

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 April 2016

## English teaching unions vote to oppose moves to academies

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers voted unanimously at its recent conference for its executive to consider taking action against the Conservative government's plans for all schools to become academies, and no longer be under local authority control.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) at its Easter conference agreed to ballot its membership for a one-day strike in the summer over the same issue.

## 24-hour strike in Greece against pension reform

Greek civil servants organised by their union, ADEDY, held a 24-hour strike on Thursday including a rally in Klafthmonos Square. They were protesting against the security and pension reform plans being pushed through by the Syriza-led coalition government.

The civil servants were joined by the Federation of Hellenic Civil Aviation Employees' Unions, (OSYPA). Their action led to the closure of major Greek airports.

## Irish ambulance staff to be balloted for strike

Ambulance staff in Ireland are being balloted this month for a strike. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). They are demanding the immediate publication of a review of ambulance services in Ireland, which was promised two years ago.

SIPTU argues the review will show up staff shortages in the service, which in 2015 they estimated at nearly 300. The result of the ballot will be announced at the end of the month.

## Strike by Slovenian electricity supply staff

Electricity supply workers in Slovenia began a three-week strike Monday. They members of the Trade Union of Energy Sector of Slovenia are demanding the details of the proposed restructuring of the industry be published and that in the meantime layoffs of staff should be halted.

## Ongoing strike of bookmaker staff in Northern Ireland

Some staff working for the bookmaker S P Graham across Northern Ireland have taken strike action for the last two Saturdays and will be on strike tomorrow, which is Grand National Day, a busy day for bookmakers. They are members of the Unite union and are demanding an increase above the offer of £7.29, which is just nine pence above the new so-called National Living Wage.

## Blockade by Belgian lorry drivers

A blockade of roads by Belgian lorry drivers began a week ago. They are protesting a new law, which came into effect on April 1 requiring Belgian lorries are fitted with an on-board unit (OBU), used to calculate the mileage driven and apply a toll. The fine for not fitting an OBU is €1,000. The drivers are concentrating their blockades around supermarket distribution centres and is leading to a shortage of supplies.

## Israeli trade union federation approves strikes

The Israeli trade union federation, Histadrut, has given the go-ahead for a series of strikes. They include a strike at the

Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry, opposing plans to move a research institute to another part of the country.

It also approved a strike by workers at the Tnuva dairy cooperative, Channel 2 television and radio staff, Port Authority staff and vets working for local government.

### **South African refuse workers continue strike**

South African refuse workers at Pikitup, Johannesburg are into the fifth week of their strike with still no resolution on the table. The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) has said they will not return to work until the demand for R6,000, (\$393) to R8,000, (\$524) is met. The union say this is a climb-down from the original claim of an increase from R6,000 to R1,000, (\$655), justifying it with the phrase “not returning to work empty handed.” Workers are currently on or around R6,000 and want to be brought in line with fellow refuse workers at R10,000. SAMWU is threatening to bring out workers in City Power (the electricity supplier), road agency workers and the Metro police. The police’s “participation” in the strike so far has been to violently attack striking refuse collectors with teargas, water cannon and stun grenades.

### **South African coal miners strike**

Coal miners striking at Glencore Mining operations in Mpumalanga South Africa are into their third week of a strike. Workers are in protest of private security guards shooting at them with rubber bullets, hospitalising many.

Many of the striking miners, members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), have been arrested. One hundred and sixty members of AMCU are striking at the company’s Wonderfontein coal mine over pay. The mine is a joint venture between Glencore and African national Congress Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa’s Shanduka Group. Ramaphosa was implicated in the shooting to death of 34 miners at Lonmin, Marikina.

The miners are demanding the doubling of their wages from R4000 to R8000, (\$526) an increase in medical support, housing and transport allowances. Apart from miners being seriously injured as a result of the shootings, around 60 have been arrested while attempting to stop strikebreakers.

### **South African gold miners demand pay increase**

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union AMCU called out its members at Sibanye Gold operations on Wednesday. They are demanding an increase in wages to R12,500, (\$835). Union members voted in October last year to go out on strike but it was put on hold while further negotiations took place.

Two other unions agreed to a 12 percent wage settlement in the negotiations last year. AMCU, with the most members in the conglomerate, opposed the deal but was sidelined as the principle negotiator. Although Sibanye Gold got a court interdict making the Wednesday strike illegal, AMCU said the strike would go ahead. Sibanye extended its operations last year when it bought up Anglo America Platinum and Aquarius Platinum with union members complaining that, while the company extends its mine ownership operations they are on very low wages.

The mining enterprise employs 44,000 full-time and contract workers and is the largest producer of gold bullion in South Africa.

### **Nigerian helicopter pilots suspend strike**

Nigerian pilots suspended their strike at Bristows Helicopters after the Minister of Labour intervened. Last Thursday, members of the pilots union and the Trades Union Congress closed down the offices of Bristows in Port Harcourt. The pilots are protesting against discrimination at the helicopter company, saying they are treated as though they are in a slave camp. Pilots from the UK, South Africa and Canada with only a limited amount of flying hours are being paid far more than Nigerian pilots with years of experience. They are demanding equality of working conditions with their foreign counterparts in line with labour laws, and equality of wages.



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