

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 January 2016

## Greek sailors hold 48-hour strike

Greek sailors organized by the Panhellenic Seaman's Federation (PNO) came out on a 48-hour strike on Wednesday. They are opposing the Syriza government's plans to reform the pension and social security systems leading to cuts and to plans to wind up the seaman's insurance fund and merge it into a bigger scheme with lower benefits.

## Greek workers oppose pension reforms

Around 3,000 students, pensioners, and private and public-sector workers marched through Athens on Saturday ending with a rally outside the parliament building. They were protesting plans by the Syriza government to cut the value of pensions and increase worker contributions. They chanted, "Your hands off our pensions!"

The public-sector union body, GSEE, along with the private-sector union federation, ADEDY, have called a 24-hour strike on Thursday, February 4 against the pension proposals. Parliament is due to vote on the proposals at the beginning of February.

## British Medical Association cancels second strike of English junior doctors

Junior doctors in England held a 24-hour strike on January 12 in opposition to the Tory government plans to impose a new contract on them. This new contract will mean a cut in pay and longer working hours.

The British Medical Association had proposed a second strike, for 48 hours, due to have started on January 26. However, the BMA called this off while talks take place between it and ministry of health officials under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services (ACAS).

A third planned strike for nine hours with no emergency cover on February 10 could still go ahead.

## Third union announces it will join London Underground strike

The union representing office and ticket staff on the London Underground (LU) rail system, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) has announced it will take part in three 24-hour strikes due to

begin in the evening of January 26, February 15 and 17.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and the drivers union ASLEF announced their intention to strike earlier. They are opposed to LU's plan to introduce a 24-hour all-night service.

Another union, Unite, which had originally announced it would be taking part in the strikes has suspended its strike threat while talks with LU management take place. The main rail unions accuse LU management of wanting to breach safety standards in order for the 24-hour working to go ahead and that LU is trying to tie the discussions on this to a separate issue—a pay deal.

## French power workers strike

Staff working for state-controlled EDF which runs all France's nuclear power generating stations and over three-quarters of hydro generating ones, came out on a 24-hour strike Wednesday afternoon. The strike is in opposition to the French government's austerity measures.

## Strike hits French channel port

Ferry staff employed by DFDS went on strike in the port of Calais on Wednesday leading to DFDS vessels being unable to berth at the port. It is understood those involved in the action, who set fire to tyres, were former MyFerryLink workers. Details of what sparked the strike were not available at the time of writing.

MyFerryLink ferry staff were involved in a series of strikes and protests over the course of last year as it was announced the company, which was part of Eurotunnel, would be sold to DFDS Seaways. After intervention by the French government, the sale of MyFerryLink to DFDS went ahead with half of MyFerryLink ferry staff being employed by DFDS and half by Eurotunnel.

## Strike plan by tram drivers in Irish capital

Drivers on the Dublin light rail system have voted overwhelmingly to hold two 48-hour strikes beginning February 11 and February 18. The drivers are members of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

The planned strike is to push their demand for a substantial pay increase. TransDev the company operating the light rail system say they would only

consider a pay increase in line with the current Consumer Price Index (CPI).

SIPTU point out that currently the CPI is negative and so effectively the company is offering no pay increase. Talks involving the union and TransDev management have been set up by the Workplace Relations Commission.

### **Portuguese dockers end dispute**

The main union representing dockers at the port of Lisbon announced it has reached agreement with the government and is due to sign a new collective agreement on February 29.

The Lisbon port workers had been in dispute for the last three years. The union planned a series of strikes due to begin in November of last year, but the threatened strikes did not happen.

The agreement was reached after talks were held between the union and the Minister for Sea, Ana Paula Vitorino.

### **Cypriot port pilots suspend planned strike**

Port pilots at the Cypriot port of Limassol called off the strike planned for Monday. It had been called to oppose the privatization of the port being pushed through by the Cypriot government.

The head of the port pilots' union said the strike had been suspended after an agreement had been reached with Transport Minister Marios Demetriades.

Under the agreement, the pilots' union will be able to discuss terms and conditions of the pilots with any potential investor in the privatized port. The government had originally refused such a discussion.

### **Israeli bus drivers call off strike**

Bus drivers for Israel's largest bus operator, Egged, were due to go out on strike on Monday. However, after last-minute talks between Transport Ministry representatives and officials from the transport workers' union Sunday night, the strike was called off. The drivers had been seeking a pay increase. The company agreed to pay a minimum wage of NIS 39 (\$9.90) an hour.

Egged drivers had been among the lowest paid bus drivers in the country.

### **Strike at Israel's top science institute**

Around 900 staff working at the Weizmann Science research unit in Rehovot went out on strike Sunday. The strike was coordinated with the Israeli labour federation Histadrut. They are members of the administrative-technical workers union.

The strike is the result of a long-running dispute going back to 2010 between the staff and the institute over the institute's continued use of agency staff.

### **Struggle by Moroccan port workers**

Workers in the Somaport terminal at the port of Casablanca are facing intimidation, suspensions and sackings by management. They are members of the SNTP/UMT union. So far, one worker has been sacked and one suspended. Management is trying to impose new working conditions in contravention of a previously negotiated collective bargaining agreement.

### **Ivory Coast oil workers set to strike**

Oil workers employed at the Petroci, the Ivory Coast state-owned company, are planning to strike in response to another 150 jobs to be shed on top of 50 already slashed this year. This represents a third of the 600 employees at the company. The union says it is to call a vote at a convened general assembly on indefinite industrial action. Petroci produces over a third of the country's gas and supplies around 30 gas stations in the country.

### **Ghanaian teachers on strike for fairer wages**

Ghanaian teachers, members of the Teachers Education Workers Union (TEWU), have come out on strike to demand a pay increase and a fairer allocation of earnings amongst junior and senior employees at the universities. Teachers are angry that the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission have not acted on a report produced last June 2015.

The strike, which began on Monday, came ahead of a demonstration of an estimated half a million workers that took place on Wednesday which was organised by the Ghanaian Trade Union Congress. Workers demonstrated against a 50 percent increase in water and electricity charges and a 28 percent increase in petrol price.

### **Ghanaian informal workers strike over price increases**

Ghanaian workers organised by the Union of Informal Workers Association held a two-day strike over increased taxes and fuel prices. They joined a national demonstration on Wednesday.

### **Liberian workers oppose company union**

A United Workers Union of Liberia (UWUL) rep was sacked by China Union, an iron ore mining company operating in Liberia, after refusing to agree to recommend company concessions to cut pay and/or jobs.

The company is demanding the laying off of 82 employees or the reduction of every employee's salary by 30 percent, or a compulsory two weeks off work without pay.

The union representative accused his union of looking after the interest of management and not that of its workers. The members of UWUL are looking to break with the union, according to the sacked representative.

The Chinese company holds the largest concession in Liberia worth around \$2.6 billion.

### **Nigerian chemical workers sacked**

Seventeen staff at the Nigerian chemical company Nycil Nigeria Ltd., thirteen workers and four union executives, were sacked last December with three months compensation. The union responded by stopping production at the plant, claiming indiscriminate termination of appointments, and not negotiating with the union before the terminations.

When forty workers were sacked last June, the union took no action, advising workers not to strike. This time the union has responded by calling a strike. The union said they do not disagree with sacking workers as long as management gives them good reason.

The dispute was settled after the company paid the four sacked union officials one year's salary on top of their three months compensation, while compensation for the rest of the workforce was increased to six months.



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