

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 October 2014

## Europe

### Industrial action closes French pharmacies

Pharmacies across France were closed Tuesday as pharmacists went on strike in opposition to the French government's plans to deregulate the industry. Striking pharmacists held a demonstration in the centre of Paris.

Under the current regulation, each individual pharmacy covers a specific geographical area serving around 2,500 people which means even people living in rural areas can normally easily access pharmacy services. Pharmacy owners also have to be fully qualified pharmacists and are not able to own more than one pharmacy.

Government plans to deregulate the service would open it up to major shopping chains.

### Greek air traffic controllers to strike

Air traffic controllers organised in the Greek Air Traffic Controllers' Association announced a 48-hour strike to begin October 4. It is to protest the government's plan to give the Public Debt Management Agency access to the revenues from airport fees.

The air traffic controllers' association argues airport fees should only be used to maintain and develop airport infrastructure rather than be used to pay off Greek government debt. They plan to file a complaint with the EU commission and petition the European parliament.

### Care workers in UK town of Doncaster begin new strike

Around 150 care workers in Doncaster, England began a three-week strike on September 29. It is the latest action in a long-running dispute.

The care workers, who look after people with learning difficulties in their own homes, had originally been employed by the National Health Service under a contract with Doncaster council.

Following the transfer of the service to private equity owned company Care UK in September of last year, the staff were subjected to pay cuts as the company eliminated pay enhancements for evening and weekend work. This has led to staff suffering pay cuts of up to £500 per month, leading to some of them losing their housing.

The current strike will make the dispute the longest-running dispute by health workers. The care workers lobbied the Conservative Party

conference being held in Birmingham on Wednesday. On Tuesday, they launched a nationwide fund appeal to maintain their action.

### Construction workers protest dirty sanitary conditions

On September 30, hundreds of workers at near Ferrybridge Power Station in West Yorkshire, England took wildcat action to protest filthy sanitary conditions.

The workers are involved in building a £300 million multi-fuel energy plant adjacent to the power station. Some 650 workers at the site were sharing just eight toilets and walked off the job, complaining over the lack of toilets, cleanliness and shortage of toilet paper and soap. The main contractor at the site is Hitachi Zosen Inova, who reportedly did not respond to previous complaints from workers.

The unofficial strike was called Monday night. Workers began forming a picket line early Tuesday.

According to the *Daily Mirror*, "About a dozen officers from West Yorkshire Police arrived at the site, as 300 workers gathered to protest over the lack of toilets, cleanliness and shortage of toilet paper and soap. But later they agreed to return to work—with the promise of more facilities and a permanent cleaner."

### UK midwives vote to strike for first time

Midwives organised in the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) have voted by over 80 percent to join a four-hour strike on October 15 by health workers employed by the NHS. It is the first such strike by RCM members.

They will join around 400,000 other health workers who are members of the Unite and Unison unions. Following the strike, they will carry out a work-to-rule for the rest of the week.

Health workers are taking the action to protest the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government's decision not to honour a one percent pay rise recommended by an independent pay review body.

### GMB union members vote to join UK health workers action

Members of the GMB union working for the National Health Service in England and Northern Ireland have voted by a 78 percent majority to join the four-hour strike of health workers, due to take place on October 15.

GMB members in the health service include ambulance staff.

### **Bus drivers in Bedford, England set to walk out**

Around 250 bus drivers and engineers in Bedford, England are due to strike Monday and Wednesday of next week between the hours of 3 am and 9 am each day.

The workers are members of the Unite union. The strike is in response to a pay offer of less than three percent for the period from June 2014 to June 2015, made by their employer, Stagecoach East. This follows below-inflation pay deals for the previous two years.

### **Trade union activists in Belarus sacked**

Two members of the Free Trade Union of Belarus who took part in a three-day hunger strike at a tractor plant in Babrujsk in March of this year have been sacked.

They were protesting discrimination against trade unionists. Management says their contracts had expired but the two sacked workers say it was because of the stand they had made.

#### **Middle East**

### **Iranian construction workers threatened with sack**

Contract workers employed on the Ahwaz urban metro railway project in Iran were threatened with the sack at the end of last week. Around 150 workers had been on strike over the week demanding unpaid wages for the last four months.

### **Solidarity action in support of Israeli post workers**

The Israeli federation of labour, Histadrut, organised sympathy strikes in support of postal workers who face 1,500 of their number being made redundant later in the year.

On Tuesday, the postal workers renewed their boycott of government departments, refusing to handle registered mail due for delivery to government ministries amongst other sanctions.

That day, workers held a one-day sympathy strike, involving administrative staff, secretaries and transcription takers, amongst others. Staff employed at the Transportation and Tourist Ministries came out on strike the following day.

### **Hospital cleaning staff in Gaza continues strike**

Cleaning staff in Gaza hospitals is continuing its strike leading to the build-up of medical waste which could pose a health hazard.

The 700 staff members are protesting non-payment of wages stretching

back five months. Palestinian officials in Gaza and in Ramallah in the West Bank are blaming each other for the failure to resolve the dispute.

#### **Africa**

### **Sit-down protest by hotel staff in Accra, Ghana**

Hotel workers at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Accra, Ghana are on a sit-down strike in response to unpaid wages and poor working conditions. The 300 workers were confronted by police called in by management. The workers' action was sparked when 15 leading union members were barred from entering the grounds of the hotel.

Management applied for a court injunction on September 24 to implement the ban. Previously, on August 21, workers had organised a protest at the hotel to press their complaints.

Tensions are running high as workers have accused management of misappropriating funds set aside for hotel renovation. They have written to the Ghanaian president with their accusations but have had no response. The hotel workers are demanding a committee be set up to investigate embezzlement of \$15 million in the upgrade funds.

### **Kenyan Telecom staff threatens walkout**

Kenyan Telecom staff has threatened to strike on October 8 unless management stops harassing and discriminating against union members. The Communications Workers Union say non-union members have been receiving only around 50 to 75 percent of their full pay, whilst union members have been receiving even less.

The union said that management used all kinds of tricks including threats and disciplinary action to encourage members to leave the union.

### **Strike of Kenyan municipal staff in Laikipia County**

More than 600 Laikipia County workers in Kenya went out on strike September 29 to protest unpaid wages to the tune of SH131 million (\$1.5 million). Their employment was taken over by the government when the local councils collapsed.

The Kenyan County Government Union wants the government to sign a recognition agreement and pay all the salary arrears. Promises have been made by the county administrations in the past to pay the arrears and an agreement was signed in 2012, but the pledges have not been honoured.

### **Tea workers paralyze production in Kenya**

Over 11,000 tea workers employed by Unilever struck on September 25, paralysing its operations in Kenya. They returned to work when the Kenyan Plantation and Agricultural Union intervened, sending the dispute to arbitration.

Seventeen workers were arrested for demonstrating at the beginning of the strike but were then released. The management had been issuing summonses for strikers to appear before a disciplinary team on September

27 for participating in an unprotected strike. The union demanded the withdrawal of the letters, threatening consequences if any employee was disciplined. The union has also begun a campaign for a 50 percent pay rise

### **Namibian construction workers return to work**

Namibian construction workers were sent back to work September 29, with an apology to the management of the Chinese Engineering Company (CHEC) by their union. Three workers were fired for protesting against working on two- and three-month short term contracts, which brought 77 construction workers out on illegal strike action. The company is overseeing the Walvis Bay port extension.

The National Union of Namibian Workers representing the 77 contract employees apologised saying the workers did not understand labour law. The union said it was pleased the dispute had been resolved amicably, and CHEC went on to promise them that it will create a shop steward training course. The workers with short term contracts will have to go through an evaluation system to earn the opportunity of full-time employment.



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