

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 May 2016

## German industrial workers in one-day action

Last Friday, over 100,000 German industrial workers took part in a one-day strike in pursuit of a five percent pay rise. They are organised by the IG Metall union, which is pursuing the claim on behalf of nearly four million employees.

The employers have offered a 2.1 percent increase, which was rejected. Further strikes are planned in the next two weeks if talks are unproductive. The action included Daimler and ThyssenKrupp employees.

## Drivers ballot at UK landscape material company

Drivers working for Marshalls, the landscape materials product provider, began balloting for a possible strike on Tuesday. They are members of the Unite union. Over 100 drivers are involved. The ballot closes on May 17. The dispute is over disparity in overtime rates; while manufacturing staff at the company enjoy a rate of time-and-a-half for overtime, drivers only get time-and-a-third.

Marshalls has 14 depots supplying firms across the country, including Travis Perkins and Jewson.

## Planned strikes on UK rail company postponed

Rail staff employed by Southern Rail, who held a one-day strike last week, were due to hold two further strikes on May 10 and 12. These have now been called off. Instead, the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) has said it will hold a strike on May 20. The dispute is over the company's plans to bring in drive-only operated trains, doing away with the conductor/guard door and safety procedures role.

According to the local *Surrey Mirror*, striking conductors have been threatened by management that their car parking facilities and concessionary train travel will be taken from them.

## London underground rail staff to ballot for action

Maintenance staff employed by Tubes Line are being balloted over a deal connected with plans to run all-night services on five London Underground lines on Friday and Saturday nights. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union agreed a deal two months ago with Transport for

London, who run the underground services for drivers. The dispute is over pay and pension arrangements. Night tube is due to start in September.

## Norwegian hotel dispute enters second week

A strike by Norwegian hotel staff entered its second week on Monday.

In all, around 6,000 hotel and restaurant staff are now on strike with the trade union federation representing hotel and restaurant staff, Fellesforbundet, saying it will call out a further 1,000 of its members on Saturday. Striking hotel staff took part in the May Day march in Oslo on Sunday.

They are demanding a pay increase and the right of the union to be able to conduct negotiations with hotels and restaurants.

## Strike threat by Norwegian public service staff

On Monday, it was announced that public-sector workers in Norway, including tax, customs and social services staff, as well as university and college employees, are threatening to strike.

Talks over the weekend between three of the four unions representing public service staff and government representatives broke down.

The three unions involved, the LO Stat, Union Stat and YS Stat represent around 100,000 public-sector staff. They are seeking a pay rise; the other public-sector union Akademikerne Stat representing academic staff has already reached an agreement with the government.

## Portuguese taxi drivers protest against Uber

Last Friday Portuguese taxi drivers held protests in the capital Lisbon and also Porto and Faro against the use of the Uber app to hail taxis. The taxi drivers accuse Uber of illegality and undercutting their business.

The protests were jointly organised by the Antral trade union and the Portuguese Taxi Federation. They claim Uber has no fixed price policy and no accident insurance. Since its introduction in 2104, taxi drivers say it has led to a 20 percent fall in business.

As part of the protest nearly 4,000 taxi drivers drove very slowly through Lisbon, creating traffic jams.

## **Portuguese union body announces weeklong strike**

The Stalinist-controlled trade union body, the CGTP, announced a weeklong strike from May 16 to May 20 at its May Day rally on Sunday.

It will impact most on civil servants. The CGTP is calling on the newly elected government to keep its promise to reduce the working week from 40 to 35 hours.

## **Protests by sacked construction workers in Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi Binladin construction company has sacked over 70,000 workers, around a third of its workforce, citing an economic slowdown in the industry. The sacked employees are all expatriate workers, but the company also plans to lay off some 12,000 of its 17,000 Saudi employees as well.

The sacked expatriate staff say they are still owed six months wages and staged a protest outside the company's premises in Mecca on Saturday. Workers expressed their anger by torching seven coaches owned by the company.

The sacked expatriate employees were issued with exit visas, meaning they must leave Saudi Arabia with immediate effect.

## **Protest by Egyptian journalists**

Egyptian journalists began a protest and sit-in on Monday, which ran through until Wednesday outside the headquarters of their union building in Cairo. Tuesday marked World Press Freedom day.

The sit-in was to protest the arrest of two journalists on Sunday evening. Police entered the union building and took away the two journalists who work for the January Gate news web site. Police accuse the two of organising anti-government protests.

On Monday, police backed by troops sealed off the area around the union headquarters, but were eventually stood down.

## **Israeli trade union body declares dispute**

On Tuesday, the Israeli General Federation of Labour (Histadrut) along with the workers committee at the Teva pharmaceutical company declared a dispute. This gives the staff legal sanction to begin a strike in two weeks time.

The plant in Kfar Saba employs over 1,000 staff. The dispute has arisen over the use of temporary labour at the plant, which has been used to displace regular employees.

## **Half-day strike by Palestinian education staff**

Administrative staff employed by the Palestinian Ministry of Education held a half-day strike on Monday. They were protesting their working conditions. The administrative staff are organised by the Palestinian

teachers' union.

## **Protesting road workers in South Africa shot by police**

Striking South African road workers, employed by Teti, a South African Road Agency contractor, were fired on by the Metro police force Tuesday. The South African Transport Workers Union accused the police of firing rubber bullets.

According to the union, the shooting took place after media covering the protest had left. Several workers were taken to hospital and then detained by the police after being treated. Other protesting workers were also detained at the police station.

The police said that demonstrators were shot for not leaving the place of the protest after they had been instructed to do so. The union is calling for the company to establish a provident fund and for workers to be paid an extra end-of-year bonus cheque to compensate for going four years without a pay rise.

The union is also demanding upward adjustments in wages for all grades among employees. The management claimed workers had been offered a 7 percent pay rise, while the union said the increase was news to them, claiming the company's offer to them was a zero percent wage deal.

## **Ugandan doctors demand payment of wages**

Doctors went on strike Sunday at Jinja Referral Hospital, the largest hospital in eastern Uganda. The interns are striking over unpaid salaries and allowances for a period of four months.

Outpatients were severely affected, as well as surgical treatments and the maternity wards. Sixteen doctors involved in the strike said they would return to work once their grievances had been dealt with. The teaching hospital provides 600 beds to several districts in the area.

## **Staff at Nigerian hospital demand wage arrears**

Nigeria's Ondo state city hospital was paralysed Tuesday when staff from several departments went on strike.

Staff, including doctors and nurses, are demanding up to five months of wage arrears. Angry staff blocked off areas of the hospital, barring vehicles from entering. The state governor was said to be making efforts to find ways to pay the wages.

## **Ugandan University staff strike for pay increase**

Staff at five public universities throughout Uganda went on strike on Tuesday, demanding the government honour its promise of a wage increase. Their strike is taking place a week before exams begin on May 9.

According to the university non-teaching staff forum, the government has informed them there was no money put aside in the 2016-17 budget to fund the increase. The universities remained paralysed while the union forum was in discussion with the finance minister, demanding a signed

letter committing it to pay the increase in August.

### **Kenyan trucks drivers killed in South Sudan**

Kenyan truck drivers carried out a day of action to get the attention of the South Sudan ambassador to Kenya over security. The truckers blocked a main road into Mombasa on April 24, causing chaos, and the union threatened a national strike by April 25 if security arrangements were not put in place.

Ten of the long distance truck drivers were murdered in two incidents in South Sudan in March. The South Sudan government agreed to provide security for drivers into the country from the border and the strike was called off.

### **Kenyan nurses strike continues**

Four hundred nurses in Nandi County, Kenya, have been threatened with the sack if they do not return to work. Ninety nurses have already been sacked and replacements brought in from other counties.

The nurses have been striking for over a month and are demanding payment of outstanding wages and allowances, and promotions to be implemented. The two sides are in deadlock. The nurses' union has said it would not enter further negotiations while the threat of sackings continues. The county governor has demanded the union call off the strike before negotiations proceed.



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