

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 November 2012

## Municipal workers continue strikes and protests throughout Greece

Municipal workers took strike action and protested throughout Greece Tuesday to protest the latest €13.5 billion (\$17 billion) austerity measures being imposed by the three-party coalition government.

During the day municipal (Poe-Ota) workers struck and occupied many government buildings nationwide. Two-thirds of Greece's 325 municipalities were closed to the public due to the strikes and protests. In Athens a demonstration was held attended by around 2,000 people.

On Thursday the protests were still ongoing with local government employees continuing sit-ins at municipal and regional government headquarters. On Friday all municipal offices in the Attica region remained closed.

A strike by members of the public sector trade union Adedy to oppose the lay-off of workers employed by central and local governments was held Thursday with a rally at the central Klafthmonos square in Athens later in the day. Also protesting were members of the Olme trade union that represents middle and high school teachers.

## Tens of thousands of Spanish health workers protest

On Monday tens of thousands of health workers protested in Spain against the austerity measures, including budget cuts and privatisations, being imposed by the government of Popular Party prime minister Mariano Rajoy.

During the day the workers—doctors, nurses and hospital staff—marched through the capital Madrid. Many were dressed in white and carried placards. They chanted, “Health is a right. We are going to fight”.

The demonstration follows regular protest by health workers including the occupation of about 20 hospitals in Madrid and surrounding areas. This has been to protest the regional government's decision to privatise six health units as part of upcoming budget cuts.

The health cuts will lead to many people going without treatment. These include pensioners, who previously had to pay nothing for medicine but are now expected to pay least 10 percent of the cost.

## Amnesty International UK workers strike against cuts

Workers employed by Amnesty International UK (AIUK) at its London headquarters struck on Tuesday for 24 hours in an ongoing dispute to protest planned job losses and spending cuts. The action was the third stoppage in the last eight weeks.

The Unite trade union said that hundreds of its members at AIUK, and at its global headquarters, walked out in separate disputes over issues including jobs and spending cuts.

Alan Scott, a Unite Regional officer said the union had struck “very reluctantly” and called for management “to engage in a constructive dialogue to chart a fair and equitable way forward.”

An Amnesty spokesman said, “The reorganisation of the International Secretariat will see staff transfer from a centralised London base of more than 500 people to 10 regional hubs around the world, located closer to where human rights violations occur.”

## Ford Sollers auto workers in Russia strike

On November 16 Ford Sollers was forced to halt production at its Vsevolzhsk plant near St. Petersburg, Russia. The strike began after management announced that the plant would not operate in mid-December due to production target already being hit. The factory produces the Ford Mondeo and Ford Focus models.

The *Moscow Times* reported from a trade union official who said the move would “result in employees being forced to take vacation, with only two thirds of their monthly salaries to be paid...” The official said that workers had begun a work-to-rule campaign to protest the plans.

The newspaper reported the “company said by telephone that no strike had taken place at the plant.” It cited the firm stating that Ford Mondeo production was halted due to a shortage of car parts, while the manufacturing of Ford Focus vehicles was stopped as the targeted number of vehicles had been produced that week.

## Construction workers in Cyprus hold two day strike

Construction workers in Cyprus began a two-day strike Thursday in an ongoing dispute over their collective agreement rights.

According to the SEK trade union official Yiannakis Ioannou employers are attempting to “stop paying the provident fund, abolish bonuses and overtime, increase work hours from 38 to 40 a week, as well as cut wages by up to 30 percent”, reported the *Cyprus Mail*.

## National Health Service staff strike in West Yorkshire, England

National Health Service administration staff at three hospitals in West

Yorkshire, England began a three-day strike Tuesday. The action involves clerical staff, medical secretaries and admin workers.

Members of the public sector trade union Unison at Dewsbury, Pontefract and Wakefield hospitals staged a second stoppage against redundancies and pay cuts. Some 70 jobs losses are at risk as a result of the proposals as well as wage reductions of up to £2,800 a year, for nearly 300 more workers

The cuts are being made as the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust faces a £26 million deficit by the end of the year and has to make an additional £24 million in cuts required by the government. These are part of the government's £20 billion cut to the overall NHS budget of just over £100 billion.

### **First Bus employees strike in Devon and Cornwall, England**

On November 15 bus drivers and other workers employed by the First Bus Group in Devon and Cornwall, England struck for 24 hours in a dispute over pay. The action involved drivers, engineers and back office staff.

First Bus attempted to break the strike by mobilising managers to run buses and claimed it ran "slightly more" services than during a previous strike on October 26 when a strike disrupted 90 percent of services. However the company was forced to acknowledge there was "serious disruption across both counties."

The BBC reported that the company and the RMT trade union have held meetings agreeing "a pay offer which guaranteed staff a 2 percent pay increase from 2 December, followed by a 2.3 percent increase from April 2013, but this was rejected."

The union only called the action after calling off a previously scheduled strike set for November 8. This followed talks in which they agreed to a new company pay offer. It was the rejection by the workers of this management/union offer that resulted in the latest strike.

First Bus Group employs 675 people in Devon and Cornwall.

### **French workers employed by Coca-Cola to strike**

French workers employed by Coca-Cola were set to strike today to protest planned redundancies. Up to 200 workers are to be laid off mainly in the firms' French sales and marketing operation.

Trade unions announced that the strike would halt production at Coca-Cola's France's five bottling plants and seven commercial offices nationwide.

Christian Jurcenoks of the CFDT union, said, "We are all convinced that Coca-Cola has exploited the financial crisis to restructure its French operations and to start a round of redundancies".

The cuts are being imposed as Coca-Cola announced an 8 percent increase in turnover (€2.2 billion worldwide) in the third quarter of 2012.

### **Scottish rail workers to be balloted for strike**

Scottish rail employees are to be balloted for industrial action by the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT). The RMT claims one of its members was dismissed for trying to help a passenger buy the correct

ticket for a journey.

The union alleged that the worker, Scott Lewis, was sacked for allegedly making "unwanted contact" with the passenger.

### **Workers in Jordan strike against fuel cost hike**

Thousands of workers struck Sunday in Jordan to protest increasing fuel costs. As a result of the gas hike, the cost of household gas will rise by 53 percent.

The protest came just 48 hours after thousands demonstrated in the capital Amman to demand the king step down, despite this demand being punishable by imprisonment. Prior to this the police were mobilised against protesters on Wednesday and Thursday who were demonstrating against the price rise. In the clashes the police killed one person and injured many others.

According to Mahmud Abu Ghunayma, head of Jordan's 15 professional associations, "All 15 unions except the nurses' union stopped working between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (0800-1100 GMT) on Sunday".

A teachers' union spokesman announced that "the strike was observed by 70 to 75 percent of schools across the country".

The strike excluded "emergency sectors," including midwifery and nursing, said the head of the doctors' union.

### **Doctors continue strike in Egypt**

A strike by Egyptian doctors entered its eight week this week with a protest being held in Alexandria. The doctors are demanding guaranteed better healthcare, a minimum wage, an increase in the budget for health from just three percent of the state budget to 15 percent and harsher penalties for those who attack hospitals. Recently attacks on hospitals have forced some emergency units to close.

Doctors remain on strike despite threats by the Ministry of Health to dock their pay or even terminate their employment.

The *Daily News Egypt* newspaper reported Tuesday, "The committee governing the partial doctors' strike announced on Monday that hospitals have received leaflets outlining penalties that may be imposed on doctors who 'are absent from work or who refuse to work.'"

A reply from the doctors stated they were "exercising their legitimate right to strike, a right guaranteed by many international agreements".

The strike committee said doctors did not want to participate in a total strike as this would harm patients, but said that if individual doctors did so it would be the responsibility of Ministry of Health officials "who have not taken one serious step to solve the problems of the collapsed health system."

### **Namibian Power workers return to work**

Members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) working for the power utility NamPower have ended their strike and returned to work. They had been seeking a 10 percent pay increase and returned to work following NamPower's agreement to pay the increase.

However, no agreement was reached over the workers' demand that medical aid be paid to all NamPower workers in retirement. Currently

medical aid is only paid to certain former employees dependent on when they joined the company.

### **Namibian airline pilots strike**

Around 50 airline pilots, members of Namibian Airline Pilots Association (NAPA), working for Air Namibia are on strike demanding a salary increase.

A 5 percent offer backdated to April 1, 2012 has been rejected by the pilots. The company say the offer is still on the table and no better offer can be expected, saying that Air Namibia is broke. In a statement, Christian Schneider, NAPA president, claimed Air Namibia pilots receive 30 percent less than those at other airlines.

### **Airline cabin crew in Mozambique strike for 24 hours**

Around 70 cabin crew working for Mozambique Airlines (LAM) held a one day strike on Sunday. Amongst their demands were a pay increase, extra pay for night work and a review of their career structure.

The return to work was on the basis of an agreement between the cabin crew and management but not details were given. LAM pilots did not join the strike. The issue of life insurance coverage for cabin crew was not resolved. The cabin crew say they are not covered by life insurance policies taken out by the airline as none of them have signed copies of renewal policies since 2005. Management claimed insurance was in place on a collective basis.

### **Tanzanian construction workers strike**

Around 800 workers employed by Aarsleff-BAM International Joint Venture building the 95 Km Laela to Sumbawanga highroad in the Rukwa region of Tanzania have gone on strike. After going on strike they remained in the company's compound in Kyanda.

They are seeking a substantial pay increase and to stop indiscriminate sackings. They are also protesting the vast pay differentials (around 50 times) between Tanzanian workers and foreign workers employed on the project.

### **Teachers strike in Liberian capital**

Around 270 teachers in the Liberian capital of Monrovia went on strike for 2 days at the end of last week. They demonstrated in front of the Education Ministry building in the capital. They are demanding back pay and incentives from the government.

The teachers have only just recently returned to work following a previous strike.

### **Municipal workers in Kenya clash with police**

Several hundred municipal workers employed by Narok County Council have been on strike since last week over non-payment of salary arrears. They are members of the Kenyan Local Government Workers Union.

The striking workers clashed with police, armed with tear gas, on Monday. The police had been mobilised to break up the workers' picket but had to withdraw in face of the strikers' intransigence.

The union's local branch chairman, Koitaat Ole Mereu, accused the council of corruption and called for the council treasurer and clerk to be replaced; saying the union will only negotiate with the council once this has been done.

### **South African construction workers continue strike**

Workers belonging to the National Union of Mineworkers employed by the construction company Aveng Grinaker-LTA in Kwazulu-Natal have been on strike since last week.

The workers are angry that the company pays substantially higher salaries at its sites in Eastern and Western Cape and are seeking parity.

### **Nigerian research workers seek redress over pension payments**

Researchers at the Nigerian Forestry Research Institute in Ibadan in South-Western Nigeria went on strike last week. They are protesting the 15 percent deduction from their wages towards their pension scheme. The research workers were demanding the federal government pay half the amount towards the pension scheme, leaving workers to pay just 7.5 percent as previously agreed.

### **Nigerian plateau state government issues further ultimatum**

Workers employed by Plateau State government are continuing their six-month strike in support of the demand that the state government implement the N18, 000 (\$114) minimum wage. They have ignored the ultimatum issued this week that they return to work as they ignored the previous ultimatum issued last week.

The striking workers have vowed to hold protest actions in all seventeen local government areas of the state this week, defying police instructions, to press their demands.



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