

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 February 2016

Strike by children's services staff in UK county of Oxfordshire

Staff working for the Early Intervention Service (EIS) at Oxfordshire County Council held a 24-hour strike Tuesday. The members of the Unite union voted by an 83 percent majority to hold the strike. It coincided with a meeting of the council to set the budget for 2016/17, which involves pushing through cuts of £69 million. The proposals include plans to close all 44 children's centres and seven EIS hubs throughout Oxfordshire, which includes Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's Witney parliamentary constituency.

The strikers' picket line was joined by hundreds of protesters against the council's planned closures.

Vote for strike by UK children's charity staff

Staff working for Action for Children have voted for a strike in a long-running dispute over a wage increase. The workers, represented by the Unite and Unison unions, voted by more than 70 percent for a strike and by nearly 90 percent for action short of a strike. However, turnout was low with only around a third of those eligible to vote taking part.

Action for Children with around 5,000 employees is seeking to impose a 1 percent pay increase for 2015/16 and no cost-of-living increase for 40 percent of staff. Both Unison and Unite have called for the charity to seek the assistance of the government conciliation service ACAS to settle the dispute.

Neither union has set a date for any strike or other action.

Second 48-hour strike on Irish capital's light rail system

Staff on the Dublin light rail system, Luas, held a second 48-hour strike this week, on Thursday and Friday, following a similar 48-hour stoppage last week. The members of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) are seeking a substantial pay increase of up to 53 percent and improved working conditions.

Talks between Transdev, the company running Luas, 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 rise in line with current inflation.

Further action is planned for March, which would include St.

Patrick's Day celebrations. Currently there is no third party involvement in the dispute. SIPTU has called on the government body, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, to become involved in talks.

Protest against Uber in Danish capital

Around 300 taxis blocked the Kongens Nytorv central square in Copenhagen Saturday in a protest against the taxi hailing mobile phone app, Uber. Their protest began at 9 p.m.

The traditional taxi drivers argue that their livelihoods are being undermined because the drivers hailed via Uber do not pay taxes or insurance, so can offer a cheaper service.

Hungarian teachers strike call

Following nationwide protests including in Budapest last Saturday, teachers organized in the Union of Teachers (PSZ) have announced their intention to go ahead with a strike in March.

More than 20,000 teachers and their supporters marched to a rally outside the parliament building. It was organized by PSZ together with the Democratic Union of Teachers (PDSZ).

The PSZ has issued a 25-point list of demands, which includes putting the school-leaving age back up to 18 from 16, an end to the state monopoly on textbooks so teachers can have flexibility to use alternatives, a decrease in the number of obligatory lessons and for teachers to be paid overtime for any additional lessons taught. They are pushing for the wages of teachers' aides, administrative and technical staff to be increased. They have not had a pay rise since 2008.

Strike announced at Icelandic aluminum smelter plant

Employees in the export section at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminum smelting plant in Straumsvik in Iceland will go on strike Tuesday to push for a wage increase. They are members of the Hlif trade union. Negotiations between the union and Alcan management have been taking place since 2014. A strike threat in the smelting department last December was called off as workers were persuaded to continue

negotiations.

The strike threat for next Tuesday is only by workers in the export section. Aluminum smelting would continue, but the company would not be able to ship out finished products. The company, which employs around 450, is responsible for nearly 25 percent of Icelandic exports by value.

strike of Israeli bank staff

Staff working in the 26 branches of the Israeli Discount Bank in the Shfela Inlands Plain region held a strike Wednesday. The bank has 100 branches throughout the country. The strike follows the calling of a dispute by the bank workers committee last April and the application of various sanctions by the staff. The action is against restructuring proposals.

Strike call by Moroccan trade unions

Following a meeting between Morocco's main unions in Casablanca, they announced a 24-hour strike next Tuesday. The four unions are the Moroccan Labour Union (UMT), the Democratic Labour Confederation (CDT), the General Union of Morocco's Workers (UGTM) and the Democratic Labour Federation (FDT).

The strike call is over the government's austerity plans, including pension "reforms" and its refusal to enter into negotiations with the trade union bodies.

Demonstration by Kenyan university staff

Around 400 Kenyan striking university staff demonstrated last Thursday, protesting an assault on their union general secretary. They marched to the police station to report the assault. They accused the vice chancellor of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of slapping the union leader, and the demonstrators demanded his resignation.

The university staff are on strike over poor pay, job insecurity and the sporadic payment of allowances. The vice chancellor claims the strike is illegal.

Strike by council workers in Gweru in Zimbabwe

Workers employed by Gweru City Council in Zimbabwe have unilaterally had their wages cut by 50 percent. Their union has taken the council to court, claiming a breach of contract and acting against labour laws.

Although the enormous cuts were implemented June 2015, workers did not discover the reduction in wages till November when their salaries were only finally paid.

South Sudan bank workers strike

South Sudanese bank workers went on strike at the KCB banking group on Tuesday, demanding a substantial wage increase. Their wages have been cut by the government's currency devaluation in December in response to falling oil prices.

The company says it has been in negotiations with its staff since the December devaluation, although they regard the strike as illegal. The Sudanese pound was trading at 2.96 to the dollar until being floated—since when it has more than halved its value, currently trading at 6.4 pounds to the dollar. Inflation is currently at an annual rate of 164 percent.

Other workers in the financial sector at Equity Group went on strike last month demanding full compensation for the impact of devaluation.

Zimbabwe gold miners strike

Over 500 miners employed at Metallon Gold in Zimbabwe went on strike Tuesday demanding the payment of several months' wage arrears. They are asking for outstanding wages for April, May and November of last year and January and February this year to be paid to them over five months. Other outstanding salaries going back to 2014 are in the process of going through the courts. The miners say they will stay out until all the arrears have been paid.

Kenyan nurses continue strike

Nurses employed by Tharaka Nithi County in Kenya are continuing their strike. The county governor declared the strike illegal and warned that if the nurses had not returned to work by Wednesday, he would sack them. He claimed there were many volunteers who could replace the striking nurses.

The governor claims all but one of the seven disputed points have been agreed on. The one outstanding point, he claims, is the refusal of the union branch secretary to be posted elsewhere. The union believes the postings are victimisation for fighting for their rights. The state governor accused the branch secretary of using the strike for his own gain, threatening that if he refuses to be transferred he will be removed from his job.



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