

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

5 November 2010

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

Tube workers, firefighters strike in London

London Underground (LU) staff and firefighters have taken industrial action in London this week.

On Tuesday LU staff held a third strike in an ongoing dispute to protest 800 job losses among station managers and ticket office staff. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA). During the action, maintenance employees walked off the job at 7 p.m. local time with other workers joining them at 9 p.m.

Some 11,000 workers participated in the action. LU staff are set to strike for the fourth time in the dispute on November 29.

On Monday, 5,600 London firefighters staged a second strike against the London Fire Brigade, which is imposing new cost-cutting rosters and threatening to sack those who refuse. The workers are members of the Fire Brigades Union.

During the day firefighters at several stations opposed a state-organised scabbing operation, organised by Asset Co., a private company that through a Private Finance Initiative runs all the emergency vehicles.

The workers are set to stage a further strike on Friday, November 5, which is Bonfire Night, traditionally one of the busiest days of the year for firefighters throughout the UK.

BBC journalists to strike for 48 hours in dispute over pensions

BBC journalists in London are to strike for 48 hours on Friday to protest attacks on their pension rights by the state funded broadcaster. This action will coincide with a one-day strike to be held by firefighters.

The members of the National Union of Journalists, the second-largest BBC union with around 4,000 members, began their dispute when the BBC announced plans earlier this year to cap pensionable pay at 1 percent from April 2011 and revalue pensions at a lower level.

On October 28 about 70 percent of NUJ members voted to reject what Director General Mark Thompson said was the "final offer" on changes to the BBC's final salary pension scheme. The other trade unions at the BBC, Bectu, the Musicians' Union, Equity and Unite, have all voted to accept the revised offer.

A further 48-hour stoppage is scheduled to go ahead on November 15.

White collar staff strike at Finnish paper manufacturers

Some 3,000 white-collar staff at paper manufacturers across Finland ended a four-day stoppage on November 2. The workers are in dispute with the Finnish Forest Industries Federations over pay and compensation payments made to staff on business travel outside normal business hours.

Staff previously held a one-day strike on October 22. The workers are members of the Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff (YTN). According to Päivi Kauhanen, director of communications at paper producer Stora Enso, the strike "has not had any effect on production in any mills".

Finnish mail sorting and delivery staff strike

Mail sorting and delivery workers in Finland employed by Posti (part of the Itella group) began industrial action on October 29. The strike was held following the October 15 expiry of a collective labour agreement for the communication and logistics sector.

The strike led to the delay of mail nationwide including first class letters, some magazines, newspapers, free sheets and 2nd class deliveries and advertisements. Workers struck at sites including the main Helsinki post centre and in the city of Kuopio.

Management at Itella claimed the strike was illegal, "since no advance notice of this action has been given."

Further delays in mail delivery occurred due to an overtime and extra work ban involving members of the Finnish Post and Logistics Union (PAU).

Unions said that if the action was not resolved further local action would be taken in Turku, Raisio, Kaarina before spreading to other towns and the regions of Uusimaa and Päijät-Häme.

German railway workers strike to demand pay increase

Railway workers struck in western and southern Germany on October 26 to demand a pay increase from national rail operator Deutsche Bahn and private companies. According to unions, some private rail firms pay up to 20 percent less for the same work. The industrial action affected rail services in North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, Saxony-Anhalt and Lower Saxony.

In 2009 rail workers received a 4.5 percent pay increase following a series of stoppages.

Luxembourg doctors prepare to strike over health reform

Doctors in Luxembourg have voted to strike at the end of November. The doctors are members of the AAMD medical workers union. They are set to strike to protest reforms of the health system by the government of Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker.

The government plans to end the current system whereby patients are able to choose which doctor to visit. Under the new legislation pharmacists will also be able prescribe different treatments and drugs than those prescribed by a doctor.

Lecturers at the University of Dundee vote to strike

Lecturers at the University of Dundee in Scotland voted for strike action last week to protest 195 possible job losses. The university is seeking to impose the redundancies in order to tackle its growing budget deficit.

The lecturers are members of the Universities and College Union (UCU). The UCU is on record that it not opposed to redundancies, provided they are “voluntary” as opposed to compulsory. On this basis it has negotiated away the jobs of thousands of university and college staff nationally, in collaboration with management over the past several years.

Mozambique food processing workers suspend strike action

Food processing workers at CIM returned to work after three days of strike action.

The workers were seeking an improved minimum wage of around \$US110 a month, up from the current US\$90 a month, and for overtime to be paid. They returned to work on the basis that management would continue negotiations over their claim with the CIM trade union committee.

Speaking to the press the union secretary, Claudio Muianga, said the trade union committee was awaiting an invitation from management to begin negotiations, but that if no agreement was reached on the pay claim, the strike would be resumed.

Kenyan tea plantation workers harassed by management

Francis Atwoli, of Kenya’s Central Organization of Trade Unions, has accused tea plantation companies of harassing strikers by closing off roads and restricting workers trying to travel to urban centres.

The plantation workers live on the estates, but need to travel to urban centres to visit doctors, and acquire other basic necessities. The workers at the James Finlays, George Williamson and Unilever tea companies are striking in protest at the introduction of tea plucking machinery they fear threatens their jobs. The action has entered its third week.

Kenyan postal workers set to strike

Postal workers, members of the Communications Workers Union at the Postal Corporation of Kenya, have given notice of strike action to commence November 10.

They are seeking a 50 percent pay increase and the resignation of members of the management team, who they say have been frustrating negotiating talks.

Zimbabwe revenue authority workers on go-slow

Last week around 2,500 workers at the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority began a go-slow in support of a pay claim. The workers currently earn around US\$300 a month—well under the official poverty level of US\$545 a month. They are seeking a 29 percent increase, which was awarded by the Labour Court that the revenue service is refusing to honour.

The workers are forbidden by law to take strike action because they are deemed to be a strategic industry. However, the go-slow action is having a pronounced impact at Zimbabwe’s busiest port of entry, Beitbridge. It is taking several hours for a handful of vehicles to be processed.

Namibian shop workers set to strike

Workers working for Shoprite/Checkers stores throughout Namibia are threatening strike action in pursuit of a wage claim. The members of the Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) are seeking a N\$500 (US\$70) across-the-board increase, an increase of N\$12 (US\$1.70) an hour for permanent part-time cashiers and N\$10 (US\$1.45) an hour for till packers. The company has offered a 10 percent across-the-board increase. They are also seeking housing and travel allowances.

NAFAU has been unable to reach an agreement with Shoprite. Some Shoprite workers are represented by the Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union, which accepted the across-the-board increase.

Sudan civil servants strike

Sudanese civil servants working for the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Supply in Southern Sudan took strike action Monday, November 1 over unpaid housing allowances. The unpaid allowances date back a year and amount to around US \$1 million.

At one point the protesting strikers were confronted by riot police, but left after intervention by union officials.

Solidarity action by Nigerian medical staff

Doctors working in federal health institutions in Lagos state were due to begin three-day strike action November 3. The strike was called by the Nigeria Medical Association. It was called in support of the around 400 doctors belonging to the Medical Guild who have been on strike since August.

The doctors belonging to the Medical Guild, working in state hospitals, have taken their prolonged strike action to get the Lagos state government

to implement the federally-agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Scale (COMESS), which around a third of Nigerian states have implemented.



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