

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 October 2012

Italian public sector workers march against austerity

Around 30,000 mainly public sector workers marched through Rome last Friday September 28 to protest against cuts in public spending imposed by the government of Prime Minister Mario Monti. The march coincided with a second day of industrial unrest at the ILVA steel plant in south of the country. Staff at the Colosseum and the Roman Forum walked out, closing two of the city's major tourist attractions.

University professors, public administration staff, refuse collectors and health workers also stopped work in support of the march. Wages have been frozen for more than two years in the public sector, and cuts have been made to state healthcare funding. The government passed spending cuts in August that included a further downsizing of the public sector.

Strike at Aer Lingus, Ireland averted by union

Industrial action threatened at Ireland's airports was postponed last Friday, September 28 ahead of talks at the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) between the union and management.

The union accepted an invitation to talks with Aer Lingus and the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) under the LRC over the joint pension scheme deficit.

Two-hour stoppages had originally been proposed at Aer Lingus and the DAA that could have closed Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports.

Journalists in York, England take action

Journalists working for Newsquest in York will be taking industrial action today following the refusal of management to pay them an increase this year.

The journalists have not had a pay rise in three of the past four years.

Latest figures for 2011 for Newsquest (Yorkshire & North East) Ltd. revealed a pre-tax profit of £1.87 million. The company also made a substantial saving after it scrapped the final salary scheme.

Egyptian doctors in partial strike

Doctors began a partial strike Monday, boycotting non-emergency services in public hospitals to protest run-down facilities and low wages.

Hospital overcrowding means sick patients are forced to sleep on the floor. Families are forced to bring in their relatives' basic necessities, such as blood bags and painkillers.

Doctors working in public hospitals receive a base salary of around only \$46 per month, and most have to work another job in private hospitals or clinics to make ends meet.

Public health receives 4.8 percent of the state budget. But of this, doctors say around 30 percent goes to pay for sewage systems and another 30 percent for Health Ministry administrators' salaries. The small funds that do trickle down to hospitals are often used to renovate buildings, rather than pay for supplies, equipment or salaries.

Over 70 percent of the country's 520 public hospitals took part in the strike. There are 50,000 registered doctors operating in Egypt, according to the latest government figures available in 2006.

South Africa: striking Dunlop workers sacked

Around 240 workers at Dunlop Howick factory, in the heart of Kwa Zulu Natal, were dismissed at the end of last week.

The factory produces conveyor belts and other industrial rubber products. Members of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) had been on strike since

August 22 in pursuit of a pay increase. Initially demanding a 10 percent rise, they subsequently asked for 6.5 percent. The company offered 5.7 percent.

Last week private security guards employed by the company shot at the strikers with rubber bullets, with 14 admitted to hospital.

NUMSA has responded by calling on the company to return to the negotiating table to settle the dispute, adding it would consult its lawyers with a view to getting the dismissed workers re-instated.

South African business leader expresses fears over transport strike

The strike by truck drivers represented by the SA Transport and Allied Workers' Union, the Professional Transport and Allied Workers' Union SA, the Transport and Allied Workers' Union of SA and the Motor Transport Workers' Union which began last week is beginning to bite.

The CEO of Business Unity SA, Nomaxabiso Majokweni, appealed to all involved to find a resolution. Addressing his remarks to the unions, he called "upon all concerned to speak with their members as industrial peace is best achieved within a framework of clear rights and obligations... We cannot afford another Marikana."

South African chrome miners underground sit in and strike

Around 400 miners at the Samancor Chrome mine in the Rustenburg area began an underground sit in at the mine last week. They are demanding a R12,500 (\$1,480) a month salary and improved housing and underground allowances.

After ending their sit in protest they came out on strike on Monday. They want nothing to do with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and have elected a committee of strikers to represent them.

The company has refused to recognise the committee and issued a statement saying it "is currently engaging with its recognised unions in order to resolve the situation."

The NUM dismissed the strikers as being unemployed or involved in politics.

South Africa: Amplats strikers threatened with dismissal

The 21,000 miners employed by Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) in the Rustenburg area, who have now been on strike for two weeks, were threatened with dismissal if they refused to attend disciplinary hearings being held by the company this week.

Taking their cue from the Marikana miners, they are demanding a R16,000 (\$1,900) monthly salary.

The action outside of the control of the recognised unions was described by Amplats as "irrational and outside any form of bargaining."

Amplats said it already had a union agreement due to end in June 2013 and would only renegotiate in six months' time.

On Monday an unofficial strike began at a platinum mine jointly owned by Amplats and the Canadian-based Atlatza Resources at the Bokoni platinum mine, at the eastern edge of the platinum deposits hundreds of miles from Rustenburg.

AngloGold also made similar threats to 24,000 of its miners currently taking unofficial strike action, threatening to downsize its operations.

AngloGold CEO, Mark Cutifani stated, "If the current unprotected strike continues, it compounds risks of a premature downsizing of AngloGold Ashanti's South African operations."

Kenyan ferry workers protest

Workers at Kenya Ferry Services are on a go-slow to protest management's refusal to implement a pay agreement. They accuse Managing Director Musa Hassan of not honouring a collective bargaining agreement that promised annual pay increases, since he took over in 2010.

On Monday they held a demonstration at the Likoni ferry terminal to press their demands and have threatened to strike if their demands are not met.



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