

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 December 2012

Spanish health workers hold 48-hour strike against austerity cuts

Health workers in Spain held a 48-hour strike and protests this week against government spending cuts and the privatisation of medical centres. It was the second strike by health workers in recent weeks.

Workers are protesting plans by Madrid's regional government to privatise six hospitals and 27 health centres, out of a total of 270 in the region. This is part of the regional governments' plan to meet deficit targets. The attacks could result in the loss of up to 8,000 health workers' jobs.

On Wednesday, thousands of Spanish doctors, nurses, and hospital staff demonstrated in the capital, Madrid, to protest against the government's austerity cuts squeezing the health sector. During the protest outside the Assembly of Madrid, many workers who were dressed in white chanted, "Shame!" and "Health cuts kill".

One doctor on the demonstration, Jose Gabriel Gonzalez, told PressTV that the measures were "an attack that will have consequences on the quality of health care". He added, "There will be fewer doctors and fewer safeguards for people to receive all the services they need. We protect the health of Madrid. This is hurting me, but ultimately, it's the patient who will feel it".

Health employees also staged a demonstration Tuesday at Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, which followed protests last week in capital.

Health workers, members of six trade unions, are set to strike against the measures on December 19 and 20.

Pre-Christmas strikes of Iberia ground staff and cabin crew to protest planned layoffs

Ground staff and cabin crew at the Spanish national airline, Iberia, are to stage strikes December 14 and from December 17 to 21 in protest against the company's plans to lay off up to 4,500 staff.

International Airlines Group, the merged British Airways and Iberia, is planning to cut 23 percent of staff, claiming the carrier is "in a fight for survival". Six unions officially support the planned strikes. SEPLA, the pilots' union, does not.

Greek municipal workers continue protests, sit-ins at town halls

Greek municipal workers continued their protests and sit-ins at town halls this week in order to prevent mayors from sending lists of municipal staffers to the Administrative Reform Ministry that could be placed into a

labour mobility scheme.

It is the fourth week of such protests by the employees. The protests coincided this week with the publication of a ministerial decree, in the Official Government Gazette, stating that local employees can be laid off without the formal approval of majors or other local authorities formerly in charge. This means the ministry will be able to proceed with layoffs without waiting for the lists drafted by city and regional administrations.

According to *ekathimerini.com*, "The civil servants will receive a reduced salary while in the scheme and could be fired if a new position has not been found for them after 12 months."

Greek police smash up occupation by at Thessaloniki university cleaners in pre-dawn raid

On November 30, riot police raided the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, which had been occupied by protesting contracted employees,

Workers had been occupying the building for 70 days, protesting they were owed money by the university for campus cleaning services that had been outsourced to the private contractor employing them.

Following the 4:15 a.m. raid, the police arrested 11 people. The daily *Kathimerini* reported that the raid was "ordered by Thessaloniki first instance prosecutor Angelos Mademlis following a request signed by 44 academics for authorities to put an end to the siege and the cleaning crew's strike, which has resulted in piles of garbage building up around the campus."

The 11 arrested workers were released but ordered to appear before the prosecutor the following Monday.

Italian port workers strike over retroactive pay freeze

Workers employed by the Port authority in Italy took industrial action this week in a dispute over a pay freeze that is being backdated as part of government austerity measures.

The port authority employees are members of several trade unions, the Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Trasporti (FILT-CGIL), Federazione Italiana Trasporti-CISL and Unione Italiana dei Lavoratori dei Trasporti, and struck on December 5.

The pay freeze contravenes the wage hike stipulated in a previous collective bargaining agreement and also forces workers to pay back the increases they have received since January this year.

Italian airport workers hold 24-hour strike

Staff at Fiumicino Airport and pilots at the country's main air carrier, Alitalia, held a 24-hour strike November 30 to protest against job cuts, absence of legal protection, the disproportionately wide range of responsibilities and low pay.

The strikers also planned a sit-in strike at the airport's terminal one.

Alitalia plans to carry out 690 redundancies and impose new contracts with increased workloads. The national contract for the air transport sector in Italy expired almost a year ago and has yet to be renewed.

Tesco delivery drivers in Doncaster, England, begin indefinite strike

Around 180 delivery drivers for the global retailer Tesco, based in Doncaster, England, began indefinite industrial action Thursday, in a four-month long dispute with their new employer Eddie Stobart Ltd (ESL).

The drivers have also organised a demonstration in Doncaster on December 8, starting at 10:00 a.m. from the depot and marching to the city centre. The march is to finish with a rally at the Tesco store, Church View, Doncaster.

In August, transportation workers were transferred from Tesco to ESL, and then, in September, ESL issued notice of termination of employment, with no promise that the drivers would be reemployed once the 90 days are up.

There have been five strike days so far in the dispute and a demonstration outside the Tesco Express store in Westminster.

UK: Safety and security staff on London Overground to strike

Safety and security staff employed by STM Security Group on London Overground services struck Thursday in a dispute over bullying and the imposition of new terms and conditions.

The workers, contracted to provide safety and security at London Overground stations, are under extreme pressure in the run-up to year-end when the service is on a high state of security alert.

Transport cleaning workers strike in northern UK cities

Cleaning workers on trains across the north of the UK took industrial action last Friday over contracts.

The workers and security staff are demanding a living wage and major improvements in pensions and working conditions. Seven separate contracts are involved in the dispute.

Postal workers in Bristol, England, vote to strike

Postal workers in south Bristol are likely to go on strike this month over workload-related issues. Around 80 percent of workers at a depot in Mead Street voted to stage walkouts last week.

The Communication Workers Union said talks with Royal Mail had broken down without agreement.

Royal Mail is to receive notice next week of the first in a series of strikes in the run-up to Christmas.

In response, Royal Mail said it had been working on contingency plans should strike action be held. A spokesperson said, "We have invited the union to meet with us again tomorrow to continue working with us to explore every opportunity to resolve concerns of our staff at Mead Street."

Auto workers at Renault and Peugeot in France strike

Auto workers at Renault and PSA Peugeot in France took industrial action this week against the companies' attempt to cut costs and boost productivity due to slumping sales.

In Peugeot's Aulnay plant near Paris, a single production line was stopped after five workers were summoned for lack of productivity, a representative of the CGT trade union told Reuters.

The Aulnay plant is due to be closed in 2014 with the loss of 3,000 jobs.

A Peugeot spokesman said that production on other lines at the plant had been slowed but not stopped entirely.

Two French Renault plants were also affected by work stoppages this week, according to separate union sources. The stoppages came as the carmaker continued labour talks over its push to bring production costs to the same level as in Spain.

Bus drivers in Cyprus strike in pay dispute

Bus drivers in Cyprus have struck in the last week in a dispute over pay. On November 30, public transport in Limassol, the second largest city in Cyprus, was severely hit as drivers of bus company EMEL began an indefinite strike over pay. They are protesting the company's failure to pay workers in full and on time.

The strike broke out when the company was unable to pay the drivers' wages for the fourth time this year.

To settle the dispute, EMEL proposed to pay 50 per cent of salaries to workers employed on a weekly basis and 60 per cent to those employed on a monthly basis. Drivers rejected this offer.

A similar situation faces drivers in the capital, Nicosia, who began an indefinite strike Monday, in protest of their November wages not being paid in full.

A report in the *Cyprus Mail* said the "company was warned last September when the same issue on payment arose that drivers would go on indefinite strike if it occurred again. The drivers had then called off a 24-hour strike at the last minute when EMEL agreed to pay salaries owed to 110 drivers."

In the town of Larnaca, a drivers' strike was called off, but as of Thursday, the stoppages in Nicosia, Limassol and the Famagusta area continued.

Ground crew at Shannon Airport, Ireland, to be balloted for industrial action

Ground crew at Shannon Airport are to be balloted for industrial action

over fears for their futures after the separation from Dublin Airport Authority.

According to the *Irish Examiner*: “Siptu [the trade union involved] said that while it welcomed the job announcement for the region, it believed the business plan for the new Shannon entity was ‘unrealistically ambitious given that it is based on a model which envisages increasing Shannon Airport passenger numbers by 50 percent within a short time scale’.”

Staff strike at Egypt’s Sharm El-Sheikh airport

Staff at Sharm El-Sheikh international airport started a partial strike Monday to demand a wage increase and a share in profits.

One of the airport’s two terminals was closed, but flights continued to run with minor delays.

Khaled Moawad of the Egypt Air independent workers’ syndicate told *Ahram Online*, “Negotiations are ongoing with officials from the Egyptian Airports Company. We hope the solution will be resolved shortly.”

The article reported, “Disruption to the city’s airport could take its toll on tourism which is facing hard times due to the ongoing violence in northern Sinai.

“Wael El-Maadawy, head of the Egyptian Airports Company, has said he is keen to reach a settlement with the striking workers.”

Sharm El-Sheikh is one of the region’s top tourist destinations.

Kenyan nurses in nationwide strike

Nurses across Kenya represented by the National Nurses of Kenya (NNK) and the Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN) began a strike Monday. Among their demands are an increase in allowances, an end to temporary contracts and that the number of nurses employed be increased. They are also seeking for a registered umbrella body of nurses to better represent them. Currently, the KNUN is not registered as a trade union.

Medical Services Minister Anyang Nyong’o attacked the strike as illegal, claiming consultation had not been exhausted. The strike is not supported by the Kenya Progressive Nurses Association. The Union of Kenya Civil Servants, the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers have condemned the strike as illegal.

Two nurses at the Kenyatta National Hospital were held hostage on Sunday by management who called police to have them arrested. They were distributing leaflets and urging fellow nurses to support the strike the next day.

Narok council staff suspended in Kenya

Thirteen workers employed by Narok council in Kenya have been suspended after being on strike for three weeks. They accused the council of failing to make statutory remittances for their welfare and other deductions to the tune of Sh60 million (US\$700,000). The council chairman accused them of absconding from work and bringing the council

into disrepute by their actions.

Ghanaian judicial service staff walk out

Members of the Judicial Service Association of Ghana (JUSAG) who work for the Judicial Service throughout the country have come out on strike. The walkout is to protest the failure of the authorities to pay their allowances over the last six months.

JUSAG said it had attempted to get the government and the Judicial Service management to address the arrears but after this failed, launched the strike.

Chitungwiza municipal workers in Zimbabwe return to work

Workers employed by the Chitungwiza local council in Zimbabwe returned to work Monday following a strike that had resulted in all council services grinding to a halt. Chitungwiza lies 30 km south of the capital, Harare. They had been on strike for a week, demanding the payment of three months’ salary arrears.

The return to work follows the council’s application to the Labour Court, which instructed the workers to return to work. The council also intends to dismiss some of the strikers.

South African farmworkers strike called off after only one day

The resumed strike of Western Cape farmworkers in South Africa, who are seeking a R150 (US\$17) a day living wage, which began Tuesday following 10 days of negotiations, has been called off after only 24 hours.

The strike appears to have been called off at the instigation of the main trade union confederation COSATU, without consultation with the farmworkers themselves, many of whom are not in trade unions.

COSATU says negotiations between the farmers represented by Agri SA and various unions representing some of the farmworkers will continue, but that if no agreement is reached by January 9, the strike will resume on those farms where no agreement has been reached.



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