

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

**18 March 2016**

## **English sixth-form teachers protest**

Teachers in sixth-form colleges in England held a one-day strike Tuesday to protest the underfunding of sixth-form colleges by the government.

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) voted by a nearly 90 percent majority for the strike. An attempt by the government to prevent the strike going ahead was defeated, when the High Court in London ruled against the government's challenge.

Striking teachers in London lobbied Parliament and handed in a petition to Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, calling on her to increase funding.

## **Lobby in London by primary school teachers**

Primary school teachers, organised by the NUT, lobbied the Department for Education offices in London on Thursday afternoon. They are calling for the over-testing of primary school pupils to stop. Teachers say the current testing system is in crisis and they are being forced to make their pupils jump through hoops.

## **UK haulage driver vote for action**

The result of a ballot of 700 haulage drivers working for the Co-op retail firm was announced on Monday. It showed 77 percent of the drivers had voted for strike action and 84 percent in favour of action short of a strike.

The Co-op is seeking to transfer 87 driving jobs in the Midlands to the haulage company Eddie Stobart Ltd (ESL). Unite is seeking further negotiations with the Co-op before authorising action.

In 2012, 184 drivers employed by supermarket firm Tesco were transferred to ESL, which subsequently sacked them. According to Unite, many of them are still without work.

## **UK-based Eurostar drivers to strike**

Eurostar drivers in England have voted for strike action by 51 to 3 over the long-running issue of lone working and the victimisation of one RMT member. No date has yet been set, but a strike over Easter has not been ruled out.

## **Scottish container port staff in dispute**

Employees at Grangemouth container port in Scotland operated by Forth Ports began a two-week strike midnight Tuesday. Members of the Unite union voted by a 100 percent majority on a 97 percent turnout to oppose the attempts by the employer to impose a change in shift rotas, removal of weekend overtime pay and a pay freeze for this year. According to the union, the new rota would mean workers losing up to £1,800 a year.

Grangemouth is Scotland's largest port and handles around 9 million tonnes of cargo each year.

## **Strike by school janitors in Glasgow, Scotland**

More than 100 school janitors in the Scottish city of Glasgow came out on strike Monday through Wednesday this week. The janitors, members of the Unison union, work for the Glasgow City Council arm's-length company, Cordia.

The dispute is over janitors claiming Working Context and Demands Payments. This is in return for carrying out dirty or unpleasant duties, working outside or heavy lifting, which can add between £500 and £1,000 to their annual salaries. The janitors argue Cordia has been refusing to make the payment, claiming the criteria for doing so have not been met.

## **Glasgow CCTV staff walkout**

Around 20 staff working for the Glasgow City Council arm's-length company Community Safety Glasgow (CSG) walked out on strike on Thursday at 7 p.m. on a 48-hour strike. The members of the Unison union held a similar 48-hour strike earlier this month.

In a long-running dispute, the CCTV staff are seeking parity on similar shift patterns with Glasgow City Council staff, who receive an additional £7,500.

## **Strike at Icelandic aluminium plant continues**

The strike by staff in the export section of the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminium smelting plant in Straumsvik, Iceland, is continuing. Although production is also continuing, the strike action prevents the finished aluminium being exported via the attached dock facilities. The workers

are seeking a pay increase.

Talks on Monday between the Hlif union and Alcan management were brokered by a government official but failed to resolve the dispute. The union is pushing for a pay rise to cover the period May 2015 through 2018 while Alcan wants the pay rise to take effect from May 2017. Alcan is seeking to be able to hire contractors at the plant who would be denied the right to strike.

### **Construction workers on Moscow metro walkout**

Construction workers employed on Moscow metro walked out on strike last Friday, saying they are owed five months' wages. The migrant workers held a protest outside the offices of the construction company Ingeocom. They told the press that each of them is owed around 100,000 rubles (US\$1,400). They vowed not to return to work until they had been paid.

### **Spanish rail strike announced**

Rail staff employed by train operator Renfe and by rail network company Adif have announced they will hold a 23-hour strike beginning midnight next Tuesday. They are organised by the CCOO union body.

They are protesting loss of collective bargaining rights and the failure of the two companies to honour an agreement to hire more staff.

### **Planned action by drivers on Irish capital's light railway system cancelled**

A planned 48-hour strike by drivers on the Dublin light railway system (LUAS), due to have begun on Thursday to coincide with St. Patrick's Day celebrations, has been cancelled. They had held previous 48-hour strikes in an attempt to secure a substantial pay increase.

Talks brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission between the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the company operating LUAS, Transdev, came up with a pay deal for three of the four groups, including drivers, involved in the dispute.

SIPTU members will be balloted on the terms of the settlement next week. As part of the negotiations, Transdev agreed to scrap plans to use buses to replace the trams if the strike had gone ahead. Under the terms of the pay agreement current salaries will rise by about €13,000, to €55,000 over the next five years.

### **Former staff at closed Irish store hold protest**

A protest was organised last Saturday by the SIPTU outside the now-closed retail store Clery, in the capital city Dublin.

The new owners of the store, Natrium, closed the store in June last year with no notice and with the loss of 130 jobs. The new owners did not pay outstanding wages or redundancy payments to the dismissed staff.

### **Striking Palestinian teachers suspend action**

Palestinian teachers demanding the Palestinian Authority (PA) abide by a 2013 agreement on pay announced they are suspending their strike. The decision came after President Mahmoud Abbas announced the 2013 agreement would be imposed from the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

Teachers have been critical of the union's pursuit of their dispute. PA security forces have made attempts to disrupt protests and demonstrations by the striking teachers.

### **Namibian building workers protest**

Workers at the New Era Investment Company, Namibia, went on strike on Monday after a building worker was injured on the construction site. He suffered severe head injuries while working on Namibia's police headquarters in Windhoek when metal fell on his head.

The Namibia Building Workers Union members complain that they carry out their duties in sandals and without head safety gear. Alongside the lack of safety gear, they also protested the absence of any safety officers on site. They also wanted the company to reinstate transport provision to their workplace, complaining they cannot afford the taxi fares on their poor wages.

### **Nigerian road construction workers strike**

Construction workers across Nigeria have gone on strike this week over the breakdown of negotiations for a new wage agreement. Negotiations through the National Joint industrial Committee (NJIC), comprising the builders' union and the Federation of Construction Industry, broke down over the union's demand for a 100 percent wage increase.

The National Union of Civil Engineering, Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers (NUCECFWW) insists negotiations continue through the NJIC and that the strike continue until the employers return to the negotiations. Road works throughout Nigeria have come to a standstill.

### **Nigerian power distribution workers threatened with victimisation**

Members of the Nigerian National Union of Electrical Employees (NUEE) returned to work last week, but are threatening to walk out again. Workers went out on strike at the Nigerian Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company (IEDC) over 400 recently sacked workers and high electricity tariffs.

The power workers are being questioned by management, asking why they were not at their post on the days of the strike. Management is demanding answers to their questions within 24 hours. The union spokesman says management has gathered reports on strikers' activities, and those on the picket lines. The union gave the company 48 hours to withdraw the questioning or face renewed action.

## **Nigerian civil servants demand wage arrears**

Civil servants in the Federated Capital Territories are continuing with their strike, even though the government has now paid their December salaries. They are owed three months' pay altogether, and initially the government promised to pay two of the outstanding months but reneged on that, paying only one month.

The National Union of Local Government Employees said it would not return to work until the remaining two months are paid.

## **South African refuse workers attacked by police again**

Johannesburg employees of the South African refuse company Pikitup went on strike March 9, leading to a backlog of waste throughout the city. They are demanding a wage increase of R4000 (US\$250) a month.

Police again attacked the strikers using teargas and stun grenades on March 11, which left some workers injured and likely to end up in court. Pikitup workers who were recently on strike in Johannesburg were violently assaulted by police and then arrested but have yet to appear in court.

Four thousand employees are ignoring company threats of no-work-no-pay and the sack if they do not return to work. A South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) regional secretary is reported as saying in the online *Citizen*, "At this point, we are not willing to back down, no one would return to work under Amanda Nair's management or without any pay increase." Other reports state SAMWU's national leadership has called on its members to return to work but is being ignored by the membership.

Pikitup management have brought in a rival contractor, Red Ant, to clear the streets. A smaller union in Pikitup, the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU), has been accused of attempting to scab on the strike.



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