

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 September 2016

## Health workers protest in Sweden

On Monday, health workers' demonstrations were held in the Swedish capital of Stockholm and more than 20 towns and cities, including Gothenburg Luleå, Ludvika and Lund. Around 1,000 people protested in Citizen Square in Stockholm.

Workers, including members of the Vårdförbundet health care union, are protesting health care cuts, staff shortages and poor pay and conditions. Speaking to Swedish Radio, Vårdförbundet representative Lena Elfström said more hospital beds had been closed this year than previously.

## Strike by Scottish college support staff

More than 2,000 support staff employed at 20 Further Education colleges across Scotland held a one-day strike Tuesday.

The members of the Unison union are demanding a £450 pay rise to bring them in line with the offer made to college teaching staff.

The stoppage led to the closure of some classes and college-based nurseries. Colleges affected by the strike included City of Glasgow, Glasgow Clyde and Glasgow Kelvin.

## Strike by bus drivers in Irish capital

Around 3,300 bus drivers in the Irish capital, Dublin, began a 48-hour strike Thursday. It is due to be followed by a further two 48-hour strikes later this month. The staff are members of the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

They are seeking a 15 percent pay rise over three years, together with a 6 percent award payment from 2008. The unions met with Dublin Bus management September 2 in an attempt to avert the strike.

Workers rejected an offer recommended by the Labour Court six weeks ago of an 8.25 percent pay increase over three years. NBRU members are seeking parity with drivers on the Dublin light rail system (LUAS).

## Work-to-rule by cleaning staff at Irish police college

Cleaners at the Irish Garda (police) college in Templemore in County

Tipperary have notified their employer of their intention to work-to-rule. The 40 employees are members of the Impact union.

The staff are angry at being paid the minimum wage of €9.15 an hour, which is well short of the €11.50 an hour living wage. They are demanding an increase in staff numbers to cope with the additional students at the college. They argue that they suffer pay discrimination, and that male staff working in the public service and doing similar work, are paid up to 25 percent more in some cases.

## Irish diamond manufacture plant workers announce strike

Employees at the Element Six diamond company in Shannon voted for a 24-hour strike to be held September 21. They are members of the SIPTU union.

The workers voted to strike after the company failed to implement in full a recommendation from the Labour Court regarding changes to shift patterns and work practices.

## Southern Rail staff in England hold further strike

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) working for Southern Rail began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. The stoppage resulted in more than two out of five trains cancelled, with no service available on some routes.

The strike was in protest at plans by Govia Thameslink, who run the private Southern Rail franchise, to remove all safety duties from train conductors and impose driver-only operation (DOO). Southern imposed the change to DOO on August 21.

The Southern rail network franchise is the largest in the UK and connects towns on the south coast with London.

## Strike of bus drivers in UK capital

Bus drivers employed by operator Tower Transit in London held a 24-hour strike Tuesday, following a previous strike on August 26.

The dispute arose over changes to work rosters. The Unite union accuses management of trying to push through the changes.

More than 1,000 workers, including drivers, engineers and controllers at all three bus depots of the operator, supported the strike.

Unite regional officer Simon McCartney said, "Strike action is very

much the last resort ...”

### **Bus drivers in western England continue strike**

Bus workers employed by the First Bus Company, First Hampshire and Dorset Ltd continue to strike in an ongoing dispute over pay. The workers first struck in June and are on strike this week, until September 11.

The drivers and staff, members of the Unite union, are angry over poverty levels of pay imposed by the company and are seeking a pay rise and parity with drivers in other First Bus companies.

They earn £8.80 an hour, while drivers working for nearby First Bus group Yeovil earn £9.50 an hour. Drivers in Bournemouth and Poole earn nearly £11 an hour.

Talks slated to take place under the auspices of the government reconciliation service ACAS did not go ahead, with Unite saying the company tried to impose “draconian conditions” prior to the talks taking place. These included proscribing industrial action for three months following arbitration.

Under anti-union legislation, the workers will have to be balloted again in the near future as the three-month period since the dispute began comes to a close on September 11. Drivers have already voted for a further strike ballot to go ahead, meaning that industrial action could extend into the New Year.

### **Protest by Greek pensioners in Athens**

Greek pensioners held a protest outside the Labour Ministry Tuesday. They were protesting further cuts in the auxiliary pension being carried through by the Syriza-led government.

The cuts are being imposed as part of Syriza’s imposition of severe austerity measures demanded by the European Union and International Monetary Fund.

### **Health workers walk out at three Norwegian hospitals**

Nearly 200 health staff, including 100 doctors, walked out Wednesday in a dispute over working hours. They are members of the Akademikerne union. Hospitals in Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger were affected by the walkout.

An additional 119 union members are set to walk out Friday if the dispute is not settled.

### **Bank workers unions threaten strike in Italy**

On Monday the CGIL, CISL, UIL trade unions, in alliance with several smaller unions, threatened to strike in protests at large-scale job losses.

The statement followed a call by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi for the banking sector to cut 150,000 jobs over the next decade.

State debt has risen since 2011 from €1.8 trillion to €2.2 trillion, or 133 percent of GDP. Since the beginning of 2008, GDP has contracted by 8

percent. The amount of toxic assets on the books of the banks has doubled and today amounts to €360 billion, or one fifth of all loans. Of these, €200 billion is considered to be irretrievably lost.

### **Workers continue strike over privatisation of Ghana utility**

On Monday, workers at the Electricity Company of Ghana continued the industrial action they began last Friday. The strike was called to oppose the privatisation of the company.

Workers turned up for work, but did not, under instructions from the Public Utility Workers Union (PUWU), carry out repairs to certain energy supply equipment. Management claim PUWU’s action is illegal and say they will deal with strikers as the law sees appropriate.

The union fears that the privatisation being carried out by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) will result in job losses and higher tariffs.

The PUWU is not opposed to the MCC programme, but want the opportunity to make the public utility competitive and be involved in the bidding.

Sixty companies had expressed interest in the utility, with six being shortlisted. It is expected the privatization will be completed by January 2017.

### **Ghana workers sacked over union recognition**

Miners are opposing the sacking of 70 workers at the Ghanaian heavy-duty equipment supply company Mantrac. A national strike was called to demand that Mantrac accede to the demand of around 300 workers for representation by an alternative union.

Since January, workers have repeatedly asked the company to switch their union dues from the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICWU) to the Ghana Mineworkers Union (GMU). The GMU claims the sackings are illegal because the company is preventing a shift in representation.

Although the strike was called off the same day, with management agreeing to discuss workers’ demands, the 70 strikers were dismissed. Workers have accused the ICWU of acting against their interests and agreeing with management. The GMU says it is depending on the “good faith” of Mantrac management.

### **Railway workers demand pay and improved employment conditions in Ghana**

Ghana railway workers are set to strike on September 12 unless their wages are paid. The workers, who have not been paid their wages for the last two months, are also seeking better working conditions.

The Railway Workers Union (RWU) secretary says it has been ignored by the government. The RWU is utilising the fact that September 12 coincides with the return of students to school to put pressure on the Ministry of Transport.

## **Namibian teachers demand increased pay**

Namibian teachers are voting in a strike ballot in pursuit of a pay increase. The government is offering public servants a 5 percent increase while the Teachers Union of Namibia is demanding 8 percent. Inflation is stated to be running at an annual rate of 7 percent.

The union accuse the education secretary of trying to undermine the voting procedure by calling for education officials to meet with teachers while the ballot is underway.

The union vice president, Matheus Haakuria, claimed the education secretary has no mandate in the dispute, saying that civil service salaries are dealt with by the prime minister.

Haakuria called on another union, the Namibia National Teachers Union, to support the strike. According to the *Namibian* news site, Haakuria “feared that the dispute should not be drawn out by delaying tactics, as it could lead to the radicalisation of the teachers.”

The government is considering the legalities of imposing a no-work no-pay rule.

## **Oil union in Nigeria threatens to resume strike**

On Monday, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) threatened to resume strikes. The union said no action has been taken to implement the terms agreed to settle a strike held over a month ago.

Ten thousand union members struck on July 6 over issues of pay and conditions and a dispute with four oil related companies over trade union recognition.

PENGASSAN called on the government to bring the companies to heel or it would have to give way to pressure from its members to renew the strike.

## **Strike threat at South Africa’s platinum mines**

A strike in the South African platinum industry is looming as the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) has declared a deadlock in talks with employers. The three major platinum producers have rejected AMCU’s demand for a 50 percent wage increase for its lowest paid members.

The union is to have further meetings with two of the companies, Impala and Anglo American, but no arrangements have been announced to meet with the third company, Lonmin. If these fail, government arbitration will be called for and if there is still no resolution, a strike could follow.

AMCU is now the largest union in the industry, having displaced the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). This process escalated following the exposure of the collusion of the NUM in preparing the way for the police massacre of miners at Marikana in 2012.



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