

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 October 2014

German Lufthansa pilots fifth strike

Pilots working for the German national airline Lufthansa staged a two-day strike Wednesday and Thursday of this week. It is the fifth strike action since the end of August. They are members of the VC (Cockpit) union and are opposing the plans of Lufthansa management to raise the age at which pilots are effectively able to retire from 55 to 60. The current agreement allows for transitional payments for those retiring at 55 until their state pension comes into effect at 60.

Whilst previous strikes have affected passenger flights, the one this week is by Lufthansa Cargo pilots and affected only freight flights.

Romanian public sector workers protest

In the midst of torrential rain, around 3,000 Romanian public-sector workers, including clerks, teachers, rail workers and health workers, held a demonstration outside parliament buildings in Bucharest. They blew vuvuzela horns and chanted, “thieves” and “down with liars”.

They were protesting poor working conditions and low pay. A recent report shows the average monthly wage fell by 2.1 percent in August to lei 1,683 (US\$480). According to the health union SANITAS, 30,000 doctors and nurses have left the country over recent years because of low salaries and underfunding of the health service.

Irish construction workers hold crane sit-in

Bricklayers on a construction site of a new school in Dublin are holding a sit-in atop a crane, 200 feet above the ground. The members of the Unite union have enough food and supplies to maintain their sit-in for eight days and say they will then begin a hunger strike if their demands are not addressed.

As a result of subcontracting at the JJ Rhatigan-owned site, they are only paid €4.90 (US\$6.25) an hour, one protester, Luke Fitzpatrick, told the *Irish Times*. Another protestor added, “We’re being paid €4.90 (US\$6.25) an hour which is well below the minimum wage. This is a government job. It’s taxpayers’ money that’s paying for this job.”

Portuguese underground workers on Lisbon Metro announce strike

Staff on the Lisbon Metro underground network are to hold a series of 24-hour strikes beginning October 21. They gave the company notice of what will be the third series of strikes since the beginning of September.

They are protesting plans to sell off the Metro system to private investors, which would lead to attacks on their pay and conditions.

UK defence workers set to strike

More than 800 workers employed by Defence Support Group (DSG) have voted for strike action over a derisory 1 percent pay offer. DSG provides services to the Ministry of Defence (MoD). It maintains, repairs, overhauls and upgrades military equipment for the MoD.

The employees, who are members of the Unite union, voted 85 percent for action short of a strike against the pay offer and 75 percent in favour of a strike. DSG is based at four main sites in the UK: Dorset, North Yorkshire, Shropshire and Wiltshire. DSG faces being sold off to the private sector.

A Unite official stated, “We will be announcing the dates for industrial action shortly, A Unite official stated, adding that in the meantime, “We urge ... management to get around the table to negotiate in a constructive and positive fashion to avert industrial action.”

London taxi drivers protest mayor’s action over taxi legislation

London taxi drivers organised by the Unite union held a one-hour rally outside the City Hall in London, the seat of London Mayor Boris Johnson. They say that under his auspices, bodies set up to regulate the taxi service in the capital and maintain its high standards have been outsourced. This has led to a decline in services and increased costs to the drivers.

They were also protesting the tolerance of some operators using the Uber app to book private hire cars and undermine the service they provide.

Members of second Irish teachers union vote for action against education changes

The Association of Secondary Teachers’ Ireland, representing 17,000 teachers, has voted overwhelmingly in favour of striking against the Irish government’s planned changes to secondary education.

The vote follows a vote by the Teachers’ Union of Ireland in favour of

strike action against the changes. The main point of opposition is the government's intention to scrap the Junior Cert exams, replacing them with a teacher-graded Junior Cycle Student Award. Teachers are concerned they will not be given the resources necessary to be able to carry out such an assessment.

The unions have already agreed to some changes, such as the new English syllabus with which they are already cooperating. There are no plans to immediately strike pending the outcome of scheduled talks with Education Minister Jan O'Sullivan later this month.

Protest outside Spanish hospital treating Ebola infected nurse

Health care workers demonstrated outside the Carlos III hospital in Madrid on Tuesday, where a nurse who had been caring for two Spanish missionaries who returned to the country infected with the Ebola virus became infected herself. The two missionaries subsequently died.

The hospital staff were protesting cuts in budgets, staff and equipment at the hospital, which they say could have led to the nurse being exposed and succumbing to the virus. They were seeking an investigation into the incident and for the resignation of those responsible for cuts at the hospital, including the Spanish health minister.

Israeli union declares end to postal dispute

The Israeli Postal Service Workers' Union declared an end to their dispute on Tuesday, announcing a compromise agreement with the Ministry of Finance. At the end of last year, the Israeli Postal Service announced a series of cutbacks, including the loss of up to 2,000 jobs. The trade union federation Histadrut had carried out sympathy strikes in solidarity with the postal workers.

The union has declared a victory in ending the strike but the terms of the settlement do not appear to have been made public.

Strike warning against Israeli state companies

Histadrut, the Israeli trade union federation, declared a dispute Tuesday over government plans to privatise 11 state-owned companies involved in defence, transport and electric power production. They also declared a dispute over government plans to increase the royalties levied by the airport authority.

Under Israeli law, unions must declare an industrial dispute 14 days before any proposed industrial action to create a cooling-off period.

South African miners strike continues

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members on strike at Glencore mines in South Africa have added the demand of a 10 percent share of company profits to their demands. The Glencore miners are striking together with workers from Platchco mining services, a contractor working at Glencore.

On September 27, NUMSA members failed in their attempt to hand in a memorandum of demands at Glencore offices as management were not on hand to receive them.

The demand for profit sharing has been added to demands for a R5000 (US\$450) basic wage and improvements in several allowances, including 100 percent company-paid medical coverage. They are also calling for an end to discrimination against African women employed by the company. Further demands made are a 14 percent pay claim, the refiguring of shifts and grades and a large list of other workplace changes.

Nigerian teachers strike in Ikiti state

Teachers in Ikiti state came out on strike Tuesday coinciding with the start of the new education year. They are demanding the payment of their last two months' salaries and repayment of July deductions. Other civil servants in the state combined in the Joint Negotiating council went out on strike on October 2 over a similar issue.

South African food workers dispute continues

A strike by 200 Food and Allied Workers Union members, which began September 25, is continuing at the South African Crickley Dairy and Twizzy Bottling Company. They are demanding a 12 percent wage increase and a 10 percent night shift allowance.

The company had arbitrarily imposed a 5.5 percent increase. An attempt by the union to take the dispute to arbitration was unsuccessful.

Kenyan telecom workers bonus dispute

Around 1,000 Telkom Kenya employees came out on strike Wednesday in response to continued discrimination. They are striking over unequal payment of performance bonuses. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) held meetings with management last Friday and Monday of this week but could not resolve the dispute and so came out on strike.

The CWU say nonunion workers are paid a bonus amounting to between 50 and 75 per cent of their salaries, Sh30,000, (US \$340) to Sh1,000,000, (US\$11,200) whilst union members have only been given a flat rate Sh2,000 (US\$22) token bonus.

The union instructed its members to turn up at their workstations countrywide at 8 a.m. and boycott work.

Namibian shop workers in union recognition struggle

Seventeen hundred out a total of 3,000 Shoprite workers have left the Namibia's Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) and registered to join the Namibia Commercial and Catering and Allied Food Workers Union (NACCAFWU). However, the company continues to pay the workers' union dues into NAFAU's account and refuses to recognise NACCAFWU.

NACCAFWU has applied for a certificate of dispute and says there will

be a strike, either legal or illegal. The shop workers are on very poor pay, below the average for the industry, according to the unrecognised union.

The company terms the workers' employment as "permanent part-time employment" and if a worker complains they are told they are casual workers. Workers earn between ND 60 (US\$6) and ND 300 (US\$27) with no job description. The employees are demanding NACCAFWU is recognised as well as demanding improved wages, transport and housing allowances.



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