

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 November 2011

School headteachers in England and Wales vote for action over pensions

Thousands of head teachers in England and Wales have voted in favour of industrial action over changes to pensions.

It is possible the head teachers could now join other public sector workers on strike on November 30.

Around 24,000 members of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) were balloted and turnout was 53.6 percent, with 75.8 percent in favour of industrial action.

It is the first time the NAHT has witnessed a vote in favour of a strike by its members in its 114-year history.

Russell Hobby, general secretary of the NAHT, made it known, however, that while head teachers had voted to strike, the union hoped to avoid calling industrial action.

“In many ways this is an unhappy milestone,” said Hobby. “We welcome the government’s recent concessions as marking, finally, the start of genuine negotiations. It is sad that it has taken this long, but it is a start.

“We would like to avoid action if at all possible and will be negotiating intensely and in good faith in the run up to the 30th”, he said.

A strike NAHT by head teachers would result in widespread disruption, as they hold leadership positions in most special schools, 85 percent of primary schools and more than 40 percent of secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Teachers and support staff also support strike action.

Teachers oppose planned government changes to the teachers’ pension scheme (TPS), which will mean teachers working longer, paying more and receiving less when they retire.

The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) is currently balloting over 230,000 members across the UK for possible industrial action. The results will be released November 18.

German steelworkers threaten strike in pay struggle

Steelworkers have threatened a strike at companies across Germany over pay.

IG Metall is in “collective bargaining talks for steel-sector

workers in the German regional states of NRW, Lower Saxony and Bremen at about 60 companies including ThyssenKrupp, Salzgitter and ArcelorMittal,” reported *Reuters* last week.

Egyptian employees on Israel’s El Al Airlines protest austerity plan at Cairo airport

Staff employed by Israel-based El Al Airlines office at Cairo International Airport protested November 3 against an austerity plan they say will bring layoffs and salary cuts, reported *Al Masry Al Youm* last week.

The two dozen employees staged a sit-in in the airport’s departure hall and refused to carry out boarding procedures for passengers of flight number 444 to Tel Aviv.

The airline workers say “the company is seeking to downsize its staff in Cairo within the framework of an austerity plan to cope with financial losses,” according to an official source at the airport.

According to *Al Masry Al Youm*, “The source said the head of the company’s office in Cairo convinced the employees to return to work, promising to resolve their problems. The staff then completed boarding procedures for the 34 passengers and the flight took off 15 minutes late.”

Israeli general strike limited to four hours by court and complicity of union federation

On November 7, *Reuters* reported that the Histadrut Labour Federation had ended a brief strike that day following a labour court injunction that limited the action over the status of contract workers to just four hours.

The strike concerned the provision of full benefits to 250,000 contract workers, including cleaners and security guards, who have worse terms than staff directly on government payrolls.

Histadrut had publically threatened to shut down Israel’s airports, ports, banks and the stock market indefinitely, but instead accepted the court decision and limited the strike to Monday morning.

Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv was closed for two hours and about a dozen flights were delayed or cancelled, with operations soon returning to normal.

Banks and local and national government offices were shut briefly and the railway and buses halted.

The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange started trading about an hour late and stayed open an extra half hour.

Mozambique sugar workers return to work

A strike by 700 workers at the Xinavane sugar factory, 90 kilometers north of Maputo, ended on Saturday after five days.

The workers had gone on strike after the company failed to implement an agreed wage increase in October. They were also protesting the non-payment of overtime and disparities in pay of workers in the same section.

The workers agreed to end the strike after management agreed to pay a bonus to each worker. However, the settlement did not address most of the workers' grievances. Speaking to the press, workers said they did not trust their union, the Sugar Workers Union, saying it did not act in their interests.

Mozambique road workers strike

Workers at the central division of the state-owned Roads and Bridges Construction and Maintenance Company (ECMEP-Centro) in Sofata province went on strike on Friday. They are demanding the payment of 13 months wages arrears.

ECMEP is owned by the institute responsible for selling state assets. ECMEP is effectively bankrupt and has been slated for privatization, but has had no takers.

The workers say the non-payment of wages has driven them into debt, poverty and even family breakup. They appealed to the prime minister to address their grievance, but warned that if he did not they would begin blockading roads.

Kenya: University staff begins strike

A nationwide strike by 7,000 lecturers began on Wednesday. They went ahead with the walkout, ignoring a temporary order issued by the Industrial Court blocking the strike. Around 170,000 students will be affected by the job action.

Lecturers are striking after the government failed, over a two-year period, to implement part of the 2010/2012 collective bargaining agreement, which had included a pay increase of around 35 percent. Last-minute talks with the higher education minister, Margaret Kamar, on Tuesday failed to prevent the strike.

Ghana pharmacists call off strike after one day

A nationwide strike by government pharmacists ended after one day when the National Labour Commission intervened. Pharmacists had begun an indefinite nationwide strike November 7 over pay. The pharmacists are members of the Government and Hospital Pharmacists Association (GHOSPA).

The National Labour Commission acted quickly to stop the strike, instructing the Wages and Salaries Commission to meet with GHOSPA for compulsory arbitration. The GHOSPA chairman, Steven Corquaye, readily agreed to the arbitration. The government was determined to act quickly following a dispute with striking medical staff last month.

Sudanese hospital workers strike

Nurses, assistant pharmacists and janitors at Nyala teaching hospital in South Darfur went on strike last Saturday. They were protesting non-payment of arrears going back eight years.

After the workers' appeal to the hospital administrators was ignored, they appealed to the state governor. However, the governor said he could only address one year's arrears as he had only been in power for one year.

Nigerian fuel workers strike

Workers in the Petroleum and National Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) and the National Unions of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) employed by MRS plc. (formerly Texaco) began an indefinite strike at the end of last week.

They took the action in support of workers who had been laid off by the company. The action will affect supplies to MRS filling stations.



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