to Portugal in 2011.

The company employs around 12,000 staff. It is expected the strike will lead to the cancellation of most of its scheduled flights.

According to the Portugal News web site, “Pilots said they would only return to the cockpit should the government agree to offer them a share of the company and reinstate a longevity subsidy which saw longer serving pilots paid extra for their loyalty.”

It noted that the strike would end “a mere five days before the deadline for interested parties to hand in their bids for TAP in the airline’s controversial privatisation process.”

### **Russian workers protest unpaid wages**

Strikes have broken out across Russia by workers demanding unpaid wages. These include teachers in the Far East, metallurgical workers in central Russia and autoworkers in St. Petersburg.

According to the Russian statistical service, wage arrears in April amounted to \$56 million, up 15 percent on the previous year.

As well as strikes over unpaid wages, automobile workers in a Ford assembly plant near the Estonian border held a strike to protest production cutbacks.

Middle East

### **Egyptian university staff strike**

Custodian staff at the American University in Cairo walked off the job Sunday. They are protesting budget cuts which have led to austerity measures affecting wages and conditions.

Following a strike in 2010, unions and university management had signed an agreement on contract extensions and job promotions. However, management has not kept to the agreement over the past five years, saying it was necessary to impose budget cuts due to falling student numbers.

### **Iranian teachers’ protest**

Last week over 200 teachers protested over several days in front of the

Ministry of Education building in the southwestern city of Bushehr. They were demanding increased wages and conditions in line with other government employees. Similar demonstrations took place in other provinces.

### **Israeli labour court orders suspension of job cuts by chemical plant**

The District Labour Court in Beersheva has ordered Israeli Chemicals Limited (ICL) to suspend its planned 140 job cuts at the Bromine Compounds plant in southern Israel, pending a second hearing next week.

The Histadrut trade union federation has been involved in a long dispute with ICL, including organising industrial action, over its planned job cuts.

Africa

### **Gabon oil workers halt oil production**

Gabon oil workers struck Synopec Addax Petroleum Oilfields on April 14, bringing production to a halt. Workers began the indefinite strike after learning five of their workmates were earmarked for dismissal. The Addax oilfield produces 220,000 barrels of oil per day.

### **Tanker drivers in Ghana threaten to walk out**

Tanker drivers in Ghana have threatened to strike on April 27 unless a threat to their livelihood is lifted. The National Petroleum Authority (NPA) is demanding drivers install tracking devices into their cabs.

The tanker drivers union says its members are angered by a situation whereby 5,000 tankers are in operation but only 1,000 trackers are available. The NPA says tankers presently operating out of Tema Oil Refinery will not be allowed to continue without trackers.

### **Kenyan nurses continue dispute**

Kenyan nurses are continuing strike action in Mombasa despite the state governor’s insistence they return to work.

Nurses ignored a demand by the county government that they return to work or face the sack. The strike began on April 18 and was sparked by the state government’s refusal to resolve a list of demands, including remittance of statutory dues, deductions for uniforms and promotion for all nurses.

The county health chief, after claiming the strike would be deemed illegal through the courts, said, “We have the numbers to replace the striking nurses and have advertised 52 nursing vacancies for applicants to be interviewed, and have already received over 500 applications.”

### **Protest by former Liberian Ebola workers**

Three hundred Liberian health workers protested at a signing over ceremony of aid facilities to the health ministry.

The former Ebola workers were protesting that the Liberian government owed them six months outstanding wages and hazard payments. As a result of the protest delegates to the ceremony were turned away and it was abandoned.

The 700 affected workers are making their claim against the government-run ELWA-2 programme but say that in contrast the ELWA-3, run by Medecins Sans Frontieres, met their commitments. The handing over ceremony was postponed until a future undisclosed date.

### **Timber producers seek pay cut**

Zimbabwe employers in the timber sector of the economy are calling for a reduction in the minimum wage by a third. Workers in the industry are angry at the employers' offer of wages of \$105. They are currently paid \$150 a month.

The response of the Zimbabwean Trade Union Congress to the timber industry's proposal was to offer to send the dispute to arbitration.

Tea plantation workers are confronted with similar threats to their wages, with a reduction of 25 percent to the minimum wage, which they also refused to accept. Recently a claim by textile workers for a wage increase was settled without a pay rise. New workers coming into the clothing sector start at 20 percent below the minimum wage.

### **Strike by Malawi secondary teachers**

Secondary school teachers are out on strike in Kasungu, Salima and Ntchisi districts of Malawi, demanding their unpaid March salary. The teachers say they have been forced into industrial action in the run-up to end of term exams and cannot manage without their salaries.

The strikers said they would return to work only when they are paid their salary arrears. The ministry of education said they should receive their arrears by this Friday.

### **“Go-slow” by medical staff in Kenya**

Medical staff in Tharaka Nithi county, Kenya, have begun go-slow action to demand unpaid wages for the month of March. The workers were promised they would be paid on the 30th of each month.

The Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN) had threatened, in a letter to the employer, to strike from April 20 if the arrears were not paid by April 17. However, following the passing of the deadline without the arrears being paid the union informed the employer that go-slow action would proceed.



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