

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 October 2012

General strikes called against austerity in Spain and Portugal

Last week, Spain's main trade unions called a general strike for November 14, coinciding with similar action in Portugal and Greece, to protest government austerity measures and labour reforms.

The general strike will be the second in Spain this year. A partial stoppage took place March 29. Fernando Lezcano, the spokesman for the Workers' Commissions, said it would be the first-ever joint Iberian general strike with both Spain and Portugal participating.

Last Friday, the Balearic islands and the northern province of Asturias became the seventh and eighth regions to ask for financial help. The islands will request €355 million (\$462.7 million) from the central government's €18 billion (\$23.5 billion) rescue fund for the regions, while Asturias will seek €261.

Catalonia has asked for €5 billion, Andalusia €4.9 billion, Valencia €4.5 billion, Castilla-La Mancha €848 million, the Canary Islands €756 million and Murcia €641 million.

On the same day, the government of Valencia approved the layoff at least 3,000 public service employees—40 percent of its workforce, saving an estimated €300 million (\$391 million).

Thousands of protestors surrounded the Spanish parliament in Madrid on Tuesday in the latest protests against austerity cuts.

Portuguese oil workers on strike over changes to the collective labor agreements

Workers at the fuel and oil corporation Galp held a five-day strike in protest last week against changes to the collective labor agreements. It followed the announcement of the government budget for 2013, which included tax rises for workers and cuts in public services.

According to reports, Matosinhos, situated in Porto, refines 110,000 barrels per day (bpd), and the Sines refinery, located near the capital of Lisbon, refines 220,000 bpd. Workers at the Galp Energia's refinery in Matosinhos went on a three-day strike over pay and working conditions on September 17.

Portugal expects its economy to contract a further 3 percent this year. The European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union (EU) are driving Portugal's implementation of spending cuts and reforms in return for a €78 billion loan agreed last year.

French air traffic controllers strike against jobs threat

A 24-hour strike by air traffic controllers at Air France took place Tuesday in protest of the company's restructuring plans and the threat to cut 100 jobs.

According to *connexionfrance.com*, "The number of strikers varied, with none out on strike at Paris Charles-de-Gaulle or Nice but several at Aix-en-Provence, Bordeaux and Lyon.

"Nice was badly affected in the aftermath of delays elsewhere. Services were up to two hours late and around 30 flights were cancelled including British Airways (London City), Flybe (Southampton) and Brit Air (Rennes)."

Among flights cancelled at Marseille were two Gatwick flights through British Airways and Easyjet. Charles-de-Gaulle, Paris-Orly and Montpellier experienced significant delays.

Scottish university lecturers in 24-hour pay strike

University lecturers in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teaching union, have rejected an offer of a 1 percent pay increase, triggering a one-day strike. The other main union representing lecturers, the University and College Union, voted against industrial action.

Below-inflation pay "increases" over three years have meant that, in real terms, lecturers' pay has been cut by an estimated 12 percent, an average of £5,000.

Employers have said the pay offer is final.

Isle of Man bus drivers in strike ballot over £3,000 pay cut

Bus drivers on the Isle of Man are expected to hold a ballot for industrial action against the government's attempts to cut drivers' wages by up to £3,000 a year.

The basic annual pay of the drivers is around £24,300.

According to the Unite union, the government-run Bus Vannin has been instructed to find £300,000 of savings.

Following the refusal of drivers to accept wage cuts, the employer has issued contractual notice of up to a maximum 90-days notice of termination of employment and a minimum of two weeks for those with less than two years service. The deadline is October 25, when workers must sign the new contract or lose their jobs.

The union has not announced a date for the ballot.

British Museum cleaning and maintenance staff vote for industrial action

Around 70 cleaning workers and maintenance staff at the British Museum in London, one of the most popular museums in the world, have voted to strike over the transfer of their jobs to private companies.

The workers fear the transfer will mean cuts in pay and conditions.

Around half of the museum's facilities are already run by outsourcing private companies such as Mitie, which looks after some cleaning services, and maintenance contractor Norland.

Both Mitie and Norland have put in bids for the new contract covering facilities management across the whole museum.

Staff at Italian carrier Alitalia in strike over jobs

Flight attendants, ground workers and pilots of Alitalia are expected to go on a four-hour strike today to protest possible layoffs, which form part of recently-announced cost-cutting measures. Some airport security staff could also join the industrial action.

Dublin teachers protest over new pay structures

Around 2,000 teachers protested at the Dáil (lower house of parliament) Wednesday over government cutbacks, saying they are having a significant impact on the classroom.

"National school teachers have warned the school system is at breaking point, while secondary teachers' unions say any further cuts in education will have a profound effect on society," said *RTE News/Ireland*.

Teachers were also protesting over the lack of equal pay for newly-qualified teachers. Due to a series of budget cuts, newly qualified teachers now earn 27 percent less than their senior colleagues after tax.

Salaries for new teachers were cut by 13 percent last year, and those appointed after January 31 this year faced a further 20 percent drop in pay due to the abolition of qualification allowances.

South England bus drivers and depot staff in 24-hour strike

Bus drivers and depot staff employed by First Devon and Cornwall are to take part in a 24-hour strike today to protect pay and conditions after rejecting a company pay offer.

The latest proposal follows the loss of paid walking time, the dilution of sick pay benefits and the removal of the final salary section of the pension scheme.

Strike by Estonian health care workers enters fourth week

A strike by health care workers over wages, work conditions and general health care management has entered its fourth week. Talks between health care unions and hospital management did not lead to an agreement last week.

Workers are also challenging the allocation of funds from the Health Insurance Fund and state budgets.

The strike includes the outpatient and inpatient care units in the North Estonian Regional Hospital, West Tallinn Central Hospital, East Tallinn Central Hospital, Tartu University Clinic, Pärnu, Narva, Kuressaare and Viljandi hospitals.

In Põlva hospital a support strike began Tuesday.

Egyptian tourist guides to strike

Tourist guides are to go on strike November 15, 16 and 17, demanding better working conditions and employment opportunities.

The tourist guides are also demanding the ending of mandatory training, which they must pay for in order to renew their license.

"The high unemployment rate tourist guides have been suffering from for the past year and a half is not supplemented by any monetary assistance by the Ministry of Tourism," according to *Daily News Egypt*.

The guides are also demanding health insurance, as they receive no compensation at all in case of injury.

Strike at Zambian training centre

Workers at the National Rehabilitation and Vocational Training Centre (NRVTC) went on strike at the end of last week protesting that they are being paid below the legal minimum wage. They are also demanding the resignation of the NRVTC management, accusing them of being uncaring.

Goodyear tyre workers in South Africa walk out

Workers at the Goodyear tyre factory in Uitenhage in Eastern Cape walked off the job Tuesday protesting the company's policy change over allowances for staggered breaks that was imposed without negotiations.



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