

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 September 2013

Europe

Croatian doctors, nurses strike

Thousands of Croatian hospital workers went on strike September 18 in protest of cuts to benefits. The workers demanded the restoration of benefits scrapped earlier this year, in particular, overtime and on-call pay.

Health Minister Rajko Ostojic claimed the demands of the striking health workers could not be met, citing the country's budget deficit which stands at 3.8 percent of gross domestic product.

The stoppage was the first doctors' strike in Croatia since 2005.

Croatia, which joined the European Union in July, will see its economy contract by an expected 0.4 percent this year.

Paris Hyatt Hotel housekeepers, valets strike

Around 60 housekeeping staff and valets at Paris' prestigious five-star Park Hyatt Hotel-Vendome went on strike last week over low pay and poor working conditions.

The staff, for the most part sub-contractors for service agency La Française de Service, are demanding pay rises, better working conditions and to become employees of the Hyatt Group. Hotel management said the dispute was between the workers and their subcontractor.

According to *AFP*, some of the strikers took to the streets under the banner: "The class war starts here."

They have been joined by seven members of the hotel staff, who are also in dispute over working conditions at the hotel.

The protest coincided with Paris Fashion Week, when the city hosts many VIP guests. A single night in one of the most luxurious suites at the Park Hyatt Hotel-Vendome costs more than some of its employees are paid in a year.

Air France flight attendants to strike in November

Air France flight attendants are to strike from November 20 to November 24 over a fresh round of cost cuts and plans to lay off up to 2,800 workers.

Air France intends to give details of the cost-saving measures on October 4, said *Reuters*, but has already unveiled plans to cut 2,800 jobs in addition to 5,122 layoffs announced as part of its so-called "Transform

2015" restructuring programme.

Amazon Germany workers strike again

Up to 400 employees of the online retail giant Amazon went on a three-day strike last week over pay.

The industrial action affected two logistics centres in Bad Hersfeld in the west of Germany.

A series of strikes have taken place at Amazon Germany in recent months.

Spanish teachers strike

Teachers across the country have called for a day of industrial action, first in October and then November, over cuts, tighter rules for scholarships, increasing tuition fees and ongoing educational "reform."

The Plataforma Estatal por la Escuela Pública, composed of parents, students and teaching unions, has announced a general strike for October 24.

On the Balearic Islands (Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera, near the eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula), high school and primary teachers have been on an indefinite strike since September 16.

The strike is over cuts and the Balearic Islands' government's new Integrated Language Procedure (TIL), which downgrades the Balearic variant of Catalan, the language of the islands for 800 years and of its school instruction up until now, into one of three languages to be taught in the education system, along with Castilian (Spanish) and English.

In Palma, capital of Mallorca, up to 6,000 teachers have been demonstrating daily outside the main government building.

Since May 2010, the teachers' working week has risen from 35 hours to 37.5 hours and their wages have fallen on average by 25 percent. The 2013-2014 school year is set to start 1,000 teachers short (8.3 percent of the teaching body) for the same enrollment of students.

Portuguese underground workers strike

Underground workers in Lisbon are to hold a 24-hour strike in the second week of October.

Union leader Anabela Carvalheira told *Lusa News Agency* the union had been authorised by the workers to find "joint means of fighting" with

other transport companies.

The union says that the government is “hiding” new laws, probably until after the September 29 local elections, to avoid a political meltdown.

Bulgarian postal workers protest in Sofia

Around 1,000 staff at the state-owned postal operator, Bulgarian Posts EAD, staged a protest in front of the government building in downtown Sofia Wednesday to demand a pay increase. Some blocked a major Sofia crossroad.

Employees from all over the country gathered outside the office of the Council of Ministers, some chanting, “We want our money!”

Bulgarian Posts EAD is in dire financial condition and the government is attempting to privatise it. Transport Minister Danail Papazov announced September 3 that a strategic partner would be found by the end of the month, which would acquire 49 percent of the company in order to guarantee efficient and professional management.

Middle East

Israeli labor court bans ports strike until October 10

Israel’s National Labor Court declared on Monday that port workers are banned from striking until October 10. According to the Israeli business news site Globes online, “The National Labor Court recognizes the legitimacy of a ports strike in response to the government’s decision to establish private ports, but, for now, it is forbidding a strike.”

The court judges ordered the state and the Histadrut (General Federation of Unions) to continue negotiations and to report on their progress by October 10. Until this date, port workers will not be allowed to go on strike.

The government has decided to build two private ports, one each in Ashdod and Haifa, which will compete against the existing ports. On this, the court decision stated, “The National Labor Court has concluded that the state has the authority to decide on the opening of new ports, and it does not need the consent of the workers to this act. However, the state must discuss with them the consequences of this decision.”

Africa

Zimbabwe strike by stationery workers

Workers employed by Marvo stationery manufacturers based in Bulawayo have gone on strike demanding backdated wages. This is the second time this year they have struck over the issue. Following a strike in June and an arbitration process, Marvo was ordered to pay the back wages in three installments beginning in July. However the company did not comply and the workers went on strike at the end of last week.

They join a long list of other workers owed back pay. Staff at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation have not been paid for six months. Workers at the Balu estate of the Agricultural Rural Development Agency outside Bulawayo are owed seven months pay. Around 80 workers employed by communication firm Liquid Telecom recently staged a sit-in demanding payment of wages in arrears.

Nigerian oil workers strike

Workers employed by Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited in Akwa Ibom state went on strike Monday. They are members of the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG).

Mobil wants to replace 80 percent of its contract workers with new contract workers taken on under a new contract that does not comply with the Collective Bargaining Agreement previously signed between the company and the union.

Nigerian tertiary education workers threaten strike

Members of the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU) threatened to strike next week over pay arrears. The workers, employed in federal universities throughout the country, are still owed their August salaries.

South African post workers declare a dispute

South African postal workers in the Communication Workers Union and the South African Postal Workers Union declared a dispute this week that may lead to a strike.

The employer turned down their demand for a 10 percent pay increase, offering instead 6 percent and refusing to discuss other allowances.

South African car retail workers dispute enters third week

The strike by car retail workers, members of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), over their demand for a double digit pay increase has entered its third week.

The strikers include production workers who make components to supply the auto manufacturers and their action is beginning to impact heavily on the auto companies. Volkswagen, Ford, Mercedes-Benz and Toyota all report limited production or stoppages as a result of the component shortage.

NUMSA officials have met with Retail Motor Industry representatives for talks, but with no agreement to date. Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant met with the union and employers on Monday in an attempt to end the dispute.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has threatened to organise solidarity action by other workers such as taxi associations if an agreement was not reached by the end of this week.

South African platinum miners’ strike threat

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union members employed by the platinum mining company Amplats have served notice of a 48-hour strike to take place Friday of this week. This is in response to the company’s plan to cut 3,300 jobs.



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