

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 November 2012

Georgian port strike ends

A two-week strike by 1,200 port workers in Poti, Georgia, ended November 11. The dispute began November 1 over pay and working conditions and was reportedly settled when Economy Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and trade union leader Irakli Petriashvili restarted negotiations.

Interpressnews quoted Kvirikashvili: “We achieved an agreement so workers will be compensated for the days on strike. Salaries will increase by 20 percent from December 1 instead of January 1”. Further details of the settlement are due to be finalised with the prime minister, said Kvirikashvili.

Poti is a critical transit hub for goods being transported between Europe and Central Asia, as part of the Trans-Caucasian Corridor. Since April of last year, the port has been owned by global network terminal operator AMPT.

Teachers at English school take industrial action

Teachers at the South Shields Community School, Tyne and Wear took industrial action last week in the first of a series of strike days over pay, pensions, conditions of service and possible job losses.

According to a statement on the web site of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), “The teachers at South Shields Community School have continued to prepare for and teach their lessons, mark and assess pupils’ work and carry out all those tasks which, in their professional judgement, assist them in focusing on teaching and learning. Not one pupil has had their education disrupted by this action.”

Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall, England, bus workers in further 24-hour strike

Bus drivers and engineers at First buses in Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall, in England, were due to stage a further 24-hour walkout Thursday, November 15, after the rejection of a pay deal offering staff a 2 percent pay increase from next month and a further 2.3 percent increase from April of next year.

The First company has made it known to union representatives who attended the last meeting that if the new offer was rejected, it would call in the “arbitration service” ACAS.

Mid Yorkshire Hospitals, England, staff to strike over jobs, pay cuts

Staff at hospitals in Wakefield, Pontefract and Dewsbury are set to stage a three-day strike next week over an ongoing dispute concerning jobs and pay cuts.

The planned action is in protest at the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust’s plans to save £630,000 by slashing 70 administration and clerical jobs and cutting the pay of around 275 other staff.

Staff who keep their jobs face a higher workload and the prospect of a pay cut of between £1,700 and £2,800, according to union officials.

Of more than 500 administrative and clerical staff balloted last month, the Unison union said 88 percent voted in favour of a strike and 96 percent voted in favour of action short of a strike.

The three-day strike is to take place on November 20, 21 and 22.

On November 1, medical secretaries, receptionists and clerks staged a one-day strike.

Management at the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust are aiming to slash costs in the face of a £26 million deficit by the end of the year.

SIPTU trade union calls off another airline workers strike in pensions dispute

On Thursday, the SIPTU trade union called off a planned strike due to go ahead on November 19 among Aer Lingus staff at Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports in Ireland in an ongoing dispute over planned attacks on workers’ pension rights as a result of the large deficit in the Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme. Siptu has stated that the company is looking to extract productivity increase from the workforce.

The action would have affected all Aer Lingus flights, but mostly to transatlantic destinations, between 10 a.m. and noon that day. Around 2,000 passengers would have been affected.

Siptu called off the strike despite no reported concessions being made to the workers. The *Evening Herald* reported that the action was called off “after clarifications from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and employers’ group IBEC on their plan to make progress on talks to tackle the gigantic €748m hole in a staff pension scheme.”

The clarifications were also endorsed by other unions, with RTE reporting that the unions and management have entered a non-binding talks process involving the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour

Court.

Early in October, Siptu called off another threatened strike at Aer Lingus and the Dublin Airport Authority on the basis of allowing talks to proceed.

Strike by European Commission officials over pay cuts

According to *EUobserver.com*: “Around nine in 10 EU Council staff and one in 10 European Commission officials went on strike on Thursday (8 November) in protest at proposed pay cuts.”

The web site cited union estimates that up to 1,000 workers gathered outside the European Commission main building in the European Union (EU) quarter in Brussels.

The strike also affected the EU court and commission offices in Luxembourg, as well as Commission research facilities in Petten, in the Netherlands, and in Ispra, Italy.

The European Parliament and the EU’s foreign service were not affected by the strike.

“Unionists told *EUobserver* the turnout at the Council was the highest because the Council’s masters—EU countries—are the ones who are proposing to wield the axe on the EU budget. Top commission officials and MEPs share the workers’ point of view (but the commission docked strikers a day’s pay despite its empathy),” reported *EUobserver.com*.

Bahraini construction workers go on “flash strike”

Hundreds of construction workers went on a “flash strike” Tuesday in protest against company officials’ failure to repatriate their dead colleague’s body to India.

“The workers of Syed Kadhem Al Durazi Company in Sanad were angry that four days after one of their colleagues, Gurmit Singh, died at the labour camp, his body was still at Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) mortuary and the company management had not taken any steps to send his mortal remains to India,” said *Gulf Daily News*.

The workers say Singh, from Punjab, died soon after a company doctor said there was nothing wrong with him after he had complained of chest pain on Saturday evening. Instead, Singh was “given some tablets and sent back, a few hours after which he collapsed and died,” according to one worker.

Another worker described the appalling conditions endured by the workforce: “We stay 10 to a room, with only six people sleeping on beds and others on the floor.”

Thousands of Egyptian workers stage sit-in at Alexandria spinning and weaving factory

“Around 3,000 workers are staging a sit-in at Alexandria’s Bolvera spinning and weaving factory, while another 300 are at the house of the governor,” reported *Daily News Egypt* on November 11. The workers are demanding a return to state ownership for the factory, the management of which is corrupt.

The strike entered its second week following the weekend. In addition to the sit-ins, workers have also mounted road blockages and started hunger

strikes.

On Saturday, management again threatened to withhold the monthly wages from striking workers. After a four-day delay, management relented and paid up.

The strikers have also demanded that the factory reinstate workers who were fired in 2007. One of those fired, Said Shehata filed a lawsuit against the factory over the dismissal. “Currently the administration seems disinterested.... They just want us to knock our heads against the walls,” Shehata told *Daily News Egypt*.

Afghan park workers in Tehran, Iran, strike over long-delayed wage payments

Low-paid Afghan workers employed in the parks in north Tehran, Iran, by contractors went on strike November 7 after several months’ worth of delayed wage payments, according to a report sent to the Iranian Independent Workers Union.

Mission Free Iran reported: “Considering the recent increases in food prices, such as the price of the bread that constitutes their main daily meal, the little wages they receive have not been increased. Given the fall in the value of the toman against other currencies, the little amount they receive is worthless.”

Namibian teachers’ strike ends

The two-week strike of teachers has ended. They had been on strike in support of a 40 percent pay increase. The Namibian government had won a court order declaring the strike illegal. Members of the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) who had gone on strike were condemned by their own union leadership.

Education Permanent Secretary Alfred Ilukena said teachers who had been on strike will not receive salary payments for that period and had refused to rule out disciplinary actions against teachers. He said negotiations over pay would continue, but it would be done through the leadership of NANTU.

Namibian power workers set to strike

Workers at NamPower, the power utility were set to come out on strike on Thursday, November 15, seeking a 10 percent pay increase, a 20 percent housing allowance and improved additional benefits. It would involve around 500 workers represented by the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN).

The union served the notice to strike on Monday. MUN was involved in talks with NamPower management on Tuesday but with no resolution, further talks took place Wednesday. At the time of writing, the outcome of these talks was not known.

South African police shooting of Xstrata mine workers condemned

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) condemned the non-fatal shooting of Xstrata mine workers by the police. The workers had come out on strike following an alleged racist assault on a black worker by a white employee.

NUMSA condemned the use of live ammunition to confront the strikers who were picketing. Xstrata is an Anglo-Swiss mining company with operations across Africa and other parts of the world.

South African Amplats workers' strike continues

Striking platinum miners at the Anglo Platinum mine in the Rustenburg region are still on strike after eight weeks. Management made its latest offer to the striking workers Wednesday, November 14. The offer comprised a R600 (US\$68) monthly allowance on top of their normal monthly wage and a one-off R4500 (US\$510) to get them back to work.

Anglo Platinum is currently reviewing its South African operations and could close some of its mines.



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