

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 December 2011

Two French McCain plants hit by pay strike

Workers at two of the three McCain frozen food plants in the country are on strike over a 10 percent pay rise.

Staff at the Matouges plant struck on November 27 and the plant in Harnes, which employs 500, saw industrial action from December 4, a union source told food industry web site *just-food.com*.

Management claims the workers' pay demand is "unrealistic in the current economic climate," offering less than 2.7 percent, including bonuses. During the weekend, an official said the plant had partially returned to production thanks to scab labour.

UK workers at Unilever strike over pensions

"Unilever workers fighting an unjustified attack on their pensions will take part in their first ever strike action on Friday 9 December," reported the web site of the union Unite on December 7.

Unilever plans to axe the final salary pension scheme, which will see the retirement income of thousands of staff cut by up to 40 percent. The corporation initially pledged to secure the scheme for its existing members when it closed the final salary pension scheme to new entrants in 2008, but intends to push ahead with plans to close the scheme to its existing members and transfer them to an inferior career average re-valued earning (CARE) scheme with effect from July 2012.

Over 2,500 workers from Unilever's sites at Purfleet, Port Sunlight, Warrington, Leeds, Crumlin, Gloucester, Manchester, Burton-on-Trent and Chester are to join picket lines "as part of a widespread day of action to protect their pensions."

The stoppages are expected to affect production of Unilever's leading brands, including Dove, Marmite, PG Tips, Pot Noodle and Hellman's Mayonnaise.

December protest by Italian workers against austerity measures

Reuters reported December 7, "Italy's three main unions CGIL, CISL, and UIL plan to strike together for three hours on Dec. 12 to protest against the government's 30 billion euro austerity measures, they said in a statement on Wednesday."

The three union heads have asked to meet Prime Minister Mario Monti and political parties to discuss "amendments" to the austerity package.

Czech teachers strike over pay

Around 1,620 schools out of the Czech Republic's 10,000 were closed December 7 due to a teachers' strike against planned pay system changes.

The strike was strongest in Moravia, while in the capital Prague only 40 schools were shut. *Noviny* reported that around "25,000 teachers joined the strike, which is about one-quarter of all teachers in kindergartens and elementary, secondary and special schools."

A draft directive is being considered by government, under which teachers' pay will not depend on the number of years served but will be set by a head teacher.

Many older teachers fear their monthly pay may drop to 20,000 crowns (\$1,060), which is the wage of a newly qualified teacher.

Bulgarian metalworkers protest cuts

The web site of the International Metalworkers' Federation said December 2, "Unions in Bulgaria organized a nationwide protest action on November 30 in response to the government's announced austerity measures. The Government later backed down from pensions cuts."

According to the report, up to 35,000 gathered to protest against announced austerity measures: "They were joined by colleagues from FSLI-Metal and Solidaritatea Metal of Romania, as well as from VASAS in Hungary.

"The Government had proposed to increase the retirement age with an additional year from the beginning of 2012, breaking an agreement on pension reform reached less than a year ago."

Bulgarian rail workers strike in third week

A strike by rail workers on the Bulgarian State Railways (BDZ), against the laying off of around 2,000 workers, entered its third week on December 7.

The action began November 24.

According to BDZ, on November 26 about 181 out of 263 trains were halted due to the strike. Bulgarian news agency BTA reported that not a single train left the Central Station in Sofia, Pernik, the Mezdra and Gorna Oryahovitsa junctions.

BDZ CEO Yordan Nedev threatened that the strike would bankrupt the company and BDZ board chairman Vladimir Vladimirov said that management may more than double the intended layoffs to 5,000.

Union leaders now say they will negotiate only in the presence of

Transport Minister Ivaylo Moskovski, who has pointed out he stands firm behind the BDZ management.

Last week, BDZ Freight Transport and BDZ Passenger Transport filed a court claim to declare the strike illegal.

Portuguese airline pilots to strike over privatization

Pilots at TAP Air Portugal are to go ahead with an eight-day strike over the holiday period, after talks with the state-owned company broke down, Associated Press reported December 7.

The Civil Aviation Pilots' Union called the walkout for December 9-12 and January 3-6.

According to AP, "The union wants a say in the airline's privatization, slated for next year, and the full implementation of a previously agreed labour deal."

The planned privatization of the national airline is part of government revenue-raising measures prompted by a €78 billion (\$1.3 billion) package provided by the European Union and the IMF.

TAP Air Portugal has said that around 100,000 passengers have reservations for the first four-day strike period. TAP operates an average of 180 flights a day, to Europe, Asia, and North and South America.

The airline said it expected pilots from sister airline Portugalia to operate about half of the daily flights.

TAP's profits last year of €62 million (\$83 million) were up almost 9 percent from 2009 as passenger numbers rose more than 7 percent to just over 9 million.

Bahraini workers protest to demand jobs back

Some 70 sacked workers gathered outside the Labour Ministry in Isa Town November 30 demanding their "immediate reinstatement," according to a report in the *Gulf Daily News*.

One protestor, Yousuf Hussain, was quoted by the paper as saying, "We will continue to stage our weekly protest outside the ministry until some decisions are taken by authorities to reinstate hundreds of Bahrainis."

The workers lost their jobs for allegedly taking part in illegal protests during the uprisings that swept the region earlier this year.

The protesters included sacked workers from Asry, Gulf Air, Banagas, Batelco and government ministries.

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) registered more than 2,000 cases of workers sacked since February.

Ugandan doctors strike

Doctors working at Uganda's main psychiatric hospital at Butabika went on strike Monday over non-payment of salaries and allowances. They are owed two months' salary and allowance payments.

Hospital Director Dr. Fred Kigozi, blamed the non-payment on changes made to the public service ministry payment system, which he said had deleted some names from the payroll.

Zimbabwe diamond miners strike

Over 600 miners working for the Chinese-owned Anjin Investments diamond mining company have gone on strike.

The strike began on Saturday in support of demands for a US\$600 per month wage. Currently some earn only US\$180 a month. All sections of the operation are affected, including mining, prospecting, power and equipment.

The company does not allow its workers to join a union.

The company has recently been given permission to sell 2 million carats of diamonds under the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, from its controversial Marange field in Eastern Zimbabwe.

Nigerian power workers protest attacks by military

Workers at the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) in Abia went on strike Monday, after being attacked by soldiers while distributing bills. They are demanding security measures to prevent future attacks.

Nigerian lecturers embark on nationwide strike

University staff in the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) began an indefinite nationwide strike on Monday. They are demanding the government adhere to the terms of an agreement over levels of funding, made between the union and the federal government in 2009.

Various reports from around the country showed the effectiveness of the strike. Lectures and other activities were suspended at Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University in Katsina.

At Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in Bauchi, the local ASSU acting chairman, Mala Garba, explained all lectures had stopped as well as the student registration process. No teaching was taking place at Rivers State University of Science and Technology in Port Harcourt. It was a similar picture in universities in Ondo, Ekiti, Benue and Kano.

Garba explained that under UNESCO guidelines spending on education should be around a quarter of the national income, but is currently a single-figure percentage.

Kenya: Airport workers seek pay increase

Workers at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport went on strike at the end of last week, demanding a pay increase. Around 700 workers dealing with cargo and passenger luggage, employed by Swissport Kenya, took part. The company provides airport services to British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, South African Airways and another 20 airlines.

Kenyan doctors in nationwide strike

Around 2,300 doctors across Kenya, members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), began all-out

strike on Monday.

The doctors say they are the worst paid in Africa and are seeking a 300 percent increase. They also want the government to address the poor state of the country's health infrastructure.

The doctors were due to be joined in their action by around 30,000 staff such as nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians belonging to the Kenya Health Professional Society (KPHS). However, the union agreed on a settlement.

A medical services assistant minister, Kambi Kazungu, stated that the government was unable to meet the doctors' demands as all resources had been channelled into Kenya's military intervention into Somalia.

South Africa: Metro security staff strike

Security staff on Cape Town Metro railway stations and lines came out on strike last Tuesday. They are employed by a separate company and were responding to rumours that Metrorail were to start employing their own staff.



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