

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

31 March 2017

Strike of Irish bus workers continues

The 2,600 staff working for the Irish state owned bus company Bus Eireann, walked out on strike on March 24 over plans by the company to cut back on pay, conditions, and impose the closure of some routes and job losses. Bus Eireann says the measures are necessary to stem greater losses. Five unions are involved in the dispute including Unite, which has 100 craft employees in the company. All services run by the company have been affected, except its school bus service. School bus service staff may join the dispute in the near future.

The two main unions are the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the National Bus and Railworkers Union. The bus workers fear the attack on jobs and conditions is a prelude to privatization. NBRU general secretary Dermot O'Leary says some staff could lose up to €10,000 a year because of the planned cuts.

Bus Eireann is part of the state-owned CIE transport group, which also includes the rail company Iarnrod Eireann and the Dublin Bus Company. Currently these two arms are not part of the dispute but SIPTU announced on Monday that it plans to ballot its members in the two companies to take sympathy action in support of the Bus Eireann employees. Many Bus Eireann facilities are shared with Iarnrod.

Walkout by Bulgarian retail staff

Last week retail staff working for the Bulgarian supermarket chain Piccadilly held a spontaneous walkout over unpaid wages. They are owed several months back pay. They blockaded the Piccadilly headquarters in Sofia demanding their outstanding wages.

Berlin airport staff strike ended by union

On Tuesday, the Verdi union signed a three-year deal to end the dispute by ground staff at the Berlin airports. The 2,000 ground support staff had taken three days strike action earlier in March to win a €1 an hour pay increase. The action had led to the disruption of around 2,000 flights.

Under the deal, the airport workers will get a 14 percent raise over three years paid in four stages. The deal, which has to be voted on by airport workers, falls short of their demands.

Walkout by German Amazon staff

Last week more than 900 staff working for Amazon, members of the Verdi union, at its German warehouse in Rheinberg, held a one-day strike. It was part of the four-year-long fight by Amazon staff to be covered by terms and conditions relating to retail workers rather than at present as logistics workers.

German logistics staff are paid at a lower rate and have worse terms and conditions compared to retail staff.

Greek power workers prepare to fight privatization

Greek powers employees working for the Public Power Corporation (PPC) are due to meet at the end of this week to discuss plans including strikes to oppose the privatization of PPC—measures imposed by the Syriza-led government, which is carrying out demands from international creditors.

Under the measures, 40 percent of PPC's hydroelectric and lignite plants will be opened up to investors. The meetings will be coordinated by the PPC union umbrella organisation GENOP.

Protest by Hungarian power staff

Hungarian electricity power workers represented by the MVM union are set to hold a demonstration outside the Ministry of National Development offices in Budapest today. They have also threatened to hold strikes to push their demand for a 30 percent pay increase. The government pay offer falls far short of their demand.

Maltese broadcasting head resigns following workers protests

The chair of the Maltese Broadcasting Authority (BA), Tanya Borg Cardona, resigned this week. Her resignation follows strikes and protests by the members of the UHM union at BA who had called for her to go because of her bullying style of management.

Romanian rail staff strike

Rail workers in Romania walked out on strike on March 22 to push their

demand for a 25 percent pay rise. The strike led to 150 trains being cancelled while other services experienced delays of up to six hours.

Russian truck drivers protest

On Tuesday, truck drivers in Russia held protests, including parking on main city highways to vent their anger at government plans to impose new taxes on heavy vehicles. The cities affected included Moscow, St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg.

Organizers say they expect at least 10,000 truckers to eventually take part in the strike.

Slovak car workers end strike

Unions representing car workers employed by Kia Motors at Teplicka and Vahom in northern Slovakia signed an agreement on Tuesday ending a weeklong strike. Under the agreement, workers will receive a wage increase and bonuses for night shift.

Production line staff had been seeking a 10 percent rise. They will instead get a seven percent increase, while administrative staff who had been seeking a seven percent pay rise will instead get a 3.5 percent rise.

UK nuclear submarine staff conduct strike

Civilian staff working at the UK nuclear submarine facilities on the Clyde in Scotland held a one-day strike last Friday with a further series of strikes to come. They are members of the Unite union and are employed by Babcock Marine engineering.

They perform duties associated with the maintenance of the nuclear fleet such as cleaning, radiation monitoring and logistics at the nuclear plant. They accuse the company of not following agreed procedures and bypassing union reps.

UK civil servants in payday protests

UK civil servants, members of the Public and Commercial Services union are holding national events today to protest against the imposed one percent pay rise, which together with national insurance contributions and pension changes has led to cuts in real take-home pay. The events include petitions and lunchtime meetings.

UK crane drivers reject derisory pay offer

UK construction crane drivers have unanimously rejected a derisory three percent pay rise. The 50 crane drivers work for the HTC Wolffkran Company, the UK's largest crane operator. The crane drivers belong to the Unite union.

The offer was made in spite of £4.3 million profit made by the company last year. Unite will now organize a consultative ballot to determine whether the crane drivers would be prepared to take industrial action for an increased pay offer.

Algerian trade unionists arrested

Nine union executives of the gas and electricity workers' union SNATEGS were arrested on March 21 as they were preparing to attend a rally in the northern city of Tizi Ouzou. In spite of the arrests, the rally and protest by the workers went ahead. They were demanding wage increases and for the harassment of their union by state forces to stop.

Israeli insurance staff end strike

After holding a 24-hour strike on Sunday staff at Clal Insurance Enterprises Holdings Ltd have returned to work. The strike ended following an agreement between the workers' committee and Clal management. An agreement was reached over a pay increase for staff and that talks will continue to reach a new comprehensive collective agreement.

Jobs protest by chemical workers

On Tuesday, hundreds of Haifa Chemical company workers demonstrated in Tel Aviv against plans by the company to decommission a damaged storage facility used to store imported ammonia.

The ammonia is used to produce nitrate fertiliser. The workers fear the closure of the ammonia plant will lead to job losses. The company is lobbying the Israeli parliament for an alternative source of ammonia until a new storage facility can be built.

Africa

Struggles continue in South Africa

A number of significant struggles by workers in South Africa are continuing, including an unauthorized strike by gold miners in Gauteng province while the government has responded to a dispute by social workers with threats to bring in the National Defence Force.

South African miners' strike against victimisation

Mineworkers at Harmony Gold's Kusasalethu site, Carlton, Gauteng province South Africa are out on what has been declared an illegal strike. Strikers are taking action to protest the suspension of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union branch leadership held responsible for a previous sit-in last January.

According to reports, the suspended union leaders were responsible for a go-slow at the mine last week, resulting in no staff turning up for Friday's day shift.

A two-day mine occupation in January by 1,700 miners, (Kusasaletu mine employs 4,500) was in response to increased work rates.

Productivity increases were imposed on the miners to recover as much gold as possible before a five-year deadline for closure takes place.

Harmony Gold said new disciplinary action may be imposed in response to this latest action.

South African Social Services in dispute

The dispute by social workers, belonging to the National Education and Health Workers Union, in the South African Gauteng Province is now in its third week.

The provincial government is considering bringing in the South African National Defence Force to "look after" vulnerable beneficiaries.

The strikers are being held responsible for the death of a six-month-old child being transported from the Walter Sisulu Child and Youth Care Centre to a staffed facility.

The strikers are being cast as violent and uncaring hooligans by some press reports although their demands are outstanding from a 2015 agreement.

The union is demanding a review of entry levels for social service professionals and occupations, a total overhaul of the Occupation Specific Dispensation and introduction of a rural allowance.

They also want provision of the equipment to carry out their work, the permanent employment of casual social workers along with an improvement in the conditions of service for all employees in the department of social development, and the implementation of the 2015 Social Work resolutions, with the protection of the professional council for Social Service Professionals.

South African state insurance workers strike

Workers at the South African state insurer, the Road Accident Fund (RAF), are continuing their one-week strike for better wages. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) says negotiations through arbitration have broken down and the union will intensify the strike. They threaten to completely shut down the bankrupt state insurer's operations.

The fund is in debt to the tune of R8.2 billion (US\$663million) and has not paid out on accidents for several months.

One of NUMSA's claims, raised at mediation and arbitration, was the refusal of RAF to work through the company's and union's bargaining council as has been customary.

The union claims the arbitration process was a means by which RAF appeared to be negotiating while having no commitment to an agreement.

Health workers walk out in South Africa over unpaid bonuses

The Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has called strikes at hospitals and medical centres in Limpopo province. It has

been called to demand the payment of performance bonuses and other long outstanding claims.

After securing a court interdict barring COSATU members from picketing health premises the provincial Health Secretary said he was now seeking a the court injunction to declare the strike illegal. The department of health is also implementing a no-work no-pay policy.

Nigeria's Arik airlines workers strike

Nigeria's Arik Air Limited airline unions went on strike on March 23 to demand the new operator obey existing agreements and allow staff to join a union of their choice, without coercion.

The new operator, Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria, (AMCON) has taken over the running of the airline, with government support. The previous Arik directors who were sacked have accused AMCON of operating the business outside NCAA regulations.

Although the National Union of Air Transport Employees, (NUATE) brought the airline to a halt, the strike was suspended when the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority and the Department of State stepped in.

Other unions had come in behind NUATE, such as Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ATSSSAN) and National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE). The dispute remains suspended.

The airline is the largest operator within Nigeria and went into bankruptcy under a mountain of debt, which included many months of workers' wages and unpaid remittances.

Nigerian medical staff threaten action over non-implementation of agreements

Medical staff at Nigeria's Delta State University teaching hospital issued a strike notice for April 1. It was prompted by the dismissal of the chief accountant and the director of administration and the refusal of the hospital board to put into practice a white paper report.

The Delta state government white paper, in part, states that the Medical and Health Service Union of Nigeria executive is the only body with which the hospital board can negotiate.

The union claims the report has been in the hands of the hospital directorate for over a year without it being acted upon.



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