

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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Public sector workers in Greece continue strikes

On November 3, primary and secondary school teachers in Greece began a 48-hour period of industrial action in an ongoing campaign to demand a pay increase. The action is the latest in a wave of national stoppages involving workers such as doctors, nurses, lawyers and ferry workers.

During the day, several hundred teachers marched in Athens to protest. The demonstration resulted in several traffic jams. Referring to government claims that pay increases were not feasible due to the costs of Greece hosting the Olympic Games next year, teachers chanted, "We want increases in salaries and pensions and don't want another penny given to the Olympics."

At one stage, a delegation of teachers tried to gain entry to the education ministry in Athens but were confronted by riot police. No arrests were made.

Doctors employed by the Social Security Foundation (IKA), lawyers and Athens prefecture employees also began 48-hour strikes at the same time as the teachers, and National First Aid Service centre employees continued a series of rolling 24-hour strikes.

On November 4, more than 500,000 civil servants held a 24-hour strike as part of an ongoing campaign to improve public sector employees' pay and conditions and oppose austerity measures and welfare cuts by the government. Among the demands of the workers are a new pay scale with a starting wage of 1,050 euros per month, the incorporation of allowances into basic pay, and the awarding of additional benefits for work that is hazardous to health.

The strike was organised by the civil servants trade union ADEDY. Public sector employees held a number of marches and demonstrations during the day of action.

UK firefighters' unofficial strike spreads

Firefighters in the UK continued to take unofficial strike action in England this week in the face of attempts by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to end the recent pay dispute.

The "work to rule" began on November 4 in Norfolk and by the following day had spread to at least 13 counties in England, plus brigades in much of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Cardiff. The firefighters have continued to answer all emergency 999 calls so as to ensure that life is not endangered during the dispute.

Earlier that day, talks between the LGA and the FBU ended.

The latest pay strikes are a byproduct of the agreement reached over a new national pay formula, following a deal struck in June after a series of official strikes spread over nine months. Under that agreement, 4 percent was paid immediately, backdated to November 2002, and a further 7 percent was due this month, to be followed by a final rise of 4.2 percent next summer. The pay formula was

implemented on the basis of changes to working practises and would eventually increase firefighters' pay to £25,000.

However, local authority employers now say they will only pay 3.5 percent this month and that the remainder will be paid next year, on condition that changes being made in the fire service are carried out to their satisfaction.

Hotel Méridien staff in Paris ends strike

Since mid-October, some 150 chambermaids, bartenders and other employees of the Paris Méridien hotel have been striking to demand a premium of 700 euros and a 5 percent wage rise for the lowest paid.

On October 24, the hotel manager tried to break the strike by utilising violent security guards, who put four strikers in hospital. Despite this intimidation, the strike continued, with workers rejecting an offer of a 300-euro premium and 2.5 percent pay rise.

On November 2, a general assembly voted to return to work, accepting the proposal by a mediator of a yearly premium of 800 euros and a 3 percent wage rise.

Temporary art workers and technicians continue protests in France

On October 30, a day of action was initiated by the CGT trade union, the "coordination of temporary workers and peccaries of Ile-de-France," the SUD trade union, an anarchist organisation and the "Movement of the Unemployed."

The protest was organised to oppose pension cuts being implemented by the Ministry of Culture. Demonstrators also demanded the charge instigated by the TF1 TV station against four protesters, because they had interrupted the "Star Academy" TV-transmission on October 18, be withdrawn. Other associations of the unemployed and of "sans papiers" (people without French passports) also joined the Paris protests.

In Nantes, 100 demonstrated, supported by an unemployed organisation. The protest included an occupation of the headquarters of the assurance scheme (Assedic), while in Rennes 100 people occupied the headquarters of the employers' organisation, Medef. A demonstration was also held in Marseille, while at Strasbourg some 40 artists and technicians prevented the presentation of a piece by Philippe Caubère.

The CGT has initiated legal proceedings against the pension reform at the Paris court, the "tribunal de grande instance."

Hunger strike by Saint-Affrique hospital workers in France ends

On October 29, five hunger strikers protesting against a cut in the number of beds at the Saint-Affrique hospital ended their action. The protesters had begun the hunger strike on October 22.

In a separate dispute, the protesters occupying the Millau viaduct ended their action following an announcement by the ARH (regional agency of hospitalisation) that it would continue to maintain the five recovery beds, and the radiology, maternity and emergency services. The representatives of the local major office had threatened to hold an

administrative strike if the “Prefect” (regional representative of the government) did not accede to their demands. The free practising doctors of the Saint-Affrique region had also threatened a strike.

Nairobi Council workers’ strike settled

More than 18,000 Nairobi Council workers took strike action on November 2 to press for payment of eight months’ salary arrears. The strikers vowed that there would be no return to work until full settlement of wage arrears.

According to *The Nation* (Nairobi), a tense meeting was held before the strike at the City Stadium of the Kenya Local Government Workers Union (KLGWU) Nairobi branch. Workers denounced Local Government minister Karisa Maitha, accusing him of fobbing them off with false promises. They demanded that the “probe committee” sent by Maitha to the City Hall should investigate the minister instead. KLGWU branch vice chairman Irungu Chege said that when he was appointed, “we thought he was our saviour, but he has turned out to be a big disappointment.”

Charity Wamboi, branch women’s representative, accused councillors of taking huge expenses for “bogus” trips while employees continued to suffer. She said the workers would forcefully eject the Mayor and his team of councillors from City Hall unless they urgently addressed the matter. “They have even gone ahead and acquired medical cover with AAR while the workers have no medical cover,” she said.

Nairobi branch secretary Kent Mukoya said the minister had made a pledge to council workers at a mass meeting in March that the arrears would be cleared within two weeks. Later, a further promise had been made to pay up by October 31, but none has been made so far.

The strike immediately affected the life of Nairobi. Water from blocked drains flooded the streets and piles of garbage were seen everywhere. At Pumwani Maternity Hospital, patients went hungry as staff joined the strike. Some hospital workers marched to the offices of the KLGWU, where they demanded to see Secretary General Bonface Mukoya, accusing the union of backtracking on resolutions passed on their dispute.

Many workers camped outside the offices of the Ministry of Local Authorities, calling for Vice-President Moody Awori to intervene in the dispute. They stopped Awori in the street and demanded that he address the dispute. They also called for the sacking of Local Government minister Karisa Maitha for corruption.

Hurried meetings were held, and a deal was struck between Awori and officials of the KLGWU. The strike was called off after it was agreed that October salaries would be paid on November 4 and the full eight months’ arrears would be paid by November 15.

However, at Kisumu, where council workers have been on strike over a similar issue, there has been no resolution. *The Nation* reported that more than 400 strikers marched into the town to protest against the delay in payment of their salaries. They camped outside the office of District Commissioner Wilfred Legei, but were told by Legei to “be patient.”

Striking Zimbabwean doctors taken to court

On November 4, the Zimbabwean Public Service Commission (PSC) issued a summons to the country’s striking doctors to appear in court on the following day to show cause why their strike should not be declared illegal. The PSC had earlier intended to take the same legal action against the doctors, but withdrew it to pursue an out-of-court settlement. The PSC and the doctors had agreed to hold negotiations over the doctors’ salaries.

Hospital Doctors Association vice president Dr. Akim Mashoko told

The Herald (Harare) that the strikers were expecting to be notified by their employer, the PSC, about a date when negotiations would take place. President Dr. Phibion Manyanga confirmed that they had been expecting negotiations with the PSC, “but now that they have issued us with summons to appear in court...we will comply with the order.”

The doctors at the country’s major referral hospitals went on strike two weeks ago in support of their demand for an 8,000 percent pay rise in response to the crippling 455.6 percent inflation rate. This would have increased their pay to 30 million Zimbabwean dollars. The strike has been supported by junior, middle-level and casualty doctors.

Nurses, who joined the strike a week ago, returned to work when the government assured them that their grievances were being looked into and promised a response within a week.

At present, patients at referral hospitals are being treated on an emergency basis only by nurses and some doctors who did not join in the strike. Last week, the government drafted doctors from the armed forces into hospitals affected by the strike.

Employers make a new offer in South African airport workers’ strike

The Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) has increased its wage offer to 8 percent in an attempt to end the strike of 1,000 airport workers. The strikers are demanding an increase of 10 percent and a minimum salary of R3,300. They include security and information personnel, fire and emergency rescue staff, trolley handlers, and maintenance staff. ACSA initially offered a 7.5 percent increase and a minimum salary of R3,225 per month.

Evan Abrahamse, spokesman for the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), said: “ACSA made a new offer of 8 percent with further compromises on other issues that the union had outlined in a memorandum of demands.

“We have already started to inform our members about the new offer and we will hear from them whether they accept it.”

In an attempt to intimidate the strikers into returning to work, police attacked a demonstration on October 29 at Cape Town International Airport. Thirty-six workers were arrested, including two pregnant women, one of whom had fainted in a police van. The company accused the strikers of contravening the National Key Points Act by holding a demonstration in an area designated as a National Key Point. The National Key Points Act was promulgated during the apartheid years in an effort to protect vital and vulnerable installations such as airports, oil refineries and power stations from attacks.

Management said strikers had been warned by the police not to demonstrate outside the agreed-upon designated area and not to engage in unlawful conduct. The arrested workers were required to appear in court on November 5.



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