

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

1 May 2015

Europe

## Strike of Irish bus drivers to go ahead

The SIPTU trade union and National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) are planning to go ahead with strikes today and Saturday.

The stoppages are in opposition to government plans to hive off 10 percent of the routes currently run by Bus Eireann and Dublin Bus to private companies.

The unions said the strike was proceeding even though the government said no employees would be compulsorily transferred to the private company given the route. Despite these assurances, workers fear further services may be privatised and the measures will lead to an attack on pay and conditions.

## Irish retail workers at Dunnes to hold protest march

The Mandate trade union has called a demonstration of Irish retail workers employed by Dunnes on June 6. The demonstration will go to Dunnes' headquarters in Dublin.

Around 6,000 Dunnes staff held a one-day strike at the beginning of April, demanding secure hours and pay, job security and the right to union representation. They are also demanding a 3 percent pay rise. The strike affected more than 100 of the retail chain's stores.

Local actions and protests will take place prior to the main Dublin march.

## London's Dockland Light Railway staff being balloted

Dockland Light Railway (DLR) staff, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union are being balloted over this year's pay offer for directly employed staff. Workers are rejecting DLR's offer.

In a separate dispute, employees at the facilities company Interserve, also RMT members, are seeking an increased pay offer. The result of the ballot is expected on May 12. Interserve, the international support services and construction group, provides cleaning and security services to the DLR.

## Additional unions may join Icelandic general strike

Icelandic trade unions representing around 10,000 workers are due to hold a general strike over pay and conditions at the end of May.

An additional 56,000 workers may join the strike. The Bay Alliance, an umbrella organisation of unions including the Labour and Seamen's Association of Keflavik, was in talks with employers' representatives, but these have stalled. The unions said they are likely to join the planned general strike. They represent around 21,000 workers.

Talks between the Labour Union and the Commercial Federation of Iceland and management have also broken down. The 35,000 members they represent may also join the general strike.

## Serbian teacher unions end action

The Union of Education Workers and the Union of Trade Unions of Education Workers of Serbia have announced the ending of industrial action.

They began strikes in November of last year. Two other teacher unions had previously announced the termination of industrial action.

Teachers had cut class times by 30 minutes in response to salary cuts imposed by the ministry of education. They agreed to end the action after the ministry agreed to reimburse teachers for pay cuts. The teachers are now expected to make up the lost teaching time.

The substantive dispute over proposed pay cuts remains unresolved.

## Turkish unions protest May Day restrictions

The confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (DISK) and the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) held a march on Sunday to protest plans by the authorities to close off Taksim Square for May Day celebrations.

Riot police blocked the protestors' access to the square by setting up barricades. The protestors shouted slogans as they marched.

## Protest by Ukrainian coal miners

Last week, thousands of Ukrainian coal miners held a rally near the Cabinet of Ministers building in Kiev.

Among their demands is the payment of wage arrears, the restoration of social guarantees and for a fair price to be set for coal. They demanded the resignation of the Minister for Coal and Energy and the scrapping of the proposed coal mine closure plan.

### **Strike by Cypriot port workers**

Staff employed by the Cypriot Ports Authority held a 24-hour strike Thursday in response to Cypriot government plans to privatise port facilities.

They held a protest outside the parliament building where the Communications and Works Committee was due to be discussing port privatization.

### **German trade unions demonstrate against power plant closures**

Around 15,000 German workers in trade unions representing miners and power plant workers demonstrated in Berlin on Saturday against government plans to impose taxes on older coal-burning power stations. The unions said the tax increases would lead to job losses.

Middle East

### **Protest over work conditions outside Iranian parliament**

Members of 10 labour organizations together with retired teachers held a demonstration outside the Iranian parliament on Tuesday. Their demands were for improved pay and conditions.

### **Strike in Israel as company threatens to sell factory**

Workers at the Nesher Har-Tov factory near Bet Shemesh, Israel, struck on Monday. The Histadrut labour federation organised the strike following the announcement by executives that they are going to sell off the factory. The company produces a popular malt-flavored soft drink.

Africa

### **Strike by South African power plant construction staff**

Construction workers employed by a contracted company building a power plant for Eskom at Medupi are continuing their strike. They are protesting poor hostel accommodation, the abolition of a contract bonus and are seeking a renegotiation of the living out allowance.

Workers have criticised the government for not intervening to resolve the dispute, particularly as the country is affected by regular load shedding, or power blackouts.

### **Short time working protest by Zimbabwean rail workers**

Zimbabwean railway workers have embarked on a daily two-hour strike in an attempt to force management to pay 11 months outstanding wages.

Management, addressing workers at a rally surrounded by riot police, claim they are not able to pay wages due low business.

The Railway Association of Enginemen said they would continue the daily action until their concerns are addressed. However, the union showed its commitment to the company and said its members would return to work each day after their two-hour strike.

### **Zimbabwean municipal workers impound cars over unpaid wages protest**

Council employees in Gweru City, Zimbabwe, impounded the local authority's cars last Friday to highlight their demand for unpaid wages. They took control of the cars in the police compound to prevent councilors and management taking what the protestors called "a jaunt to Bulawayo."

The employees last pay cheque was for the month of December, but they are still owed wages for the months April through to July for last year. A Workers Committee spokesperson said, "We can't have management and councilors spending council money on trips that do not benefit workers who are in salary arrears."

### **Strike of Mozambique construction workers**

Metalworkers, masons, machine operators, drivers and mechanics, building the Maputo Bay Bridge Mozambique, began a strike Monday.

Their employer is the Beijing-based China Road and Bridge Corporation. They are demanding better wages and secure contracts. Other grievances raised are wage disparity, lack of overtime payment, lack of health and safety regulations and no accident or medical coverage. A striking worker said, "To get our wages we have to demonstrate, otherwise we would not get paid".

Although the construction project is planned to run into 2017, management refuse to give workers long-term contracts.

### **Walkout by Zimbabwean nurses**

Nurses throughout Zimbabwe's state-owned hospitals went on strike Monday demanding night shift allowances.

The Health Services Board declared the strike illegal. Nurses went back to work on the same day, but refused to carry out night duty shifts. Nurses claim they have not been paid night shift allowances since January and when it was paid, it was at a rate of \$3 a month.

Negotiations over allowances have been going on since the beginning of March, with nurses saying this was too long. The Zimbabwe Nurses Association claimed the nurses were not on strike but were just not going into work at night. Student nurses are working alongside sisters-in-charge in dealing with some patients while others have been discharged.

### **Malawi Standard Bureau staff on strike**

Staff at the Malawi Standards Bureau have gone on strike for a pay rise. They initially demanded a 42 percent increase, but have reduced it to 39 percent. The Bureau made a 33 percent offer.

Staff placed protest placards at the company's gates declaring they will not return to work until management meets their demands in full. The impact of the strike is taking effect at the border post, where the company is responsible for verifying goods coming into the country.

### **Strike by nurses at Ghanaian hospital**

Nurses at the Ridge Hospital in Accra, Ghana are striking to demand payment of wages for March. Some 570 nurses employed in the national health service began the strike on April 13. Doctors are trying to maintain service.

Although management is in talks with the nurses, a news report said the Ghanaian Bureau of National Investigations stormed the hospital in an attempt to get the nurses back to work.



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