

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 January 2016

One-day strike of junior doctors in England

A 24-hour strike by junior doctors in England began at 8 a.m. on Tuesday in which they only provided emergency cover. They were taking the action in opposition to the Conservative government's attempts to impose a new contract that would mean a cut in pay, longer working hours and less chance for advancement.

A series of three strikes due to have begun December 1 were postponed when the organization representing the junior doctors, the British Medical Association (BMA), called them off to hold further talks with the government under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services, ACAS.

Following a breakdown of the talks, the new series of strikes were announced. The 24-hour strike is to be followed by a 48-hour strike beginning 8 a.m. on January 26, followed by a nine-hour all-out strike with no emergency cover on February 10. However, talks under the auspices of ACAS began again Thursday. The BMA is desperate for the government to come up with a face-saving formula that would allow the two further proposed strikes to be called off.

London underground rail unions announce strikes

Unions representing staff working on the London Underground (LU) system (the Tube), the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, ASLEF and UNITE have announced a series of three 24-hour strikes. They are due to begin in the evening of January 26, February 15 and 17.

The strikes are over LU's management plans to introduce a 24-hour all-night service. TSSA, the union representing office and ticket staff, is due to consult its members as to whether they will join the action.

Strike by teachers at English Midlands school

Teachers at Small Heath School, Birmingham, came out on strike Monday against plans by the local authority to convert it to an Academy school. They have already held five days of strikes since May last year. They voted for four further days of strike last week.

Following the decision to hold further strikes one of the teachers, Simon O'Hara, was suspended. The teachers are members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). A petition calling for the reinstatement of O'Hara, who has taught at the school for 30 years, has been signed by 1,300 people.

Greek workers oppose pension and social security reforms

Last Friday hundreds of Greek public sector workers and pensioners marched in Athens, protesting against the Syriza government pension reforms, which will see pension schemes merged into one main scheme with payments reduced by around a third.

Staff employed by the Seamen's Pension Fund (NAT) were on

strike Monday and Tuesday of this week in opposition to plans to merge NAT into the main pension scheme. Their union held a general assembly on Tuesday to discuss future action.

The PNO union representing Greek ferry staff this week announced a 48-hour strike January 20-21. It is in opposition to the government plans to merge the social security fund covering seamen and transport workers into a national insurance scheme, the EFKA.

Dutch dockers threaten further strikes

Around 800 dockers organized by the FNV Havens union in the Port of Rotterdam held a 24-hour strike on January 7. It was in opposition to plans to open two new terminals, which will be highly automated and according to FNV could lead to the loss of around 700 jobs, a fifth of the current workforce.

The workers are seeking job security guarantees over the next nine years and have said they will hold further strikes if talks with the employer are unproductive. The strike last week was the first in 13 years.

Strike threat by Portuguese public sector staff

The CGTP union body announced Monday it would call a strike of public sector workers in Portugal if the newly elected coalition government did not cut the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours this month. The newly elected left coalition government had promised to reverse the previous right-wing government's imposition of a 40-hour week, which had been brought in as part of its austerity measures. However, the government said the cut in hours would apply from July this year.

Ukrainian miners block border crossing

Ukrainian miners went ahead with their plan to block a border crossing post Tuesday. More than 300 miners blocked the crossing point between Poland and the Ukraine on the main road linking Lviv and Rava Ruska.

The miners, members of the Independent Trade Union of Coal Miners of Ukraine (NPGU), have been on strike since January 2. They are protesting at arrears in their wages. They have been paid less than half their wages owed for the period November to December 2015.

Cypriot workers strike threat

Workers belonging to the Turkish Cypriot public sector workers in Northern Cyprus have threatened to strike if their customary 13th salary is not paid by January 25.

Staff employed by the Republic of Cyprus state telecoms company, CyTA, organized by the EPOET OIO-SEK union, have voted over 90 percent in favour of a strike against plans by the Cypriot government

to privatize the company.

The government is also planning to split the state-owned power company EAC into two organizations, one for power generation and one for electricity distribution, with a view to privatization. Power workers unions are opposed to the moves. The government is seeking to privatize these companies as part of its deal with international financiers who bailed out the country.

Striking Egyptian workers suspended

Around 18,000 workers employed by Petrotrade have been on strike for over five weeks. Petrotrade has 52 branches across Egypt. Set up in 2001, the company collects payments for domestic gas on behalf of the Petroleum Authority.

The dispute is over the company policy of paying bonuses only to managers and “favourites” among the workers, bypassing the bulk of the workforce.

Over the course of the dispute the company has suspended some workers, now numbering several hundred, it regards as ringleaders of the strike. Police have questioned some after asking them to report to police stations.

Wildcat strike by Israeli airport authority staff

Staff working for the Israeli Airport Authority coordination centre began an all-out unofficial strike on Sunday. The Airport Authority applied to the court in an attempt to halt the strike.

Kenyan teachers' strike

Lawyers acting for the Kenyan National Union of Teachers (KNUT) are demanding the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the teachers' employers, respect the ruling on teachers' wages negotiations. The court ruled teachers could resume their strike after the 90-day suspension agreed with the government had ended.

The government has reneged on court rulings and appeals relating to the teachers' pay award. The union's main concern has been the decision by the TSC not to collect union dues. The union argued that the TSC should have opened a suspense account rather than stop taking deductions.

KNUT accuses the TSC of penalising the union for calling the strike last September and attempting to bankrupt the union. The strike continued for five weeks, becoming the longest teachers strike in Kenya's history.

The union is demanding the money from the outstanding dues from October to the present day to be able to carry out elections as demanded by the TSC. According to the TSC, the elections are needed so they can determine which teachers are members of KNUT and which are members of the Kenyan Union of Post Primary Teachers (KUPPET).

Temporary teachers taken on to break the strike who were promised permanent jobs have been sacked after their three-month contracts expired.

Liberian Ebola front line workers denied benefits

One hundred workers responsible for cleaning down, bagging and burying Ebola infected bodies in Liberia have been consistently denied risk benefits that had been promised to them. They have held demonstrations and been promised meetings with officials who then fail to turn up.

They were able to meet with Prime Minister Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who gave them \$2,000 and bags of rice and arranged for them to meet

with the minister of health at the beginning of January. However, when they turned up for their meeting they were denied access to the minister.

Each Ebola Treatment Unit worker is owed \$5,000 in compensation for their hazardous work.

Lecturers strike in Nigeria

Lecturers in Oson state, Nigeria, came out on indefinite strike Monday over the sacking of 141 of their colleagues.

The members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) and College of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) are demanding the governor repeal all sacking notices from October 29 to the present. They are also demanding that the state implement agreements made with the union on October 29 and for their salaries to be paid in full.

The Medical and Dental Association of Nigeria at the Ladoko Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital has joined the strike in solidarity with the lecturers.

A separate dispute, a strike by the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) and Association of Medical and Dental Officers (OSAMDO) in Osun state, continues.

South African bus workers strike

Bus workers at Transnat bus service for the eThekweni Metro Municipality were on strike in Durban, South Africa, Wednesday in response to non-payment of December's wages and bonuses. Payments to their provident fund are also overdue. Some workers abandoned their buses last Friday after learning their wages had not been paid.

The municipal bus service expected workers to return to work on Wednesday afternoon, claiming that the wages of the 750 employees would have been paid in full by then. They came out on strike on the day pupils were due to return to school.

Transnat is owned by the nephew of Jacob Zuma, South Africa's president, and has been sued by the municipality on previous occasions.

The bus drivers have been invited to a meeting with Transnat, but a worker told the *Citizen* online news, “Drivers are not going to the meeting. They feel the [eThekweni Metro] council is colluding with Transnat. They want the mayor to come to them at their depot in Umlazi and Ntuzuma.”

Another worker said, “People are scared to speak out. There is a culture of threatening people. It's run like the taxi industry.”

Coal miners strike in South Africa

South African miners at Msobo Coal went out on strike Monday against redundancies. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) claimed there were no proper consultations over the retrenchments and that redundancies are being made to enable the company to employ casual workers in line with other mines.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>