

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 February 2016

Staff in UK colleges walk out

Staff employed in some 200 colleges in the UK held a one-day strike Wednesday. Those taking part included members of the University College Union (UCU) and the public-sector union, Unison. Thousands of staff including lecturers, librarians, technicians and cleaners participated. UCU members voted by a 74 percent majority to strike. Unison members vote was 66 percent.

They are protesting a pay freeze for the year 2015-16, imposed by the Association of Colleges representing the college employers. UCU members walked out in November over the same issue.

UK junior doctors association announces further strikes

This week, the British Medical Association (BMA), the body representing National Health Service junior doctors in England and Wales, announced a series of 48-hour strikes. They will begin at 8 a.m. on March 9, April 6 and April 26. They follow two 24-hour strikes held earlier this year.

The announcement came after Conservative government health secretary Jeremy Hunt said he would impose a new inferior contract on junior doctors. This would mean cuts in premium rate pay for out-of-hours work, evenings and weekends. It could increase their already long working hours and is detrimental to patient care.

The BMA is demanding a judicial review, stating that the government has failed to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment, as required by law, on the terms of the new contract. Announcing the strike, Johann Malawana, the BMA junior doctor committee chair, said, "The government can avert this action by re-entering talks with the BMA and addressing the outstanding issues and concerns junior doctors have, rather than simply ignoring them." He added, "The government must put patients before politics, get back around the table and find a negotiated solution to this dispute."

Strike threat by Scottish postal workers

Postal staff across Scotland are to be balloted for strike action. The threat comes after Royal Mail refused to reinstate a sacked postman, Dave Mitchell, who had 27 years service. An employment tribunal had awarded Mitchell £56,000 and demanded his reinstatement.

Mitchell was sacked in 2014 after test items allegedly went missing. A Royal Mail investigation failed to uncover the items in spite of a search of

his home, car and van.

A strike could be held in March and would affect Edinburgh, the Lothians, Central Scotland, Fife and the borders.

Union attempt to avert further strikes by Irish tram drivers

Talks took place on Wednesday between representatives of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the management of LUAS, the light railway system that serves Dublin. The discussions were held under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission.

LUAS drivers are seeking a pay rise above the between one and three percent that the employers are offering. Management also insists that a pay deal is dependent on productivity increases.

LUAS drivers have held two 48-hour strikes with a further two planned for March 8 and March 17.

LUAS carries around 100,000 commuters daily. The company is particularly anxious to avert the strike planned for March 17, St Patrick's Day in Ireland, which is a national holiday. On that day, the tram system would normally expect to take €50 million in fare revenue.

Protest by Norwegian hotel staff in Bergen

Hotel workers at the renowned Hotel Norge in Bergen are protesting plans by the new owner, Scandic Hotels, to close the hotel in September. A renovation is scheduled to take place, with a view to reopening in May 2107.

During this period, the 200 staff will be left without employment even though Scandic has promised to reemploy them once the renovation has been completed. The hotel and restaurant workers union has filed a legal complaint.

Spanish trade unionists found not guilty of charges while picketing

Eight trade unionists charged with Franco era laws while on a picket line have been exonerated of all charges.

They had been charged for their activities on a picket line outside the Airbus works in Getafe. The alleged incident took place in 2010 as part of a general strike.

Protest of artists' models in French capital

On Saturday, models that pose for artists held a protest near the town hall in Paris. They are organised by the Art Models Collective of Paris.

They are seeking professional status, including enhanced pay. Currently they are employed on a temporary basis, which often means for less than a day at a time. In 2008, a change in law outlawed the practice of students giving the models a tip. This led to a cut in their earnings by a third.

General strike goes ahead in Morocco

A general strike by Moroccan trade unions went ahead Wednesday. The strike was called by the UMT, CDT, UGTM, FDT trade union federations, along with teachers' union, SNES.

According to reports, the strike received strong support nationwide. The port of Casablanca in Morocco's biggest city was disrupted as well as transport and other sectors of the economy.

It was called after the government refused to enter into substantial negotiations with the union bodies over wages, taxation, pensions and labour legislation.

Under the proposed changes to state pension funds affecting 400,000 workers, the retirement age is to be increased to 63 by 2019. Workers will have to pay 14 percent of their salaries towards their pensions by 2019.

Protests by Egyptian doctors

Doctors held one-hour nationwide protests at hospitals across Egypt on February 20. They were protesting an alleged assault of doctors by police in January. The protests were organised by the Egyptian Doctors Syndicate.

The syndicate alleges several police officers assaulted two doctors, after one of the doctors refused to file an untruthful report of the injuries sustained by one of the police officers when he attended Matariya teaching hospital on January 28.

Israeli truck driver strike

Truck drivers employed by haulage company Movelei Dori struck on February 19. They are seeking an end to low pay, long hours and violations of their rights. Drivers also accuse management of employing bullying tactics.

The drivers joined the WAC-MANN independent union in September last year. Initially, the company recognized the union as valid negotiators but broke off talks in January, claiming they had been informed by a lawyer that the drivers had cancelled their WAC membership.

A dispute was lodged by WAC early February, leading to the strike.

Palestinian teachers end weeks of strike

Teachers in the occupied West Bank, who had been on strike for several weeks, ended the action February 18. They returned to work following an agreement between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestine Teachers' Union. The PA agreed that teachers would receive all outstanding pay by the end of 2016.

The previous day, the PA had arrested 22 teachers including principals. They were among 20,000 teachers who demonstrated in Ramallah the previous day, calling for the implementation of a previous agreement signed in 2013, which had guaranteed teachers' rights.

Protest by construction workers in Saudi Arabia

On February 16, some 1,000 construction workers in Jeddah stopped work and protested at the site they are working on.

The employees were protesting the nonpayment of wages going back six months. Those taking part included Saudi and foreign nationals.

As part of the protest, they disconnected the electricity supply to the site.

South African road workers protest slave wages

Truck tyres were set alight and roadblocks constructed by protesting highway workers in Johannesburg, South Africa on Wednesday.

Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) employees took to the streets, demanding a 7 percent pay increase promised last year, but not paid. The protesting staff upturned bins and laid tar across the steps of the JRA office.

The workers earn a pittance salary of R5,000 or (\$319) a month. The South African Municipal Workers Union is in negotiations with management over the dispute.

Strike by South African high court workers

Workers at the office of the Master of the High Court demonstrated February 18. Two days earlier, employees at South Africa's Pietermaritzburg high court office struck, demanding a resolution to discrepancies in merit and attainment levels applied at their workplace.

An agreement was reached in June last year but not implemented.

A National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union shop steward referred to supervisors with higher qualifications being paid less than those they supervise.

The striking workforce of around 200 is demanding the high court office show the differences between qualifications. This is being denied by management on the basis of the confidentiality of employee information.

South African Tshwane University of Technology staff set to resume strike

A section of staff at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in South Africa threatened to resume their strike this week.

A group of staff at the university opposed to outsourcing formed a

protest group called #outsourcingmustfall. They took action against the university outsourcing work to contractors who then employ casual staff.

The previous strike ended last week after an agreement to employ casual staff on university wages and conditions, together with no victimization of strikers. The university has reneged on the agreement and the staff are threatening to resume the strike.

Assaults on South African students condemned

Staff at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology warned management that further strikes are in the offing.

On February 19, two trade unions, the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, and National Tertiary Educators Union, threatened that if the vice chancellor did not come up with solutions in five days they would take industrial action.

The university has offered employees a seven percent increase, but, as at other universities, the outstanding issue is the use of contract labour rather than employing in-house staff.

Kenyan teachers strike threat

The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) is threatening further strikes against the teacher's employers, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC).

Since teachers went on strike last year and won an agreed 50 percent pay raise sanctioned by the Kenyan high court, the TSC has moved to reverse it.

The union agreed to shelve the pursuance of the pay claim currently going through the courts, based on TSC shelving its goal of performance contracts and appraisals.

KNUT said a statement was agreed, with the TSC putting aside its demand for performance contracts. The TSC denies this. The performance contracts were the basis for the union threatening a new round of strike action. For that reason, the dispute went before the Kenyan state conciliator, with the employer's federation in attendance.

The denial of withdrawing the performance contracts and appraisals by the TSC has put the strike back on the agenda.



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