

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 September 2014

Europe

Lufthansa pilots strike at Munich Airport

Lufthansa pilots took industrial action at Munich Airport, Germany, on Wednesday against planned attacks on their pension benefits. The strike began at 10 a.m. and went on until 6 p.m., organised by the pilots' union, Vereinigung Cockpit (VC).

Presently, Lufthansa pilots can retire at age 59, but the airline wants to raise the retirement age to 61. Pilots are also asking for a 10 percent pay rise.

The walkout coincides with the end of the summer holidays in Bavaria. Last week, pilots staged a six-hour strike at Frankfurt Airport, resulting in 218 flight cancellations from Lufthansa and the company's budget airline, Germanwings.

24-hour strike by ground handlers at London's Heathrow airport

A 24-hour strike by ground handlers began on September 12 at three Heathrow terminals in a long-running dispute over pay. ASIG (Aircraft Service International Group), which handles baggage at Terminals 1, 2 and 3, offered a pay deal of 5.5 percent over two years, which workers rejected due to the rising cost of living.

The Unite trade union represents more than 500 of the ground handlers at the three terminals. Talks between the union and ASIG management broke down Monday over the delayed 2013 pay award, which should have been implemented 14 months ago.

Ground handlers cover such duties as check-in and baggage handling. Heathrow is among the top three of the world's busiest airports.

Greek workers protest in Thessaloniki

Hundreds of workers protested against the Greek government's austerity programme at the annual International Trade Fair in Thessaloniki on September 6. The fair is a major political event, where the Greek prime minister traditionally outlines his government's policy for the coming year.

Among the workers protesting were firefighters and coast guards.

Around 5,000 police were deployed on the streets of Thessaloniki in order to clamp down on protesters, with 43 people arrested.

Greek health workers protest privatisation plans

Doctors and hospital staff announced protests this week in opposition to a draft law setting up a new hospital payroll agency, the Hospital Payment Systems Company.

The doctors are members of the OENGE trade union and walked out from Wednesday noon to protest the measure. A rally, organised by the Athens-Piraeus Hospital Doctors Union (EINAP) and the hospital staff union POEDIN, was held outside the Greek Parliament.

OENGE said that the creation of the new company marked the state's "complete withdrawal from public health system funding."

Lisbon metro workers strike

Almost 1,500 subway staff in Lisbon, Portugal, struck during the Wednesday morning rush hour in a protest against pay cuts and the possible privatisation of the Metropolitano de Lisboa.

Lisbon's subway carries on average about 370,000 passengers a day.

Italian air traffic controllers strike

A four-hour strike by Italian air traffic controllers was held September 6. The strike is the latest action in a long-running protest against European Union (EU) plans for restructuring European airspace, intended to cut jobs and worsen working conditions.

The strike led to the cancellation of many flights including at least 100 between the UK and Italy. EasyJet cancelled around 60 services, mostly from Italy to other European destinations. A Ryanair spokesperson said that it was forced to cancel 96 flights, with further delays and cancellations likely.

British Airways cancelled two Heathrow-bound flights from Rome and one from Milan during the afternoon.

Russian health workers go on hunger strike

Health workers in the city of Ufa, Russia began a hunger strike

Tuesday in protest against low wages, reported state-run news agency TASS .

Six health workers were participating in the protest. Another individual had wanted to participate, but was excluded due to health concerns.

Andrei Konoval, a spokesman for the Interregional Union of Health Workers, told TASS, “The protest includes a doctor, a paramedic, a nurse, a cardiology nurse, and two anesthesiology nurses. They all will continue to fulfil their duties during working hours.”

Norwegian duty-free workers strike

Duty-free retail staff at airports in Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger, Trondheim and Sandefjord went on strike Monday over a rejected pay offer. The strike resulted in reduced capacity at the check-out areas of the airports.

The strike went ahead after representatives for the employers’ organisation Virke and the airport retailers’ labour organisation LFF (Luftfartens Funksjonærforening) failed to come to terms after mediation.

Middle East

Construction workers at Istanbul complex protest workplace deaths

Dozens of construction workers blocked a road in the Halkal? neighbourhood of Istanbul on Monday, two days after an elevator collapse killed 10 co-workers at the site of a lavish new tower complex in the central area of Mecidiyeköy.

The workers at the Tema Park residential project, a suburban complex on the European side of Istanbul, denounced their working conditions as “inhumane”, saying the meals provided by the construction company contained parasites and worms. *Hurriyet Daily News* commented, “The deaths of 10 workers after an elevator plunged from the 32nd floor on Sept. 6 caused indignation, especially after the construction company, Torunlar, refused to accept responsibility for the accident. The incident also prompted the public to question Turkey’s construction boom in recent years, particularly in Istanbul, where huge residential complex projects are spreading rapidly across the city.”

After two days of negotiations following a broader public outcry over construction workers’ safety and living conditions, the striking workers’ 14-point demand request conveyed through lawyers was formally accepted by the company. The deal commits the construction company to monitoring subcontractors and requests that they do not cut expenses regarding work safety material from the wages of workers, which is a common practice.

Africa

Nurses at Mombasa hospitals in Kenya continue strike

More than 600 nurses remain on strike at hospitals in Mombasa, the second largest city in Kenya, despite their unions’ call to return to work.

The Mombasa County Doctors Union says the health workers are concerned that the county government’s return-to-work formula will victimise those that called the strike. The nurses and clinical officers refusing to return to work accuse their unions, the Kenyan National Union of Nurses and the Kenyan Union of Clinical Officers, of betraying them.

The strikers are demanding a return-to-work formula, to secure that no workers are victimised and that wrongly deducted monies are repaid before they go back.

Around 600 medics at Embu County Hospitals also went out on strike last week demanding their unpaid wages.

Teachers in East and North Darfur, Sudan, continue strike

Secondary school teachers in the state of East Darfur, Sudan are continuing their three-week strike in pursuit of unpaid wages. The Teachers Union is demanding the payment of half of their salary arrears, around SDG 3.3 million (US\$900,000), before they return to work.

The Ministry of Finance refused to meet the teachers’ demand. It proposed to pay August and September’s wages, but the Teachers Union said those months were not part of the arrears.

Secondary school teachers went on strike this week in El Fasher, North Darfur, over the lack of payment of wage increases, even though all Sudanese state authorities have committed to paying the increase.

The state governor proposed a committee to look into the demands. The teacher’s response was to form a committee, print a leaflet to distribute at other schools and go on unofficial strike. The state authorities designated the strike illegal and threatened to sack the teachers.

Zimbabwe railway workers protest

Zimbabwe railway workers demonstrated in Bulawayo on September 6 demanding payment of outstanding salaries. Demonstrations took place across the country, including Harare.

The rail workers are owed 10 months’ wages amounting to US\$55 million. The police attempted to ban the demonstration on the basis it was likely to turn violent, while the high court gave it the go-ahead.



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