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Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Around 2,000 local authority workers on 24-hour strike marched through Athens on Monday protesting the Syriza-led Greek government's proposals to cut nursery posts.

Police used tear gas to break up a rally to demand a meeting with government officials.

The march coincided with talks between European Union and central bank officials and the government, which continues to impose harsh austerity cuts. In autumn, the current EU loans programme ends, with Greece set to return to the international bond markets to finance its debts, which remain at around 300 billion euros.

The protests followed a government decision to lower the school starting age to 4.

Greek rail workers announce strikes

Staff working for the Greek rail company Trainose have announced a series of partial strikes beginning March 5, followed by a 24-hour strike the next day. On Monday, they will hold three-hour stoppages beginning at 5am, 1pm and 9pm followed by the 24-hour strike Tuesday. The company has around 650 employees.

According to the Athens-Macedonian News Agency they are taking the action to highlight the deteriorating state of the rail network and staff shortages. Formerly owned by the Greek state, in September 2017 the company was bought by the Italian state-owned rail company Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane.

The stoppages are expected to affect services across the country including Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras as well as the link to Athens International Airport and the Proastiakos suburban rail network.

Belgian rail strike

Rail staff across Belgium began a 24-hour strike Monday at 10pm. In the capital Brussels, metro, tram and bus services were also hit, as well as public transport in Antwerp and Ghent.

The strike was called by the social democratic aligned ACOD public sector union, over definitions of arduous or hazardous work within the public sector. Split shifts, night work and shift work, classed as arduous or

hazardous—enabling workers to retire earlier—are not applied consistently across the public sector.

Portuguese Ryanair cabin crew strike call

Four hundred cabin crew at the Portuguese wing of the low-cost Dublin-based airline, Ryanair, are to hold three days of strikes over Easter—on March 29, April 1 and April 4. The strikes have been sparked by deteriorating work conditions, a lack of respect by management and pressure to fulfil on-board sales targets.

Ryanair only recognises unions representing pilots; however a senior executive said an invitation for talks have gone out to unions representing crew in Portugal, Spain, Italy and the UK.

UK rail guards at Arriva Rail North and Merseyrail in further strike over Driver Only Operated trains

Rail guards working for the private UK rail franchises, Arriva Rail North and Merseyrail, are due to begin a 24-hour strike at midnight today in an ongoing dispute over plans to extend the use of Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and could lead to the elimination of 6,000 guard jobs.

Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) General Secretary Mick Cash said Arriva Rail and Merseyrail were refusing to negotiate.

UK Fujitsu workers protest

On Tuesday, Unite trade union members protested against the dismissal by Fujitsu of Unite representatives. The protest took place outside a technology event in London attended by UK Fujitsu chairman Michael Keegan.

The action followed a strike at the firm's Manchester site to protest job losses at the company and the dismissal of four of the six Unite union officials.

Food processing workers in Carrickmacross, Ireland to strike

Staff at Kerry Foods plant in Carrickmacross in the Irish Republic will hold three one-day strikes on a weekly basis beginning March 6. They are protesting company plans to cut 31 jobs due to uncertainties over Brexit.

A major source of income for the factory, which employs 400, is the export of frozen meals to the UK.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union, which called the strikes, accept the loss of jobs, arguing for voluntary redundancy.

Irish telecom staff announce strikes

Field engineers working for BT Ireland are to hold six days of strikes over three weeks beginning March 9.

The company, which employs 600 staff across the country, have cut the jobs in one field engineer team, replacing them with staff on lower pay.

Members of the Communications Workers Union voted by 95 percent to strike for union recognition. BT Ireland insists on negotiating through its own employee representative group.

Work stoppage by UN staff at Swiss headquarters

UN staff in Geneva, Switzerland stopped work for two hours on Monday. The 9,000 workers were protesting a 3.5 percent pay cut and a further five percent cut due in June.

Several hundred held a demonstration outside a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, holding placards saying: "No confidence in ICSC." The ICSC is the International Civil Service Commission that oversees working conditions. It is carrying out cuts in pay and benefits of UN staff across the globe.

Three Ukrainian miners continue hunger strike

Three miners working for the state-owned Selidovuhol enterprise are continuing their hunger strike, which began last week. The miners together with several union officials are protesting in a Ministry of Energy and Coal Mining building, against unpaid wages.

Italian nurses announce strike intention

Nurses belonging to two small independent nursing unions announced they will hold a 48-hour strike beginning April 12. The strike is against the terms of a recently signed new national contract.

In a previous strike on February 23 over the failure to renew a health sector collective bargaining contract, Nursing-Up and Nursing claimed 80 percent participation.

Iranian sugar workers win wage arrears

Workers at the Haft Tapeh sugar production plant in Shush have won their most recent payment of wage arrears for money owed since mid-January this year. The non-payment of wages has been a continuing problem and the workers launched a campaign against management last July over the issue. The company still refuses to recognise their union and daily contract employees are owed wages.

Go slow at Israeli airport

Israel Airports Authority staff at Israel's Ben Gurion airport took part in go-slow action on February 22 for two and a half hours. They were protesting working conditions.

The go-slow meant planes taking off every 10 minutes rather than the usual two.

Kenyan health workers strike for unpaid wages

A strike by doctors, clinicians and medical staff has paralysed health services in Saiya state, Kenya, since February 21.

The workers, who have not been paid since the beginning of the New Year, also complain of regular late payments.

Though the state county governor said funds had arrived from central government, the strike went ahead because of his reputation for making "empty promises."

In another dispute, Kenya's University Staff Union and the University Academics Staff Union issued a seven-day strike warning notice last Saturday. The notice is to press for the signing of a new 2017-21 collective bargaining agreement.

The Minister for Labour threatened to cancel the unions' strike notices, saying wage demands "must be supported by a solid economy."

South African unions sell out Durban University lecturers strike

Unions at Durban University of Technology (DUT) have called off a seven-week strike on the promise of further negotiations, following violence against strikers and a management lockout.

The unions claim management have refused further talks on their 6.5 percent wage and allowance offer, and brought in state mediator, CCMA.

The members of the National Tertiary Education Union, National Health and Allied Workers Union and the Tertiary Education National Union of SA were striking for a 10 percent wage increase, a R400 (US \$35) housing allowance and R9,000 (US \$765) once-off bonus.

DUT vice chancellor said, "Forcing the university to settle for a salary increase... will jeopardise future generations of DUT students." Student registration has now begun.

South African miners strike over non-payment of wages

Over the last three weeks, South Africa miners at three Gupta family-owned mines have been protesting unpaid wages and job losses. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union members joined the strike alongside the National Union of Mineworkers.

The country's power generating company, Eskom, has not paid their coal account at the mines. South Africa's banks have cut ties with the Guptas to avoid reputational risks.

A bank associated with the Guptas, the Bank of Baroda, plans to leave SA at the end of March. The mines are now in the hands of business rescue practitioners.

With an estimated wealth of over \$10 billion, the Gupta brothers are the seventh richest operators in South Africa. The brothers, who were close to former president Zuma, have gone missing.

Grace Mugabe refuses to pay protesting Zimbabwean farm workers

Grace Mugabe and her husband, the ex-President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, were confronted by employees of their farm over the termination of benefits owed to them. Grace Mugabe told the 106 demonstrators that no one will make her pay, not even the new president Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The farm ownership is being transferred to a "Wilson Marufu," who offered to pay the workers in rice. Marufu is the maiden name of Grace Mugabe.



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