

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 March 2016

UK Eurostar strike threat

Around 100 senior Eurostar staff based at St Pancras station in London are being balloted over the alleged victimization of a union representative. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT). Any strike would be held over the Easter weekend beginning March 25.

Big vote by Scottish council staff in Glasgow to fight pay cuts

Glasgow council workers employed in refuse collection, street cleaning and the parks service have voted by a 95 percent majority on an 80 percent turnout for industrial action including strikes. The members of the GMB union are opposing proposals from Glasgow council to cut pay and conditions after years of pay freezes.

Rally to oppose UK closure of tax offices

The Public and Commercial Services union held a rally outside the House of Commons UK parliament building in London on Tuesday. It was held in protest of the plans by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) tax collecting service to close 137 out of 170 offices across the country. In February, HRMC announced 150 compulsory redundancy notices with more to follow.

CCTV staff in Glasgow to strike

CCTV (closed-circuit television) operators working for Community Safety Glasgow (CSG), an arms-length organization of Glasgow City Council, are to strike next week. The 18 members of the UNISON union are protesting against only receiving a basic £8.25 an hour for working 12 hour shifts. Other staff working similar shift patterns for CSG and Glasgow Council receive an additional £7,500 a year bonus. The CCTV staff are seeking parity.

Ballot of Scottish lecturing staff ends Friday

A ballot of college lecturers in Scotland launched by the Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA) on February 12 closes today. The lecturers across 16 colleges are seeking a pay increase and pay equality across the colleges. Lecturers have been awarded a 1 percent pay rise.

Strike at Icelandic aluminium smelter

The planned strike by workers at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminium smelting plant in Straumsvik, Iceland went ahead February 23. Those striking are from the export section. Aluminium smelting continued, but the company was not able to ship finished products. As the strike began, pickets prevented Rio Tinto management members trying to carry out their work duties loading aluminium onto boats in the harbour.

Negotiations between the Hlif 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.

Georgian miners call off strike

Around 1,000 coal miners working at the Dzidziguri and Mendeli pits near the city of Tkibuli have returned to work after more than two weeks on strike. They were seeking a substantial wage increase and better working conditions. The value of their wages has diminished due to the devaluation of the Georgian currency, the lari. The rate of income tax they pay also increased at the beginning of the year.

On February 24, the miners stormed the headquarters of the company owning the two pits. Following talks between the strike committee and management, the miners agreed to end their strike. Most miners will receive a 5 percent pay rise with extra increases for those in high-risk roles.

Dublin bus drivers in dispute over radio ban

Bus drivers in the Irish capital of Dublin will boycott the use of the Dublin Port Tunnel from Tuesday next week. The tunnel—one of the longest in Europe—is some three miles long. The drivers, members of the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) are taking the action to protest the ban on drivers using radios in their cabs. They have defied the ban and are

continuing to use their radios. They have been threatened with disciplinary action.

NBRU has called for the boycott of the tunnel, as a ban on use of radios would mean drivers in the tunnel would be unable to get notification of emergencies happening in the tunnel.

Irish retail staff oppose pay cuts

The 14,000 staff working for the retail giant Tesco may be balloted by their union Mandate if the company pushes ahead with plans to cut pay.

Tesco plans to bring in new contracts for around 1,000 long-serving staff in April.

Protest by Turkish car workers halts production

Car production workers at the Oyak-Renault plant in Bursa, which is jointly owned by Renault, walked out on Monday after the company dismissed 15 employees via text message. They continued their strike and protest on Tuesday. Police were called and 15 were arrested. The strikers are demanding reinstatement and a pay increase.

Egyptian doctors continue struggle over police attack

Egyptian doctors, including those in public hospitals, organised in the Doctors' Syndicate, last week stepped up their action by refusing to charge for medical care. This follows a series of protests throughout February in defiance of a ban.

The protests result from an alleged attack by police on two doctors at Matariya teaching hospital on January 28. The doctors say they were attacked after refusing to provide a falsified report on the injuries of two police officers that attended the hospital.

Iranian sugarcane workers protest privatisation plans

On Sunday, over 500 staff at the Haft Tapeh sugarcane factory held a protest outside the company's office to protest unpaid wages, for a wage increase and to oppose plans to privatise the plant, which workers fear would eventually lead to closure.

Strike threat by Tunisian telecom staff

Staff working for Tunisie Telecom have threatened to go on strike at the end of the month if the company does not abide by a previous agreement. The agreement was signed in May last year and comprised a backdated pay and bonus increase.

Nigerian energy workers give strike warning

Workers at the Nigerian Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company (IEDC) gave a seven-day notice to strike on Monday. They are seeking the reinstatement of 400 workers who were recently sacked. The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) accused the IEDC of sacking them without following an agreed procedure.

The Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) is supporting the NUEE and says if the 400 sacked workers are not reinstated within seven days they will cut gas supplies to the company and stop electricity production.

NUPENG members employed by the Nigerian Gas Company are also demanding a 16-month backlog of wages be paid to the electricity employees, and that the government intervene over redundancy payments owed to 5,000 workers, sacked under a previous termination program.

Nigerian energy workers threaten walkout

Members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), at the Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NNRA) issued a three-day strike warning on Monday. It follows a 14-day period in which management tried to resolve outstanding issues.

The issues include the dictatorial methods employed by the company director general, victimization of union representatives, ignoring negotiated agreements, lack of promotion, and the failure to provide equipment to measure radiation levels. The union accuses the company of arbitrarily cutting pay and recruiting staff in violation of normal procedure.

Strike by Nigerian council staff

Workers in six councils in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territories (FCT) resumed their strike on Monday after promises to pay three months outstanding wages were not honoured. One worker, speaking anonymously to the *Daily Trust*, said elections due to take place on March 19 would not go ahead as the gates of the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) will remain locked due to the strike.

Nigerian doctors strike threat

Doctors in Osun state have threatened to go out on strike if six months of wage arrears are not paid within the next two weeks. Doctors in the six states of the West Zone are threatening to take solidarity action in support of their Osun colleagues.

The chairperson of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) said the Osun doctors were not being paid the correct rate and were paying higher taxes than their associates elsewhere. The NMA went on to suggest the federal government investigate the practices of Osun state administration.

Strike by South African casual university staff

South African workers at the university in Potchefstroom went on strike last Friday. Workers at the campus of North-West University joined other campus workers across South Africa in striking against casual labour.

They are demanding that all those employed on campus must be direct labour. Over 100 striking casuals are protesting low wages, poor treatment by their contractors and racial discrimination. The strike has been deemed illegal and some workers have already been sacked. Academic functions have continued throughout the strike.

Namibian zinc miners continue strike

Miners at the Ross Pinah Zinc mine in Namibia are continuing their eight-week strike to demand a wage rise and increases in increments.

The Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) have been pressing for a wage increase of 12.5 percent, an allowance of N\$2,300 (US\$147) for underground work, doubling of medical cover, and an equal bonus system. Although the union has reduced its wage claim and scrapped its demand for underground payment and production bonus, the company increased its sole pay offer from 5 to 5.5 percent. The union said it would not call off the strike unless they come up with something its members can agree on.

Strike by Tanzanian process workers

Tanzanian fish processing workers downed tools at the VicFish Company in Mwanza on Monday demanding a pay increase. Strikers say they have a very low living standard and are demanding an increase from Sh3,850 (\$1.76) to over Sh10, 000 (\$4.7) in daily allowances. Their other demand is for workers who have been employed for years without an official contract to be made permanent.



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