

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 October 2010

Greek railway workers strike to protest break-up of state rail company

Rail workers employed by the state-owned Hellenic Railway (OSE) have been striking for four 24-hour days this week, beginning October 25. The strike also includes the suburban rail link to Athens International Airport. The workers are in protest over an infrastructure, transport and networks ministry bill on the reorganisation and development of OSE. The government plans to break up OSE, cutting 2,500 jobs, about 40 percent of its workforce.

1,000 Romanian dockers march to demand higher wages

Around 1,000 dock yard workers marched in the Black Sea town of Mangalia on October 22, to demand higher wages. The dockers had been on strike for 10 days before the march.

The demonstrations are the latest in a series of protests that have gripped Romania since the government of Prime Minister Emil Boc announced austerity measures that have raised the sales tax from 19 to 24 percent and slashed public sector wages by one quarter.

Public sector staff protest in Romania

Hundreds of public sector employees protested in areas of Romania against austerity measures. In the eastern city of Iasi, protesters briefly scuffled with police while trying to force their way into the local government building.

A protest rally was held October 27 in the capital, Bucharest, as the government narrowly survived a no-confidence vote in parliament over the austerity measures it is imposing. The same day, the IMF was visiting Romania to establish terms for a new loan agreement predicated on slashing the budget deficit from 7.2 percent to 6.8 percent this year.

Romania took a €20 billion loan from the IMF, the European Union and the World Bank last year, when its economy shrank by 7.1 percent. It is pushing through a 25 percent cut in public salaries, a 15 percent cut in pensions and a 15 percent cut in unemployment benefits.

Rosyth shipyard workers in Fife, Scotland, announce strike over pay offer

Shipyard workers at Rosyth, in Fife, are to take strike action in a dispute over pay, in rejection of a 2.5 percent pay raise offer. The strike was announced three days after the Strategic Defence Review spared the shipyard from the axe.

The Rosyth workforce voted 97 percent in favour of industrial action short of a strike, and the same number in favour of a full strike. The strike mandate runs out November 4. Workers had agreed to remain silent about the planned action until after the recent defence spending announcement. It is anticipated a walk-out will take place at the Fife yard next week, with a full strike to follow.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg visited the Babcock-owned site last week to announce that the building of two £5.2 billion aircraft carriers at Rosyth and on the Clyde will go ahead. These orders are said to secure work at the yards for the next eight years.

Strike by Oxford University Press warehouse called off

A three-day strike by almost 100 workers employed at the Saxon Way, Corby, warehouse of Oxford University Press (OUP) due to begin October 27, was called off by the Unite trade union at the last moment.

The workers are pursuing a pay deal of 4.2 percent, which may allow wages to just catch up with inflation. Last year a pay freeze was imposed on the workforce. The combined turnover of OUP in 2009 and 2010 was £500 million. Unite said the action had been suspended to allow fresh negotiations with the company.

Finnish aircraft maintenance strike ends

On October 26, the Finnish Aviation Union said that it had reached agreement on a new wage deal, ending a two-day strike by 900 air transport technical staff, which had halted aircraft maintenance. During the action, Finnish national carrier Finnair had to cancel 35 flights, and Scandinavian airline SAS's Blue1, 14 flights.

No details of the agreement were immediately available but the main disagreement hinged on the use of non-permanent personnel and wages.

Italian footballers in strike threat as contract talks break down

Contract talks between the Italian players' association and Serie A have stalled, again raising the possibility of a strike. A strike declared for

September 24-25 was avoided when the two parties reached an agreement, but the players' association has warned that if a new contract was not settled by November 30, the strike would go ahead.

AC Milan defender Massimo Oddo, who read the original strike declaration on September 10, said that the players were open to "any sort of talks, but the league has erected a wall without any desire to negotiate", describing the league as acting like a "dictatorship".

The players are still unhappy with two items on the new proposed collective contract—one clause that would prevent players from refusing transfers near the end of their contracts and another regarding out-of-contract players being kept from pre-season training.

The earliest strike action is likely is December 4 and 5, when five-time defending champions Inter Milan are scheduled to visit Rome club, Lazio.

Polish court prosecutors to strike over cuts to service

Court prosecutors in Poland are to refuse to question suspects and witnesses between November 16 and 19 in protest against what they say will be a dangerous level of under-funding next year due to government cuts.

Government cuts have left the prosecution service short of 20 million zloty (5 million euros) this year, with 80 million zloty expenditure cuts planned for 2011.

Hungarian rail workers plan to strike over job cuts

Rail Cargo Hungária workers are to take industrial action if the company's Austrian owners go ahead with plans to cut 1,500-2,000 staff within a year.

Workers of state-owned Hungarian railway company MÁV have said they are ready to take solidarity strike action. The jobs of 3,000-4,000 MÁV workers could be endangered if the proposed cuts are made at Rail Cargo Hungária.

Firefighters in London set to strike on November 5

Around 5,600 firefighters at the London Fire Brigade are set to escalate their strike action unless the London Fire Brigade withdraws the August 11 sacking letters sent to all of them. The workers are scheduled to walk off the job for 47 hours starting from 10 a.m. on November 5, which is Bonfire Night, traditionally one of the busiest nights of the year for the fire service.

Chinese workers in Saudi Arabia protest over low wages

At least 100 Chinese workers employed on a light rail project in Saudi Arabia stopped work October 12 to demand higher wages, improved housing and better working conditions. The state police arrested at least 16 of the workers after the protest began.

This week the Saudi authorities told the local newspaper *Saudi Gazette*

that the detained workers would be deported. Wang Yong, the Chinese consul general in Jeddah, said that most of the workers had already been deported and those remaining would be soon.

The workers, who were in their fourth month of an 18-month contract, were charged with "inciting the cessation of work" and are expected to pay for damages inflicted on four cars during the protest, according to Saudi media.

According to China's Commerce Ministry, the number of Chinese citizens listed officially as working overseas could reach one million before the end of the year.

Egyptian workers' protest nationwide to demand higher pay

Workers' protests took place in several cities across the country October 20 to demand that wages are kept in line with rising cost-of-living prices. Education Ministry employees staged protests in 10 cities throughout the country to demand higher pay bonuses.

Staff at state information centres continued their sit-in outside the Egyptian Trade Union Federation's Cairo headquarters. Also in Cairo, workers from Middle East Contractors demonstrated before the parliament building against the government's refusal to allow them to enrol in a housing project in the city of Helwan. The demonstrators were eventually dispersed by security personnel.

And in Ramadan City, workers from the Savola factory—who say that company management plans to close down the plant and lay them all off—staged protests for the third consecutive day.

In the Upper Egyptian city of Assiut, doctors employed by the local Al-Zhar Hospital also staged protests to demand better pay.

Nepali workers held hostage in Libya

Nearly 70 Nepali workers, working for a Libyan real estate and construction company have been held hostage in their company compound. The workers, who had been striking for the last three weeks seeking a pay increase, were locked in the compound by the company last Thursday.

Three of them managed to escape and contact a local newspaper to highlight their plight. One of them, Briddhi Limbu, told the paper that company officials had padlocked the main gate and left them without food. A similar incident took place a few months ago, when over 100 Nepali workers were taken hostage. After the intervention of the Nepali government, they were released and allowed to return to Nepal.

Botswana diamond workers return to work

Workers at the Diamond Trading Company, a joint venture between De Beers and the Botswana government have returned to work after a two-week strike. The workers took the action in pursuit of an 8 percent pay increase. The company offer was 6 percent.

The union representing the workers suspended the strike but will continue talks with management and said it may resume industrial action if the dispute is not resolved.

South African Pick n Pay workers set to strike

Around 27,000 workers employed by Pick n Pay, South Africa's second largest grocery chain are set to begin strike action October 29. They are members of the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU). The union intends to picket all stores nationwide, and the Johannesburg region will hold a march Thursday in Vosloorus where a new store is due to open.

The union is seeking a pay increase, a 10 percent discount on basic food for staff and a guarantee of 120 hours work a month for workers on variable hours. Employees took action at the end of last month in pursuit of their demands.

Kenyan tea workers continue strike action

The 80,000 tea plantation workers in the Rift Valley province who have been on strike since October 18 are continuing their action over the introduction of tea plucking machinery. The workers fear the machinery will threaten their jobs.

Nigerian oil workers set to strike

Workers belonging to the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) in the Lagos zone, working for Chevron Nigeria Limited, were due to start strike action October 26.

The strike action was called following the sacking of NUPENG officials working for LFA. LFA was under contract to Chevron. The Lagos zone union chairman, Tokunbo Korodo, said the action will continue until the sacked workers were reinstated.

Nigerian university unions in joint action

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, the Non-Academic Staff Union and the National Association of Academic Technologists working in university institutions in the south-eastern and south-western states began a week's strike action on Sunday.

The action is over the state governments' refusal to implement an agreement to increase education funding and address the poor state of infrastructure.

Academics belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Universities in the south-eastern states have been on strike for three months over the same issue.

The unions said the strike would be indefinite if the state governments do not address their concerns.

Mozambique food processing workers strike

Food processing workers at CIM began strike action Monday over a wage demand. Management increased the minimum wage several months

ago from \$US70 a month to \$US90 a month. They also said they would make payment in kind by offering food parcels.

The workers rejected this and a meeting was scheduled last Saturday between management and the CIM trade unions. However management did not turn up, and the workers decided on the strike action.

Mozambique construction workers strike

Around 6,500 construction workers, working on the infrastructure of an open cast mine in the western province of Tete began strike action last week.

The work is nearly completed and the project is now being wound down, resulting in staff being laid off. The workers are striking over lack of information on redundancy pay and say that some workers made redundant earlier had received larger payouts than those made redundant recently.



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