

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 December 2015

Nationwide strike of UK driving examiners

Last Friday saw the first UK-wide strike of staff at the government's Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). They are members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS).

The strike followed days of action on a regional basis and led to the cancellation of driving tests. Management plans to extend the working day and increase the number of tests taken. One examiner explained, "This will mean some driving tests taking place during darkness. There is a clear safety issue here and an issue over the fairness of this to those sitting their tests."

Staff on London light railway announce further strikes

Workers on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), which serves London's financial district, have announced a series of strikes. They will hold 24-hour strikes January 11, January 13 and February 11 followed by 48-hour strikes in February and March and four-day strikes on two dates in March.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) have been involved in a long-running dispute against alleged bullying tactics, breaches of agreements and use of agency staff by the company newly awarded the running of the service, Keolis Amey Docklands.

Strike by teachers in Rotherham, UK

Teachers at Listerdale Primary School in Rotherham held three days of strikes last week followed by three days this week.

The strikes are to protest the suspension of Craig Roberts, the school head, in September. He had been suspended by the school's academy trust over "serious concerns of a non-safeguarding nature."

Roberts told the media he had been suspended without warning and was still not clear why. Roberts and the strikers are members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT).

Strike by bus drivers in Medway, UK

Bus drivers working for the transport company Arriva in the town of Medway in Kent followed up a strike last Friday with a further strike

Monday.

The 200-plus members of the Unite union voted for the strike in November in response to the company's introduction of new timetables without consultation. The drivers say the new timetables mean some have had to drive for more than five hours without a refreshment or toilet break. The new timetables also meant some passengers were left without a service for them to be able to get to work.

Azerbaijani oil workers killed in fire

A severe storm, which caused a high-pressure underwater gas pipeline to rupture, led to a fire on an offshore rig in the Guneshli field in the Caspian Sea. The rig is owned by the Azerbaijani state oil company. The fire led to the death of seven oil workers. Around 20 are still missing and are feared dead. Others were taken to hospital, of which two have now been released.

Disputes hit Cyprus

Last Friday, 900 members of the bank workers union, ETYK, in the Cypriot republic held a strike after talks over the renewal of the collective agreement broke down.

Electricity workers in the Cypriot republic are campaigning against government plans to privatise the Electricity Authority of Cyprus (EAC). A threatened strike last Friday was called off. Members of the union met with energy minister, Yiorgos Lakkotrypīs, on Monday to press their concerns over job losses if the privatisation goes ahead.

On Tuesday, a strike was held in Turkish-controlled north Nicosia, where several unions protested outside the assembly building. Employees from the electricity industry, education, medical and municipal authorities organised under the umbrella of the Turkish Cypriot Platform joined the protest. The protests were to oppose moves by the northern Cypriot administration to cut wages and abolish cost-of-living allowances among other issues affecting public-sector staff.

Further strikes announced in Greece

Staff at the Attikon hospital in Athens announced they will hold a five-hour strike December 17. The strike is to protest underfunding and understaffing at the hospital. According to hospital unions, there are

currently 350 fewer staff than needed. The hospital will provide emergency cover during the strike.

The Greek Professional Soccer Players Association (PSAP) announced Monday that its members intend to come out on strike, beginning with the third round of the Greek Cup group matches between December 15 to 17 and continuing with Super League and second division matches due to be played December 19 to 21.

The PSAP called the strikes following the reneging on an agreement by the Greek football federation and the top two leagues reached two years ago, to compensate players sacked by financially troubled teams.

Hungarian teachers announce possible strikes

PSZ, one of the main Hungarian teachers unions, has announced possible strikes in the New Year over demands for increased funding for education in Hungary. PSZ sent a letter November 23 to the prime minister outlining its concerns over inadequate funding for education. A reply by the undersecretary for public education was rejected by the teachers' union as inadequate.

Hungarian state TV announces further job cuts

The Hungarian state television service MTVA has announced plans to get rid of another 129 jobs at the company. The cuts will fall mainly in the advertising and technical departments.

Currently MTVA employs 2,200 staff. It has cut staff previously. In 2011, it sacked 900, a further 200 lost their jobs at the start of 2013, and in January this year, 177 were discharged.

Protest by Russian truck drivers blocks highway

A protest by Russian truck drivers brought the Moscow ring road to a standstill last Friday. The drivers are protesting against the introduction of a new tax collection system to be imposed on lorries weighing over 12 tons when they use federal highways. The protest led to a 10-kilometer traffic jam on the ring road.

According to the truck drivers' union spokesman, drivers from Dagestan, Petersburg, Kursk, Tula, as well as from Moscow, took part in the blockade.

Thousands of jobs in danger as Spanish company threatens to fold

The Spanish renewable energy giant, Abengoa, is on the brink of bankruptcy with debts of €25 billion. The Spanish government has refused to bail it out.

The company employs nearly 29,000 globally, with 7,000 of the jobs in Spain. The head of the CCOO union in Andalucia, where the company has its headquarters, told the press he is waiting for a KPMG report into the company's finances but is expecting mass layoffs.

Egyptian journalists syndicate calls for release of detained journalists

The Journalists Syndicate, Freedom Committee, has demanded the release of journalists currently imprisoned in Egypt and the improved treatment, including medical treatment, of those currently jailed. Around 32 journalists are now being held in Egyptian jails. The committee plans to organise marches and protests in its campaign to get the journalists released.

Sit-in at Lebanese telecom company

On Thursday last week, staff at the Lebanese state-owned telecommunications company, Ogero, held a two day sit-in. They were expressing their solidarity with the head of the company, Abdul Youssef, who is the subject of a Central Inspection Department investigation.

Municipal workers strike in South Africa

Municipal workers in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, went on strike demanding full-time employment. Workers on temporary contracts at the Msunduzi electrical administration set tyres alight Monday to bring their protest to the attention to the municipal manager.

One worker explained that some of his colleagues have worked there between four and 15 years, but are still on temporary contracts. Another said it isn't what you know, it's who you know, alluding to officials employing their relatives. The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) representative refused to comment.

SAMWU is also involved in strike action by local government workers at licensing departments at the Randburg and Roodepoort centres in Gauteng, over the outsourcing of jobs.

Strike of Malawi match workers

Two-hundred-and-fifty workers at the Leopard matchmaking factory went out on strike last week. They were demanding the reintroduction of the end-of-year Xmas bonus payments. The bonuses, along with Christmas gifts, have not been given out over the last seven years.

The Leopard Company employees have been angry over the retraction of the gratuities over the years and have brought company production to a complete standstill by the withdrawal of labour.

Strike of Namibian fishermen continues

Striking Namibian fishermen have been indicted by the court to refrain from inciting or intimidating those attempting to return to work. Twelve fishing companies employing 832 fishermen had hoped the court would call off the strike.

The seafarers are expected to work 18-hour continuous shifts out at sea. When fishermen are injured through their work at sea, with no immediate

prospect of a return to shore, there is no medical cover or suitable equipment to treat them, sometimes resulting in the loss of life. The workers' legal representative likened their work conditions to slavery. The Namibian Labour Act restrains overtime to a maximum of three hours per day or 10 hours a week in the industry.

Nigerian water workers strike

Water workers in Ilorin State Nigeria took a three-day warning strike Monday. This will be followed by an indefinite strike if debts to workers are not settled, the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) warned. At issue are three months unpaid wages, cooperative arrears created over eight months and the fact that union dues deducted from wages had not been passed on to the union.

A union spokesman said they were also calling for the removal the Company General Manager for gross incompetence. Five workers are said to have died through the lack of an income. Many dams are not functioning across the state, ending water supply to residents.

Strike of Nigerian local government staff

Nigerian local government workers are on strike in Taraba State bringing out all sixteen local councils. All previous appeals over salary debt to local government have been treated with contempt. Although bail-out funds have been paid out to the local government from the central government, the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) says they have deliberately ignored the situation council workers faced.

NULGE said they would not return to work until the government met their demands. Several other unions may join the strike.

Nigerian workers ready to defend minimum wage

The Nigerian Labour Council says it is putting its members on a state of alert in preparation for a fight against attempts to cut the minimum wage. The Governor of Zamfara State and chairman of the Nigeria Governors' Forum have restated their determination to reduce the minimum wage or alternatively to carry out a jobs cull. The collapse in oil prices is being cited for the reversal of the recent establishment of a minimum wage.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact