

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 February 2017

Strikes by German airport staff disrupt flights

Around 2,000 ground crew at four German airports—Tegel and Schönefeld in Berlin, and at Stuttgart and Hamburg—held a strike on Wednesday morning. The members of the Verdi union taking part included flight crew, baggage handlers, drivers and cleaners. The strikes lasted about six hours and led to the disruption or cancellation of more than 100 flights.

They are seeking a pay rise of €1 an hour plus improved conditions and better promotion opportunities. Further pay talks are scheduled for today.

In a separate dispute, teachers, who are members of various unions, took part in strikes throughout Germany on February 1 and 2 in pursuit of a 6 percent pay increase.

UK Equality Commission staff continue dispute

Staff working for the UK government's Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) were due to strike Thursday as part of their ongoing campaign against cuts and compulsory redundancies.

The Public and Commercial Services union and Unite union members were set to picket at EHRC offices in Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham among others. A further four days of strikes have been set for the period up to mid-May.

Further strikes by teaching assistants in Derby

Teaching assistants (TAs) in Derby held a further three days of strikes this week and on Wednesday held a demonstration outside Derby Council headquarters.

The 1,250 TAs, who are members of the Unison union, have suffered pay cuts as their employer, Derby Council, which is Labour Party controlled, amended their pay to cover term time only. This has led to cuts in pay of up to 25 percent and many of the TAs have been forced to take second jobs to be able to get by.

Thames ferry strike suspended

The scheduled strike today by the 36 staff working on the Woolwich ferry service across the river Thames in East London has been suspended.

The unions representing the ferry staff, Unite and GMB, suspended the action ahead of talks with the employer Briggs Marine Contractors Ltd, which were held Thursday.

The workers are protesting health and safety issues at the ferry service and allege the company encourages a bullying culture, with claims of sexual harassment made.

A series of one-day weekly strikes through mid-April are still scheduled.

Strike threat by Finnish aviation workers

Staff at Finnish travel groups TUI and Tjareborg, along with staff employed by Norwegian Airlines in Finland have threatened to strike in the run-up to the half-term holiday, due to begin February 20. The workers are demanding a wage increase.

TUI, Tjareborg and Norwegian Airlines in Finland employ aviation cabin crew, security staff and ground maintenance crew from aviation services company Airpro, which in turn is wholly owned by the Finnish state-owned Finavia.

The travel group staff are represented by the Pro trade union, while the aviation group employees are represented by the aviation workers union, IAU.

If an agreement is not reached by February 17, security staff and airport lounge staff would strike for several hours during the course of that day, while cabin crew staff would begin a 23-hour strike at midnight on February 19.

Protest by Georgian chemical employees broken up brutally

Police using brutal force broke up a protest by chemical workers at the Rustavi Azot fertilizer plant in Georgia at the end of last week.

The previous week 350 workers at the plant had been dismissed. A new manager at the plant, which faces economic problems, was appointed in January. In his attempt to address the financial problems, the manager illegally dismissed the 350 and attempted to force remaining employees to sign new contracts with worse terms.

During the protest, the dismissed workers, along with other trade unionists and supporters attempted to enter management offices at the plant to confront them over the dismissals. At this point police were called, who then broke up the protest. The protesters began to leave the plant but continued to be attacked.

Following the protest, a four-hour meeting between representatives of the dismissed workers—initiated by the Ministry of Labour—failed to resolve any issues and the dismissed staff vowed to keep up their protests.

The workers are members of the Trade Union of Metallurgy, Mining and Chemical Industry Workers of Georgia, which is affiliated to the IndustriALL Global Union.

Strike by Irish nurses and midwives looks increasingly likely

The 4,000 Irish nurses and midwives belonging to the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) are likely to vote in favour of industrial action in an upcoming ballot according to the union.

The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) already voted in December in favour of strikes, if talks between the unions and Irish Ministry of Health failed to make progress.

Talks have been taking place in which the unions want all nursing and midwife posts currently vacant to be filled. They demand nurses and midwives currently under training but graduating this year be offered posts. Another demand is that any posts left vacant because of maternity leave be filled in full immediately. To date, no progress on these demands has been announced.

Irish Tesco staff set to strike

Irish Tesco employees at nine stores are set to come out on indefinite strike on February 14. The Mandate union, which represents 10,000 Tesco employees, reported a 78 percent vote in favour of the action. Initially, nine stores will be hit, but with other stores being balloted, a further 15 could join in.

The strike is over Tesco forcing through changes to the terms and conditions of around 250 staff who had been working for the company in 1996, when changes were implemented for all newly-appointed staff. Tesco is now seeking to apply the terms and conditions to their long-serving staff.

Strike by Egyptian textile workers

On Tuesday, nearly 3,000 women textile workers came out on strike at the Mahalla Textile and Weaving Company in El Mahalla El Kubra in the Nile delta. Their main demand is for a 10 percent increase in pay and enhanced benefits.

The company is one of the biggest cotton producers in the country, with around 30 plants employing a total of 60,000 staff.

Israeli airline flights disrupted by pilots' action

Pilots working for the Israeli airline El Al are continuing to disrupt flights in an on-going dispute over senior pilots.

Under international regulations, pilots aged 65 or over are not allowed to pilot international flights, however the retirement age in Israel is 67.

The 40 pilots involved, who are aged between 65 and 67, have been sidelined into lesser roles, with a consequent two-thirds cut in pay. The disruption last Sunday led to the cancellation of five flights.

Tunisian construction workers announce hunger strike

Around 60,000 Tunisian construction workers were set to hold a mass hunger strike together with protests outside governors' offices across the country on Thursday to protest the precarious nature of their employment.

According to Tunis Afrique Presse, the workers vowed to hold a national strike on March 9, with a mass demonstration outside the Kasbah Government Palace.

South African mining unions protest mining companies' arbitrary action

Coal mining unions in South Africa have called a dispute and threatened to strike over national negotiations. The leading union in the coal industry, the National Union of Mineworkers, and a smaller union, Solidarity, are in dispute to maintain the nationwide industry agreement while a new bargaining structure is put in place.

The dispute arose at the opening of the annual wage negotiations. The Chamber of Mines, the coal mining companies' negotiating body that includes international companies such as Glencore Operations SA and Anglo American Coal, told the unions that national bargaining will not continue, and future agreements will be carried out on a bilateral basis.

The unions are objecting to the arbitrary decision taken by the mining companies, under conditions in which talks between the two sides had agreed to move towards decentralisation. Unions claim the agreement was to take place only after they had reached a settlement and a new bargaining arrangement had been put in place.

South African academic staff return to work

Striking members of the National Education and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) at the University of South Africa have ended their strike. NEHAWU's weeklong strike, at the largest university in Africa, ended last week after the union agreed to a diminished wage claim.

Workers came out on strike demanding a 14 percent wage increase and improvements in housing allowances, and the implementation of a Labour Relations Agreement on temporary workers.

The union agreed to an 8 percent pay increase for lower paid staff and 5 percent for those on a higher salary. Their housing allowance was also increased by 8 percent and an unspecified deal reached on temporary workers.

Kenyan academic staff continue strike

A national strike at Kenya's universities and colleges now entering its third week is to continue. The strike was organised by the University Academics Staff Union (UASU), which is demanding the implementation of a 2013 collective bargaining agreement (CBA) due to come to an end this year.

The union wants to base a new CBA on the implemented 2013-17 agreement. The vice chancellors negotiating body, the Inter-Public Universities Council Consultative Forum, has not responded to the union's demands. The Kenyan Education Ministry is considering abandoning the 2017 first semester due to the standoff.

Kenyan doctors continue dispute

Kenyan doctors are continuing their nine-week national strike as a new negotiating body is being put in place. The Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentist Union (KMPDU) has agreed that the Confederation of Trade Unions (COTU) and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) will take up their negotiations.

The doctors are striking over a 2013 collective bargaining agreement that has been constantly reneged on.

Clinical officers, who had previously been out on strike alongside the doctors, are threatening to re-join the strike today to protest broken promises that their demands would be resolved. They had been coerced back to work when their union accepted false promises.

Kenyan nurses are also renewing their strike after some health authorities failed to honour return-to-work agreements. They had returned to work two months ago after striking over their 2013 collective bargaining agreement.

Mozambique bus workers strike over loss of premium pay

Bus workers at the Mozambique municipal bus company, EPTPM went on strike on February 2 but returned to work February 4, after representatives of the workers' trade union committee intervened.

They struck to oppose the company's arbitrary decision to remove premium payments for holidays. Grievances were also stoked up when unspecified deductions were made to their wages.

Negotiations are now in the hands of the trade union committee. Management said they were under instruction from the government to make savings in order to cut the company deficit.

Oil workers strike in Cote d'Ivoire

Cote d'Ivoire oil workers employed by Canadian Natural Resources at the Baobab and Espoir oil and gas field came out on a 72-hour strike on February 1 and then extended the walkout for another 72-hours as they sought to bring in workers from other sectors to support their protest. The stoppage resulted in a 33 percent reduction in the country's production of gas.

According to reports, the SISPOO union called the strike over working conditions and to demand contract staff be incorporated into the permanent workforce.

The oil field produces between 40,000 and 50,000 barrels of oil per day and the country's power plants are dependent on natural gas.

Industrial action by oil workers follows strikes by public sector workers and military personnel over unpaid wages and bonuses.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact