

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 April 2016

Greek journalists strike

The Panhellenic Federation of Journalists' Unions began a 48-hour strike yesterday to protest against the Syriza-led government's assault on pensions.

The strike involves all printed and electronic publications, as well as the government's Secretariat General of Information and Communication. Television and radio broadcasters from both the public and private sector are to strike for 48-hours beginning today.

Pension reforms are being submitted to parliament as part of an agreement with the Troika—the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—to make further cuts in public spending. Discussions are continuing between Greece and its international lenders. Next week Eurozone finance ministers are expected to announce Syriza has met their requirements.

Portuguese dockers walk out

Portuguese dockers in the ports of Lisbon, Setubal and Figueria da Foz began a two-week strike at midnight Thursday. The strike is over a new proposed collective bargaining agreement, which would lead to a two million euro cut per annum in the wage bill by introducing two new lower wage rates.

Protest march by Romanian miners

On Monday, Romanian miners completed a seven-day 200-mile march when they arrived in the capital, Bucharest. The march is to protest plans to cut 800 mining jobs. The state-owned Oltenia Energy Company intends to cut the jobs after posting a €200 million loss for 2015. On their arrival in Bucharest, delegates from the National Quarry and Energy trade union, which has no policy to oppose the job cuts, met with government officials.

Walkout by school janitors in Glasgow, Scotland

Over 100 janitors employed in primary schools in Glasgow began a three-day strike Wednesday. They had taken previous strike action in March and have been boycotting certain duties. The members of Unison are employed by Cordia, an arms-length company operated by Glasgow

City Council.

Currently the janitors are not entitled to a Working Context and Demands Payment, which pay an additional £500 to £1,000 a year. It is paid in acknowledgment of heavy and dirty duties performed by some council staff, but the janitors are not covered by the provision in spite of having to undertake such tasks.

UK rail conductors vote to strike

Train conductors working for Govia Thameslink Railway that runs Southern Rail services, covering the southeast of England, have voted overwhelmingly to go on strike on an 80 percent turnout. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

Three 24-hour strikes have been announced, each to begin at 11 a.m. on April 26, May 10 and May 13. The limited walkouts are in response to Southern Rail's proposal to introduce driver-only trains.

Conductors will no longer operate the doors—under the proposals drivers will have responsibility for this. The role of conductors will be revamped and they will be re-assigned as on-board supervisors. Rail staff are concerned about the safety issues of driver-only trains.

French power workers in dispute

The CFDT and the CGT unions at the electric grid operator, RTE, have planned a one-day strike on May 3 against plans by the French government to sell 50 percent of its stake in the power company EDF. RTE is a unit of EDF.

According to EDF the plan to sell 50 percent of the stock to investors is to help finance the company's project to build nuclear plants at Hinkley Point in the UK.

French rail staff set to strike next week

Four rail unions are to hold a countrywide one-day strike next Tuesday. The strike is in response to changes in working conditions.

Drivers on Irish rail system in unofficial action

Irish Rail, the company that runs the DART rail system around the Dublin area, is threatening to take legal action against the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) and Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

The company says the refusal of drivers to give eight new train drivers cab familiarisation as part of their training is a breach of contract and represents unofficial industrial action. Irish Rail is currently in negotiations with NBRU and SIPTU over pay. For its part NBRU states cab familiarization of new drivers is purely voluntary and drivers have a right to refuse not to carry out such training.

Lay-off threat to Dublin tramworkers

Letters have been sent out by management at Transdev, which operates the Dublin tram system, LUAS, to all its 250 staff threatening to lay them off if they continue to take action in pursuit of a substantial pay rise. They have already held various one- and two-day strikes and tram drivers began a work-to-rule on Sunday.

Strikes due this coming weekend are to go ahead. Other strikes are planned throughout April and May. The letter states staff will not be able to return to work unless they agree to carry out all duties. SIPTU, the union over LUAS staff, said an all-out strike is a possibility as yet no decision has been taken to hold a ballot.

Strike threat by Israeli municipal staff

On Monday, municipal staff in Tel Aviv declared a labour dispute and announced they will come out on strike on May 1. They cite a list of issues including the appointment of a new chief sanitation officer.

Oil prices fall as Kuwaiti oil workers end action

Kuwaiti oil workers ended their three-day strike on Wednesday. World oil prices have fallen partly in response to the end of the strike, but mainly as a result of the failure of oil producers meeting last weekend in Doha to agree to freeze output.

The oil workers went on strike over plans by the government to cut wages and benefits for employees in the state-owned oil industry. Their strike cut oil production in the country by half.

Burkina Faso bus workers fight penalties

Bus workers are continuing their strike at Burkina Faso's public bus company, demanding the dropping of penalties against co-workers. The strike began on April 8 and brought bus transport to a halt.

Eight workers, including the union rep were sanctioned for calling the strike. Management said they would review their action against the workers they hold responsible.

Niger's oil refinery workers halt distribution

Fuel distribution was brought to a near halt by a strike affecting Niger's oil refineries last week. The three-day strike by the refinery workers, which began on April 13, was over wages and working conditions. Workers have taken industrial action on several occasions over the discrepancy in conditions of local labour and Chinese employees at the Soraz refinery.

The refinery is a joint operation between the Niger government and the majority shareholder, the China National Petroleum Company, which refines oil for the national market, with exports to Mali and Burkina Faso. Production was down to around to one-tenth of normal production prompting the Oil Ministry to say the shortage could be covered from reserves.

Nigerian power workers protest over mass sackings

Employees of Nigeria's Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company (IEDC) have gone on strike, shutting down power supply. Ikeja is the state capital of Lagos State, with a population of over 860,000. Workers blockaded the company headquarters and other premises demanding the reinstatement of 400-sacked workers.

The company sacked its employees in a restructuring program in March with the National Labour Convention threatening a strike. The company said the rationalisation was based on the falling productivity of certain employees. The deputy president of the National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) was among the casualties of the sackings.

Similar reasons have been given for sackings at the Jos Electrical Distribution Company (JEDC), which was picketed on Monday by NUEE members. Fifty workers have lost their jobs. The company has told the union they will not be taken back on and if they proceed with their action they would seek a court order.

Members of the National Union of Electricity Employees are also picketing the offices of the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) in Abuja State. The protest, which began on Monday, is over the non-payment of redundancy money to 3,000 employees when the public, Power Holding Company of Nigeria, was privatised in 2013. The union has barred its members from occupying the company premises while appealing to the national government to resolve the matter. The PHCN was broken up into a series of 18 successor companies: six generation companies and 12 distribution companies covering all 36 Nigerian states.

Nigerian hospital workers hold sit down strike

Workers at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital have begun a sit down strike in defence of maintaining public facilities at the hospital. The health professionals union is complaining that elements of the hospital's activities are being farmed out to private contractors.

Contract consultants are entering the hospital and providing their own diagnostic equipment, under circumstances where in-house equipment has broken down and warranties have expired.

Legal action taken against South African Pikitup strike

South Africa's refuse collection strike in Johannesburg ended April 9, but no information on a wage settlement has been revealed as of April 20. The regional South African Municipal Workers Union secretary expressed his satisfaction with the deal.

The refuse workers were demanding a pay rise from R6, 000, (US\$420) to R10, 000 (US\$703) per month, and the removal of the managing director. The union has been hauled in front of the court and found guilty of contempt and the general secretary given a suspended sentence.

Comair South Africa workers locked out

Striking South African airline workers are continuing their dispute over pay with Comair's Kulula.com. The airline workers who normally operate out of British Airways airports have been locked out. The lockout was implemented after the staff refused the company offer of a 22.5 per cent pay rise over three years.

Their pay demand of 35 per cent over three years has so far been rejected, as the company recruits new staff and encourages passengers to check in online. Wage negotiations with Comair, a British Airways franchise holder, have been going on since last November.



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