

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 March 2019

**Thousands of teachers strike in Morocco, car workers walkout in Hungary**

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Middle East

### Moroccan teachers strike

On Tuesday, thousands of teachers went on strike and held demonstrations in Morocco. This was their second week of protests.

They are protesting their temporary work status and demanding to be made permanent. The Moroccan government brought in the concept of temporary contractual employment three years ago, beginning with teachers. Teachers in regular employment are employed directly by the government whereas contractual teachers are employed directly by the school. Although earning equivalent salaries, temporary teachers do not have pension or medical insurance cover.

## Europe

### Hungarian car workers' strikes

Workers at the Korean-owned tyre company, Hankook, began an indefinite strike in Hungary on Tuesday. The VDSZ union members are demanding an 18 percent pay rise and an increase in bonuses.

The indefinite strike follows a two-hour warning strike held on March 6, after which the company offered a basic pay increase of 13.6 percent backdated to January.

Hankook employs around 3,000 workers in Hungary.

The same day a short strike for higher pay took place at the Chinese-owned Wescast car exhaust factory near Budapest. The plant employs around 1,000 workers. The Vasas union members returned to work later that day.

### Strike by Greek energy workers

Workers employed by DEPA, the Greek public gas corporation, held a one-day strike on March 7. The strike was called by the SEFA-DEPA union and was supported by others. The strikers marched to the Greek

parliament.

The strike and march coincided with the passage of a bill in parliament, put forward by the pseudo-left Syriza government, to split DEPA in two, one part overseeing infrastructure and the other dealing with trading issues. The split would facilitate the further privatization of the company.

### Greek public hospital workers set to strike

Staff in Greek hospitals were due to walk out for 24-hours on Thursday. The POEDIN union members were protesting the lack of ambulance crew. They were also protesting Syriza government plans by the Interior Ministry to transfer around 500 former local authority school guards to understaffed hospitals.

### Construction workers in Manchester, UK walk off job

Workers in Manchester employed by construction firm Dawnus walked off the job on Monday over non-payment of wages. They were working on a major road in the city and left machinery in the road, leading to traffic chaos. The strikers, many of whom are not unionised, appealed to workers at other construction sites, who walked out in sympathy.

The *Manchester Evening News* noted, "Staff from Total Plant Hire Ltd, a Trafford Park-based firm which supplies machinery, downed tools at around 9.30am on Tuesday claiming they are owed around £300,000 by main contractor Dawnus with a second sub-contractor also alleging they are owed the same amount."

Labour Party-run Manchester City Council are responsible for the management of the work, with the job contracted to Dawnus. Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, speaking from the prestigious global property developers fair in Cannes, France, attacked the workers action and asked the police to look into possible criminal charges against them.

### Strike by workers at bearings factory in the Midlands, UK

Workers at the NSK bearings factory in Newark, Nottinghamshire began strike action on March 4. Due to run until March 26, the strike follows an overtime ban begun in January.

The 27 Unite union members are opposing changes in shift patterns, which are detrimental to their work-life balance. The changes include contractual weekend working across two weekends, extending Friday

working by four hours and a banked hours system, which could extend the working week by 10 hours.

### **Protest by UK blacklisted construction workers**

Blacklisted UK construction workers held a sit-in at the London offices of Swedish construction company Skanska on March 6. The sit-in was timed to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the exposure of the blacklist of construction workers in the construction industry. Skanska was one of the most prolific users of the list.

### **Staff at school in Sussex, England may strike over privatization**

UK teaching staff at Peacehaven Community School in East Sussex are considering strike action. The National Education Union members are protesting plans by East Sussex County Council to hand control to the Swale Academies Trust, which runs 16 schools in the area. The school would be privately run but financed by the local authority.

The school was built in 2001 under a private finance initiative and payments are ongoing until 2026.

### **Icelandic tourism workers vote for further strikes**

Hotel workers and tour bus drivers in Reykjavik, Iceland and the surrounding area have voted by more than 90 percent for industrial action, up to and including strikes.

They held a 24-hour strike on March 8 to demand a pay increase. The union representing hotel and tourist industry workers has drawn up a series of strike days in March and April, as well as action including refusal by bus drivers to take tickets and hotel workers refusing to do laundry work.

### **Staff at Irish finance company set to strike**

Staff at First Choice Credit Union in Ballyhaunis, Archill and Castlebar, in Ireland, are due to strike today. The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union members are demanding increases in basic pay and travel expenses as well as pay equality.

The workers rejected a settlement package recommendation made by the Labour Court in September last year.

### **Latvian teachers plan protest**

Latvian teachers are planning to protest outside the Latvian parliament March 20. The protest will coincide with the first reading of the draft budget in the Saeima (parliament). They are demanding a wage increase and additional spending on education.

### **Turkish cosmetic workers end near 300-day strike**

Turkish workers at the cosmetic company, Flormar, a subsidiary of the French-owned Yves Rocher, have ended their near 300-day strike.

The strike began in May last year following the company's sacking of 132 women for joining the Petol-Is union. The company agreed to pay the sacked workers severance payments and compensation equivalent to 16 months' salary.

### **Africa**

### **Sudanese hospital workers' hold strikes and demonstrations**

Medical staff throughout Sudan protested on Tuesday in preparation for a civil disobedience demonstration on Wednesday.

The Sudanese Medical and Health Staff Group members carried out vigils at pharmaceutical companies and hospitals. The Wednesday demonstrations were supported by strikes throughout Sudan's hospitals.

Workers have been protesting since December 19 against the government of President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in a 1989 coup. The protests were triggered by the tripling of the price of bread and fuel shortages.

### **Workers at Krugersdorp's hospital, South Africa, take wildcat action over conditions**

A wildcat strike by medical and administration staff at Krugersdorp's hospital in South Africa, begun last week, ended after three days following a labour court ruling.

Workers at the Dr Yusuf Dadoo Hospital were protesting staff shortages, the lack of cooking facilities, and demanded the canteen be reopened and management removed. National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union pickets prevented doctors from clocking into work.

### **Municipal workers in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, protest cheap labour scheme**

Around 70 public sector workers protested at the council buildings in Port Elizabeth, South Africa on Tuesday morning.

The South Africa Municipal Workers Union and the Independent Municipal Allied Trade Union members are protesting the employment of casual labour. Twelve casuals on the cheap labour scheme, the Expanded Public Works Programme, are doing a survey of tenants in the dangerous, no-go areas of townships in Port Elizabeth. They are to gather information on home ownership, normally done by official employees and union members, to establish who qualifies for rebates.

Contractors are paid R5,000 a month whereas full-time employees are paid R19,000.

## **Namibian miners' union sides with management against striking workers**

A wildcat strike by Namibian mine blasting workers at Basil Read Mining Namibia ended after the intervention of the Miners Union of Namibia (NUM).

Several hundred workers struck on February 22 against discriminatory practices of sub-contracting company Skorpion Zinc mines.

Workers complain of racial discrimination and unfair practices over pay, housing and many other areas of work. The dispute erupted when pay slips were posted on the company notice board by a wages clerk, showing pay discrepancies for equal work favouring white workers. The clerk has been suspended.

An NUM spokesman said, "As a union, we do not condone illegal industrial actions." The union agreed with the company that workers should face disciplinary action before being allowed back in the mine. The company has advertised the jobs of strikers.

## **Kenya's nurses threaten strike against casualization**

Kenya's nurses are threatening strike action against government proposals to casualise their jobs. President Uhuru Kenyatta, and the Council of Governors want to introduce yearly contracts.

The Confederation of Trade Unions and the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN) members recently struck for three weeks from February 4, for the implementation of a 2017 collective bargaining agreement. The President intervened alongside the courts to threaten nurses with the sack if they did not return to work. The majority of nurses ignored KNUN's directive.

## **Kenyan airport workers' strike continues in face of management strikebreaking**

Kenyan airline workers, including cabin crew, ground staff, security, air traffic controllers and maintenance staff are continuing their strike begun March 6. They are opposing the takeover of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport by struggling Kenya Airways (KQ).

Services were restored on Thursday by using Kenyan Air force officers as scabs after the strike was deemed illegal and economic sabotage. Several members of the Kenya Aviation Workers Union were arrested and accused of striking illegally.

KQ is proposing to sack all employees and rehire selected workers through a contracting company on the basis of wage, benefits and pension cuts. Those who oppose the terms will be made redundant.



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