

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 February 2016

Protest by London taxi drivers

Around 8,000 black cab taxi drivers held a go-slow demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament Wednesday afternoon. It was organised by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) in opposition to the use of the mobile telephone app Uber, which the traditional black cab drivers say is severely threatening their livelihoods.

Further strikes by teachers at English Midlands school

Teachers at Small Heath School Birmingham began a three-day strike on Tuesday in an ongoing dispute over original plans to make the school an academy school and take it out of local authority control. The council has now said there are no plans to make the school into an academy. However, in the course of action taken by the teachers organised in the National Union of Teachers (NUT), a teacher, Simon O'Hara, at the school acting as an NUT shop steward, was suspended. The latest strike by teachers is to win the reinstatement of O'Hara.

Blockades by Greek farmers continue

Greek farmers who held a 24-hour blockade of the Temple highway on Monday decided on Tuesday to continue the protest and blockade the highway indefinitely.

Currently, there are around 135 such blockades by farmers. Representatives of the 135 blockades were due to meet in Promachon this week in an attempt to coordinate the various blockades to produce maximum impact. The blockades and other actions by the farmers are in opposition to the Syriza-led coalition attacks on social security—particularly pensions.

On Wednesday afternoon, farmers in western Greece blocked the highway between Antirrio and Ioannina. On Friday, farmers across the country began to head towards Athens for a planned three-day protest outside parliament over the pension “reforms”.

Strike by Irish transport workers

A two-day strike of staff working for LUAS, the tram system in the Irish capital of Dublin, began Thursday. The Services, Industrial, Professional

and Technical Union (SIPTU) is seeking a substantial pay increase.

Talks between Transdev, the company running the tram service, and SIPTU over the last 18 months have failed to come to agreement on a pay rise as part of an agreement to run for the next five years. The only offer put forward by Transdev is for a pay rise in line with current inflation, which would effectively mean a pay freeze. The strike affects around 90,000 commuters in the Dublin area who would normally use the service.

Irish emergency call staff vote to strike

Staff at the Irish Emergency Call Answering Service (ECAS) who take and monitor calls for the emergency services (police, ambulance and fire services) have voted by an 84 percent margin to hold a 12-hour strike. They have not set a date for the action but say it will take place before the Irish election on February 26.

ECAS is part of the BT-Ireland phone system, but BT-Ireland outsources the service to Conduit Global. ECAS staff are members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU). They are calling for a pay increase and are currently paid €11.50 an hour. They are also calling for union recognition. Since the strike was called, management has not spoken to the CWU but has held meetings with ECAS staff across the three sites where the service operates. Another issue for the ECAS staff is toilet breaks. Currently, no more than one ECAS operative at a time, across the service, can take a toilet break. There are strict time limits on how long an individual toilet break can last, and there is a limit of 19 minutes for toilet breaks across the whole 12-hour shift.

Protests in support of Polish dockers

The International Transport Workers Federation this week organised protests in Luxembourg, Frankfurt and London in support of Polish dockers employed at the Deepwater Container Terminal in Gdansk.

The Polish dockers, members of the Solidarnosc union, have been attempting to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement for the last 30 months. Solidarnosc has accused the company of getting rid of union activists during this period.

The protests in Luxembourg, Frankfurt and London were held outside the offices of the Australian company Macquarie. The company specialises in asset management and financial services and is the major shareholder and manager of the Deepwater Container Terminal Company in Gdansk.

Protest march by Spanish trade unionists

Around 5,000 workers and trade unionists marched through Madrid on Tuesday in support of eight trade unionists whose trial started that day and was expected to last four days.

The trial of the eight arose from a general strike on September 29, 2010. On that day, the eight joined a picket line outside the gates of Airbus in Getafe in the Madrid suburbs. Riot police broke up the picket, firing shots in the air and rushing the assembled pickets, causing panic, which resulted in injuries.

Using legislation going back to the Franco period, the eight are being charged with “acting with violence.” If found guilty, they could face a total of 66 years in jail. Some 300 other Spanish workers currently face similar charges. Other demonstrations were planned to coincide with the planned four days of the trial.

Strike threat by Hungarian transport employees

Workers employed by the Budapest Transport Company (BKV) have established a strike committee and say they will hold a strike in the near future. BKV operates buses and light rail services in the Hungarian capital. Their issues include no pay rise for a considerable time, unsafe working conditions and layoffs by the company in spite of staff shortages.

Employees of the state-owned rail system MAV are also threatening to strike after prolonged talks between the company and their union for a pay rise proved fruitless.

Strike by Israeli municipal workers averted

A planned strike by Israeli municipal authority staff was averted at the last minute when the government’s finance ministry agreed to pay previously promised bonus payments. If it had gone ahead, the strike by the 100,000 municipal staff would have closed down around 250 local authorities.

Ivorian strike against job losses

Oil workers at the Ivorian state oil company Petroci went on strike February 2 to oppose job losses. Hundreds walked out on a three-day strike after the company cut the workforce by 10 percent. A further 200 jobs are under threat.

The union is demanding the company increase the redundancy package on offer. The union extended the initial three-day strike to push for an increased redundancy package and threatened to extend the strike to related industries such as oil refineries where it has members.

Petroci produces around 60,000 barrels of oil per day, controls around a third of Ivory Coast petrol distribution and supplies 30 fuel stations.

Nurses in Kenya strike over contract

Nurses and medical workers in Kenya’s Tharaka Nithi County went on strike February 1 to demand the implementation of an agreed deal.

The agreement was signed last year after striking medics returned to work, but the state reneged on the contract. The agreement included the payment of outstanding deductions and promotions within three months and for allowances to be increased.

Nigerian workers demonstrate over power price hike

The Nigerian Trade Union Congress and the Nigeria Labour Congress called a national demonstration on Monday to oppose electricity tariff increases. The demonstration took place in all 36 Nigerian states. The recent price increase is the fifth since 2012.

The two labour organisations threatened to call a national strike if the Regulator Electrical Commission does not withdraw the increase. The demonstration in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital city, closed down the offices of the distribution company responsible for electricity bills. The distribution companies were mandated to provide meters over an 18-month period in 2013, but the bills for most Nigerians are still arbitrarily estimated.

Protest by miners in Tanzania

Miners at the TanzaniteOne mining company, which produces gemstones, came out on a two-day strike on Tuesday over the nonpayment of January’s wages. They are also dissatisfied with the response of the Mirerani Township and Simanjiro District to whom they took their grievance.

The company claims the January wages have now been paid into the workers accounts. Even after it was confirmed that January’s wages had been paid in, the miners were still calling for the removal of TanzaniteOne’s operating licence. They say there has been a series of ongoing disputes with the company. Miners are currently complaining they have to get drinking water from another district because the company’s water is unsafe.

Strike by Nigerian teachers

Teaching in Nigerian public schools in Ekiti State came to a halt on Monday when teachers held a two-day warning strike. They took the action after bailout money recently paid to the state was not used to pay their outstanding allowances related to wages for September 2014 and leave bonuses.

The teachers took the action even though the state governor said they would be paid. Wages for the previous two months had been paid into teachers’ accounts but then withdrawn.



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