

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 March 2016

## 48-hour strike by junior doctors in England

Junior doctors (those below the rank of consultant) in England began a 48-hour strike at 8 a.m. on Wednesday. They are protesting the imposition of a new contract by the Conservative government that will remove unsocial hours payments and reduce the safeguards against junior doctors working excess hours. Further 48-hour strikes are planned for April 6 and April 26. They are offering emergency care during the strike periods.

According to the National Health Service (NHS) sources, 5,000 planned operations and procedures were cancelled and there was a disruption to clinics and appointments as a result of the walkout. Opinion polls show nearly two thirds of the population support the action of the doctors, seeing it as a defence of the NHS.

The junior doctors held picket lines at hospitals across the country in spite of poor weather conditions.

## Rally by workers to lobby Glasgow City Council

Workers in Glasgow, Scotland, held a lobby of the City Council on Thursday to coincide with a meeting to debate the budget for the coming year. Council employees were joined by staff from Cordia, which operates as an arm-length company of Glasgow council, offering home care and other social services. They were complaining of chronic understaffing.

## Strike on French railways

Rail workers employed by the French rail operator SNCF in the four unions CGT, CFDT, Sud and Unsa, came out on strike beginning Tuesday night at 7 p.m., returning to work Thursday morning at 8 a.m. It was the first time all four unions at SNCF came out on strike since June 2013.

The demands of the rail workers are for a pay increase, enhanced working conditions and a recruitment drive to end staff shortages.

The strike hit mainly long-distance trains, but the area around the French capital, Paris, was particularly hit with only around a third of trains running. The Eurostar service between Paris and London was affected, with around a fifth of services not running.

## Rallies throughout France to protest employment changes

Around 140 marches and rallies took place all across France on Wednesday to protest proposals by the Socialist government of Francois Hollande to bring in changes to labour laws. The proposals will reduce overtime compensation and holiday pay as well as sweep away the 35-hour maximum workweek. They will make it easier for workers to be sacked and would introduce greater flexibility.

The marches were joined by workers and young people, including high school pupils in the union, FIDL. As many as 1,500 young people took place in the march in Paris, and several thousand marched through the southern port city of Marseille.

## Glass workers at Georgian factory return to work

A month-long strike at a glass factory in Ksani near Tbilisi ended at the end of last week. Around 160 employees took part in the strike. They returned to work after being awarded a 7.5 percent pay rise, union facility premises in the factory and an agreement to negotiate a collective agreement.

## Irish light rail staff may escalate their dispute

Staff working for the light railway system in the Irish capital of Dublin (LUAS) who have already been involved in a series of two-day strikes may escalate their action. LUAS employees have held a series of 48-hour strikes, with another one planned for next week on St. Patrick's Day. They are seeking a substantial pay increase. LUAS management have only offered a pay rise of between 1 and 3 percent tied to increases in productivity.

Talks between the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and LUAS management hosted by the Workplace Relations Commission broke down. According to the union, LUAS was only prepared to negotiate with revenue protection officers and revenue protection supervisors. The company refused to talk with drivers and traffic supervisors, even after SIPTU reduced its pay increase demand by around a half. Drivers and traffic supervisor staff are considering seeking a ballot for an all-out strike.

## Strike at Irish chocolate manufacturer suspended

After two days of strikes, employees at the Cadbury chocolate

production plant in Coolock, North Dublin, which took place at the end of last week, suspended their strike pending talks with management. The strike had been over plans by the plant's owners, Mondelez International, to outsource 17 jobs in the stores division.

The workers are in the public sector Unite and SIPTU unions, which suspended the strike to allow talks with management brokered by Workplace Relations Commission.

### **Action by Irish primary school teachers against heavy workloads**

Irish primary school teachers organised by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) have voted by a 97 percent majority to refuse to do a range of duties, mainly of an administrative nature. They are taking the action to protest the heavy workload teachers are under, which often means they end up doing unpaid work. They are also protesting the ongoing ban on promotion.

### **Rally of Palestinian teachers**

Teachers in the West Bank who have been on strike for the last four weeks across the country held a rally on Monday outside the government offices of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah. Several thousand teachers attended the rally and march. They are on strike to demand higher wages, as promised in an agreement that was made by the PA in 2013 but never implemented.

Attempts by the police to block the march were swept aside by the numbers of teachers on the march. Some teachers have been detained by the PA security forces, which has been mounting checkpoints across the West Bank to prevent teachers from reaching planned rallies and demonstrations. The PA has threatened the teachers with legal action if they do not return to work.

### **Strike by Egyptian bus drivers in Alexandria**

Bus drivers in Egypt's second city, Alexandria, went on strike Sunday. Among their demands are a threefold increase to their bonuses. They are currently paid EGP150 (US\$19), whereas management receive a EGP15,000 (US\$1,900) bonus. They are demanding an end to 20 percent cuts in their salaries over the last several months and to be given 15 percent of fare takings.

The strike had a big impact in Alexandria, with big traffic jams resulting from their action.

### **Kenyan university staff prepare for strike**

Members of the Kenyan University Academic Staff Union (UASU) were to strike today. Lecturers and support staff at state universities are demanding the university councils put forward proposals on wages and allowances.

A meeting for discussions on Tuesday at Nairobi University was

boycotted by the University Councils Consultative Forum.

UASU and other unions involved are concerned that the public university vice chancellors are deliberately avoiding meeting the unions. According to the UASU secretary general, the government has instructed the University Councils Consultative Forum to come up with an offer to the unions so it can consider it in its budget, in two weeks.

### **Nigerian Ogun State workers walk out**

Ogun State civil servants went out on strike on Monday in response to non-authorised deductions from their pay packets. On Tuesday, two strikers were arrested on the picket line outside the state governor's office. Police were accused of ill treatment of workers even as representatives of the Trade Union Congress and the Nigerian Labour Congress were monitoring the picket lines.

The State government threatened that a no-work, no-pay rule will be implemented if workers refuse to return to work. Ogun State doctors and teachers embarked on a warning strike Monday, closing schools and hospitals, over unpaid arrears.

### **South African workers oppose casualisation**

Community health workers across the northwest of South Africa are demanding permanent contracts and an end to casual labour.

Members of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union working for the health authorities are joining other workers across South Africa to demand permanent contracts. They are opposing health authorities outsourcing labour to private contractors, which is a universally recognised means of privatising health care.

### **South African bus workers dispute**

Services on the city of Tshwane bus route stopped when drivers went out on strike. Thirty-three women recruited under an equality programme were sacked when money for training female drivers was said have run out. The rest of the workers came out on strike to demand their reinstatement.

South Africa Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) said the bus company was not abiding by the Employment Equity Act. The company, A Re Yeng, holds the franchise for the city of Tshwane bus transport system and says the strike is the result of a union recognition dispute.

SAMWU and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), which are in conflict for membership numbers, deny the company's claim. The company won a court ruling to declare the strike illegal, which the unions are ignoring.



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