

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 September 2011

## German doctors strike over pay and conditions

Hundreds of doctors at university medical clinics in Germany staged a series of two-hour strikes on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, in a long-running dispute over pay and conditions.

Their three main demands are for a five percent increase in wages, a modern pay structure and better pay for night shifts.

Another concern is the growing number of positions at the university clinics left unoccupied as qualified doctors seek better options elsewhere. According to *The Local*, in a 2010 union member survey, 19 percent of physicians reported four or more vacancies in their departments, and 53 percent of respondents said they were considering leaving the university hospitals.

Doctors at the German Heart Centre Munich and the Hannover Medical University also stopped work for two hours Monday in support of the doctors' demands.

Göttingen's University Hospital doctors also went on strike for two hours in the afternoon, while other university clinics in Tübingen, Jena and Düsseldorf planned strikes later in the week.

The dispute potentially affects 20,000 doctors at 23 university clinics.

## French teachers protest job, budget cuts

Up to 160,000 striking teachers protested in cities across France against the latest job and budget cuts. The teachers were from both the public and private sectors.

In Paris an estimated 45,000 teachers took to the streets. The SNES-FSU National Trade Union for Secondary Education says that High schools and pre-university schools are taking in 79,536 new students this year, as 4,800 teachers will be fired.

A further 16,000 jobs are planned to be cut during the 2011-2012 academic year.

A total of 50,000 posts have been cut since 2007.

The French government is eager to utilise the global economic crisis to lower public spending; with 2011 deficit target set at 5.7 percent of GDP and then 3 percent in 2013.

## Workers at French oil refineries debate possible strikes over restructuring

Employees at eight of France's 10 operating refineries held meetings this week to discuss taking industrial action after the decision by commodity chemicals maker LyondellBasell to shut its Berre L'Etang refinery after failing to find a buyer, according to Reuters.

Meanwhile, workers at Total's 230,000 barrels-per-day Donges refinery voted to reduce production to a minimum level for 24 hours, a union representative told Reuters. Total operates five refineries in France.

On October 10, Total is to unveil a restructuring plan to merge its refining and chemical businesses, prompting fresh job concerns among workers.

## Thousands strike against austerity in Greece

Thousands of drivers employed on the Greek public transport system walked off the job Wednesday in protest at government austerity measures. The industrial action created major traffic disruption in Athens for a third day.

The Associated Press reported: "Bus, train, metro, trolley-bus, tram and suburban railway workers called a 24-hour strike in opposition to government plans to place employees in a reserve labour pool at 60 percent of their salary for a year, after which they would be dismissed if no other suitable jobs were found for them in the public sector."

Athens also saw a 48-hour strike by taxi owners Wednesday protesting against changes to the sector.

Meanwhile, tax-office employees, customs officials and Finance Ministry employees conducted a 48-hour strike. Doctors and nurses are also taking strike action.

At the behest of its international creditors, the Greek government last week announced implementation of fresh pension cuts, levying of new taxes for low-income earners and transferring 30,000 public workers to a "labour reserve" force, on pay cuts of 40 percent. Further cuts in wages and spending are planned.

The European Union, the International Monetary Fund and international creditors are demanding additional austerity measures be forced on the Greek population before they release €8 billion (\$10.87 billion) in aid. If Greece does not receive the next installment within the next few weeks, the government will run out of money.

## Pay protests by construction workers at UK, North Lincolnshire oil refineries

Around 200 construction workers at two North Lincolnshire oil refineries, run by Total and Conoco, took part in the protests Monday over

pay cuts. The trade union claims construction companies plan to dismiss staff and re-employ them on new contracts with lower wages, reported the BBC.

“Workers are angered by plans by Balfour Beatty and other construction companies to regrade staff in the mechanical and electrical sector.”

The Unite union said the eight companies, which have construction contracts with the two refineries, plan to dismiss employees before re-engaging them on new contracts, meaning a drop in income by up to a third for some workers.

#### **Staff strike over pay at Stow College in Glasgow, Scotland**

Around 90 support staff at Stow College in Glasgow, Scotland took strike action Wednesday to demand a pay increase of £7.20 an hour. According to the Unison trade union, its members did not receive an expected pay rise in August.

Dozens of staff manned a picket line at the main campus in Glasgow. The strike also closed Glasgow College’s Food on 5, Cafe Connect and the Stow West Refectory.

A union official told the BBC, “The SNP [Scottish National Party] government promised to protect the lowest-paid workers from the worst aspects of the recession, yet Stow College refuses to introduce the living wage for our members—many of who are low-paid women workers—and on top of this, we are now facing a real-term pay cut.”

#### **Rail metro staff in Newcastle, England in pension dispute strike ballot**

Rail workers in Newcastle, England are to be balloted over whether to come out on strike in support of the public sector pension dispute.

The government plans to raise employees’ pension contributions by 3.2 percent, while hiking up the retirement age.

The Trades Union Congress has called a “Day of Action” for November 30. The Rail Maritime and Transport union said workers on the Tyne and Wear Metro in Newcastle will vote on whether to take industrial action.

#### **Egyptian transport workers hold protests outside government cabinet building**

On Wednesday transport workers in Cairo entered the 11<sup>th</sup> day of strike action, as hundreds of public transport workers gathered Wednesday outside the military government’s cabinet building in Cairo. This was the fourth successive day the strikers had mobilised outside the building.

The workers are demanding a 200 percent increase in their basic monthly salary in order to allow them to reach a LE700 (\$117) per month minimum wage. They are also calling for a guaranteed 100-months-salary retirement bonus for employees, upgrading the decaying bus fleet and new work uniforms, according to Ahram Online.

The previous day the strikers rejected an agreement between the Independent Union of Transport Workers and Ministry of Manpower Ahmed Hassan El-Borai. The union represents 45,000 bus drivers, ticket collectors and mechanics. Most of the capitals bus depots also rejected the agreement according to workers who spoke to Ahram Online.

#### **Doctors in Alexandria, Egypt continue strike for improved salaries and security**

*Al Masry Al Youm* reported September 27 that doctors in Alexandria, Egypt continued their strike for the second consecutive week, in demand of better salaries and security personnel to protect hospitals.

On September 13, doctors announced they were starting a nationwide, open-ended strike. It now involves nearly 75 percent of Alexandria’s hospitals have joined the strike, except for emergency departments, intensive care units, and some hospital receptions.

The doctors also demand an improved health service and the dismissal of corrupt officials from the Health Ministry.

#### **Workers’ protests continue in Egyptian capital and other governorates**

Workers’ protests demanding better wages and bonuses have continued in Cairo and other governorates. *Al Masry Al Youm* reported September 27 on the “Veterinarians of Animal Health Labs, who are working with temporary contracts, demanded permanent appointments. Temporary employees at Tamya Hospital in Fayoum protested for the same purpose.

Residents of the Ebni Beitak public housing project in Six October City also staged protests, complaining that the government has not completed the infrastructure of the project.”

Staff at the Public Services Authority also staged protests to demand their salaries which were last disbursed in January.

In Daqahlia, temporary teachers demanded permanent positions at the public schools, and temporary employees at Sharqiya governor’s office demanded the same. Workers at the irrigation project in Beheira staged protests to demand better wages and bonuses, it reported.

#### **Staff at Kuwaiti private oil firms, ministry stage sit-in**

Staff at private oil companies and the Ministry of Oil staged a sit-in Wednesday in front of the ministry’s headquarters to demand equal privileges with their counterparts in Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries, reported the *Arab Times*.

According to Chairman of the Union of Private Oil Sector Workers Salem Al-Ajmi, the lives of about 5,000 workers in private oil companies are in danger, but they do not receive any compensation.

“Al-Ajmi also unveiled plans to hold massive protest actions in the coming days if their demands are not met. He said the workers in Ahmadi and Al-Khafji, as well as those in the drilling and production sites, will participate in the demonstrations,” said the *Arab Times*.

#### **Commerce ministry, stock market employees strike to demand Kuwait salary increases**

Commerce and Industry Ministry employees went on strike Tuesday at the Ministries Complex to demand the approval of their salary increment,

wrote the *Arab Times*.

"The protesters expressed their resentment towards the concerned government authorities for ignoring their demand for many years," said the paper.

The *Arab Times* also reported on plans by the Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) employees "to hold a protest action from 8:00 to 10:00am on Wednesday. Sources disclosed the workers decided to start the protest at 8:00am to make the act symbolic since it coincides with the beginning of the official work hours, while the next hour is crucial because most transactions commence at 9:00am.

"Sources added the workers decided to stage a strike in protest of an official letter addressed to an undisclosed government department, because it did not specify the date for the payment of the salary increment for the KSE employees in line with Article 157 of the Stock Market Authority Law."

### **Zimbabwe rail workers strike**

Workers employed by the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) went on strike September 27 in protest of unpaid wages; they have yet to receive their August wages. They are also protesting unpaid allowances dating back to 2009.

NRZ employs around 9,000 workers and the nationwide strike brought passenger and freight movement to a halt. This included the famous Victoria Falls to Bulawayo train, when crew on the train, hearing of the strike call, joined the action.

NRZ workers are represented by four unions, the Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railway Workers' Union, Railway Association of Yard Operating Staff, Zimbabwe Railways Artisans Union and Railway Association of Enginemen.

Hundreds of striking railway workers rallied at a sports stadium in Bulawayo to be addressed by union leaders. The unions had given NRZ notice of strike action if their demands were not met. As a result of the strike Ministry of Labour officials set up talks with NRZ and the unions.

### **Namibia uranium miners strike goes ahead**

Over 800 miners working for Rio Tinto at their Rossing uranium mine near Arandis, Namibia began a strike Monday. The miners, members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN), are seeking an additional N\$30,000 (US\$3,900) on top of the current bonus payment of N\$11,000 (US\$1,400) to bring them in line with bonuses paid to management.

Management had offered an upfront payment of N\$15,200 (US\$1,900) with a further N\$2,100 (US\$260) to N\$5,150 (US\$650) conditional on meeting productivity targets. The union has accused management of using foremen and temporary workers to attempt to keep production going.

Rossing management was due to go to the Labour court in Windhoek, Wednesday to seek an injunction to force the miners back to work.

### **Namibian Tourist Board workers strike**

Around 25 workers, members of the Namibia Public Workers Union, working for the Namibia Tourist Board (NTB), went on strike at the end of last week following the breakdown of pay negotiations.

The workers original demand was for a 15 percent rise, currently their demand is for a 10 percent increase. The NTB originally offered just over 4 per cent before upping it to 8.5 per cent.

### **South African health laboratory staff strike**

Around 2000, health laboratory staff, members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union began a nationwide strike on Monday. They are seeking a 9 percent pay rise and a R2, 300 (\$290) medical aid allowance. The employer has offered a 6.5 percent pay increase.

The health lab workers are responsible for carrying out routine medical sampling. Union spokesman, Sizwe Pamla, wanted Ministry of Health officials to intervene. He also indicated other unions may join the strike.

### **Staff at Ibadan university, Nigeria strike**

Staff belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Universities at Ibadan University began a warning strike action on Monday. The action led to the disruption of exams currently due to be taken. They are striking over poor working conditions and the union vowed further strike action if their demands were not met.

Staff belonging to the Non Academic Staff Union and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities at the same university may also strike next Monday.



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