

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## 180,000 Finnish municipal workers begin overtime ban

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

### 180,000 Finnish municipal workers begin overtime ban

Around 180,000 Finnish public sector workers began an overtime ban on Tuesday. They will also refuse to swap shifts. The action will hit public transport services, health and care services.

The workers are demanding €150 million in compensation for cuts in bonuses to be made this year and in 2019. Local government employers have rejected the demand as financially impossible.

The unions involved are the Finnish Union of Practical Nurses, the Union of Health and Social Care Professionals, the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors, and the Public Sector Professionals.

The action follows strikes and protests by hundreds of thousands of Finnish workers last week over cuts to unemployment compensation. The proposed bill cuts unemployment benefits by 4.6 percent if claimants fail to work a specified number of hours and don't actively seek work.

### Italian medical and nursing staff to hold 24-hour strike

Tens of thousands of doctors and nurses in Italy are due to hold a 24-hour strike February 23, after negotiations failed to renew health sector collective bargaining contracts. Health staff will provide emergency cover on the day of the strike.

### Staff at hospital in North Yorkshire, England, favour strike to oppose privatisation

Workers at the hospital trust in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, voted almost unanimously in an indicative vote on strike action. They are opposed to the trust's plans to transfer 300 National Health Service (NHS) staff to a wholly owned subsidiary company to run the hospital. The trust's chief operating officer told the *Ripon Gazette*: "The new company will be modernising pay, terms and conditions for new staff. ..."

In the north west of England, staff at the Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh hospitals voted by 93 percent to oppose the trust's plans to transfer the 900 NHS workforce to a wholly owned subsidiary company, WWL Solutions.

The ballots at both trusts were organised by the Unison union.

### More action over driver-only operated trains at UK rail company

Rail guards employed by South Western Railways are to refuse to work rest days between February 16 and 19. This is part of a long-standing national dispute that began in April 2016 by workers at many private rail franchises against the introduction of driver-only operated (DOO) trains.

Six-thousand guard jobs are under threat as well as passenger safety. The guards are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT).

### UK Rail servicing workers to ballot for strike over sacking

Around 100 rail staff, working as tankers for the Virgin East Coast rail line, are being balloted for strike action over the sacking in December of one of their colleagues, Alex Ajufo.

Tankers are responsible for supplying trains with water and cleaning duties when the trains arrive at their terminus. They work for outsourcing company ISS.

Ajufo, a union representative for the RMT, worked as a tanker at Kings Cross station in London.

### Docklands Light Railway workers in UK capital to hold further strike

Staff providing cleaning services, security and information at the Docklands Light Railway system are to strike on February 22 and 24. The RMT union members are employed by outsourcing company ISS. The dispute is over the company's refusal to abide by the terms of the current contract, including contractual hours.

### UK Energy meter installers vote to strike

Sixty smart meter installers working for energy company EDF Energy have voted to take a week's strike action beginning February 19.

The Unite union members are opposed to the company's plans to put tracking devices in their vehicles and to conduct random drug and alcohol tests.

### Strike by Cypriot bus drivers in Limassol

Bus drivers employed by the Emel company in Limassol, Cyprus, held a 24-hour strike Tuesday. They are demanding the restoration of benefits cut in 2014.

The members of the Sek and Peo trade unions vowed to hold a 48-hour strike if their demands are not met.

### Strike at Estonian meat packing plant

Workers at the HKScan meat processing plant at Rakvere in northern Estonia came out on strike Tuesday for three days.

The strike is led by the slaughter line operatives, who are demanding a 16 percent rise from February 1 and another 16 percent rise from the beginning of July. This is the first official strike in the plant, which employs nearly 800 workers. Following an unofficial strike in October of last year, three workers were sacked over a demand for higher wages.

### Georgian rally protests health and safety cuts

About 20 workers in Georgia rallied outside the Georgian parliament buildings in Kutaisi on Monday, protesting changes to health and safety law that would leave workers without adequate protection.

The rally was timed to coincide with a debate in parliament on changes

to health and safety legislation. The debate was postponed, but the rally went ahead.

### **Irish train drivers to be balloted over mentoring role**

Train drivers employed by the Irish rail system, Iarnrod Eireann, and the Dublin Bay DART rail transport network, are to be balloted for possible all-out strike action.

They are opposed to plans by the rail companies to make mentoring of trainee train drivers compulsory. Previously, mentoring had been on a voluntary basis, though drivers had boycotted the role for the last two years. Drivers rejected a recent Labour Court ruling of a 1.5 percent pay rise as an incentive for carrying out mentoring.

The drivers are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union and National Bus and Railworkers Union.

### **Maltese doctors strike**

Doctors at three Maltese hospitals, St Luke's, Karin Grech and Gozo, held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. They were supported by nursing assistants and medical technicians.

The strike was to protest the transfer of a 30-year contract to a private supplier, Steward Global Healthcare. The Medical Association of Malta is not opposed to privatisation of services in principle but to the way the transfer has been handled.

The strike led to the cancellation of thousands of appointments, but emergency cover was provided.

### **Protests by Hepco workers in Arak, Iran, over unpaid wages**

Hundreds of Hepco employees in the central Iranian city of Arak formed a human chain around the city's main square Monday, protesting against unpaid wages for up to 15 weeks.

Hepco, which manufactures road-making equipment, was privatised last year with the loss of thousands of jobs. Remaining workers lost health insurance and pension benefits.

A protest by the workers in September of last year, alongside employees of Azarab—which makes industrial boilers—was attacked by riot police. Azarab was also recently privatised.

### **Sugar workers in Shush, Iran, continue struggle over unpaid wages**

The strike by 500 sugar processing workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar mill in the city of Shush has entered its second week. Workers are fighting for wage arrears going back at least two months.

On Monday, workers surrounded the plant and stopped the movement of goods in and out, leading to the arrest of about 30 pickets. The company was privatised following years of state ownership.

### **South African platinum contract miners strike for permanent agreement**

Seventy-two miners at the opencast platinum Anglo-American platinum mine in Mogalakwena, South Africa, struck last week to demand permanent contracts with the company.

The workers, mainly from the local community, are employed by human resources agency Concor. Without a contract they get no injury compensation and also cannot get credit.

An amendment to the Labour Relations Act in 2014 established that workers with three months of permanent employment with a company have a right to be brought onto that company's books. Some of the miners have worked at the mine for up to six years.

The miners are members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union.

### **Strike at South Africa Durban University of Technology continues**

Workers at the Durban University of technology in South Africa are

continuing their strike for increases in wages and allowances. University management offered a 6 percent increase, while workers are demanding eight percent and R350 (US\$29.30) in stipends.

Management have brought the arbitration services in to impose their offer and get staff back to work, as the opening semester is already one week late.

Last week, workers and students were injured by university security staff, who fired rubber bullets at a peaceful demonstration on the campus.

### **Nigerian research workers continue month-long strike**

Around 100 research institutions in Nigeria continue to be closed down as a four-month strike carries on.

Workers in three unions under the umbrella of the Joint Research and Allied Institutions Sector Unions are fighting for 11 demands including back pay of N9 billion (US\$25 million). They also want a new wage structure and tools to carry out their research.

Thirty-three meetings have taken place between unions and government since an agreement was signed in 2010, but failed to be implemented.

The strike is impacting the economy and food production, as well as work on a range of epidemics rife across the country.

The unions have threatened a mass protest in the capital, Abuja, if the dispute is not resolved.

### **Maritime union calls off strike over dangerous Nigerian port roads**

A strike by Nigerian maritime workers set to start Tuesday was called off by the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria in response to a promise by the federal government for talks.

The union had issued a seven-day ultimatum that the government remove all parked and broken-down transport vehicles so deadly potholes could be repaired on the Oshodi-Apapa Expressway leading to Lagos port.

Several drivers have lost their lives on the treacherous dual carriageway.

### **Kenyan university workers resume strike over old and new collective bargaining agreements**

The University Academic Staff Union (UASU) at Kenya University has given the government until February 12 to agree to a 2017-2021 collective bargaining agreement (CBA) or they will call a seven-day warning strike.

The UASU called off a previous strike in December to go into talks with the government and university representatives.

Altogether the union called three strikes last year to get their 2013-2017 CBA implemented. Workers are still demanding funds be paid for the university staff pension schemes going back to 2010 so retired academics can claim their pensions.

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