

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

31 October 2014

Europe

Strike of German Amazon staff

Staff working for Amazon in Germany, which is its second largest market after America, went on strike at the beginning of the week. Those taking part are members of the Verdi union. The German arm employs 9,000 permanent staff and 14,000 seasonal workers in nine distribution centres.

Staff in the company's distribution centres in Bad Hersfeld, Leipzig, Graben and Rheinberg were on strike Monday through to Wednesday, whilst staff at the Werne centre were on strike Monday and Tuesday.

The dispute is to protest the company's practice of dealing with workers in small groups or individually, often employing them on short-term contracts, and insufficient breaks, leading to stress and sickness. The main issue, however, is that Amazon workers in Germany are classified as logistic staff and are paid as such. Verdi argues they should be classified as retail staff who are paid at a higher rate.

A similar strike hit Amazon last month with 2,000 employees taking part, according to the union.

Firefighters in England set to strike for four days

Firefighters in England were set to begin a four-day strike Friday. It has been called by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and is the latest in a series of actions over the last 18 months by firefighters, who are opposing government attacks on their pension scheme.

Under the government's proposals firefighters who can currently retire at 55 will have to work until the age of 60 before receiving their pension. Other changes mean they will have to contribute more to the pension scheme, but in return have fewer benefits. Another concern is that currently firefighters have to pass a rigorous fitness test to work beyond 55. If the pension age is raised to 60, many firefighters fear they will have to leave work at 55 unable to pass the fitness test, but will have to wait five years before being entitled to draw their pension.

Leaders of Welsh firefighters called off the strike after the Welsh government made a "significant" proposal over the pension issue. No details were released but talks will proceed between FBU officials and the Welsh government representatives.

The FBU is also considering proposals put forward by the Scottish and Northern Ireland assemblies.

Waste recycling staff strike in Sheffield, England

Thirty employees belonging to the GMB union who staff five household waste recycling centres in the northern English city of Sheffield came out on strike Wednesday. The strike follows previous action by the group of workers.

The council-owned sites are run by The Green Company, which in turn subcontracts the waste management to the French-based transnational company Veolia. The dispute is over pay, working conditions and accusations of bullying by management.

March by Turkish miners from disaster pit to demand unpaid wages

Around 500 miners employed at the Soma coal mine in western Turkey have begun a 500 kilometre march from Soma to the Turkish capital, Ankara. They are protesting against unpaid wages.

Soma was the scene of Turkey's worst mining disaster in May of this year, when an explosion followed by a fire killed 301 miners at the pit. An official report accused the mine owners of negligence. There was no refuge chamber in the pit and workers were not provided with functioning gas masks.

Turkish coal miners feared drowned

Eighteen Turkish coal miners trapped when water flooded into the chamber where they were working are feared to have drowned. The mine is near the village of Pamuklu in central Anatolia. The inflow of water happened around 12 noon on Tuesday, flooding the chamber to a depth of 50 metres, 350 metres beneath the surface. A pump was brought in to pump out the water, but the level continued to rise. It was only after 15 hours of pumping that the level began to go down.

A miner who managed to get out in time before being overcome by the water told the press: "This is the third flood at the mine. It wouldn't happen if necessary precautions were taken."

Middle East

Striking Israeli port workers ordered to return to work

Port workers at Haifa came out on strike Tuesday morning, but

following a National Labour Court ruling, the Haifa Port Workers committee announced they would be returning to work on Wednesday.

The strike coincided with a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to mark the start of the building of a new port at Ashdod. The new port, along with one planned for Haifa, will be privately owned and will compete with the currently state-owned ports at Ashdod and Haifa. The construction of the new ports is being undertaken by the Beijing-based construction firm China Harbour. The work is expected to take about seven years.

Twenty-four hour strike hits Morocco

The three main Moroccan trade union bodies, the UMT, CDT and FDT called a 24-hour general strike on Wednesday. Affiliated unions in the public and private sector took part in the strike. The unions called the strike in response to the government's refusal to include the unions in discussions over wages, working conditions, pensions and other matters.

The Moroccan government is under pressure from the IMF to row back on subsidies and concessions it made in 2011 in response to the Arab Spring movement.

Africa

Ghanaian public sector pension dispute

Ghanaian public services employees went out on strike October 22 over a government proposal to farm out a second tier pension scheme to the Pension Alliance Trust. The workers in health and education unions have come together under the Forum for Public Sector Registered Pension Schemes and claim that the government has no legal right to put their pension into the private company.

The 12 unions with around 800,000 members are demanding their pensions be managed by a union recognised pension organisation.

In a separate dispute, private sector unions are threatening to strike on November 30 if their members' pension contributions currently held in trust by the Bank of Ghana are not handed over to the pension providing company. They are demanding the scheme be implemented immediately in line with pension requirements to come into operation early next year.

South African postal strike in third month

The strike at the South Africa Post Office continues into its third month despite the Communications Workers Union's (CWU) revision of its 15 percent pay demand.

The CWU has reduced its original pay claim of 15 percent down to 8 percent to be introduced over a four-month period, as well as proposing a 16-month period to integrate casual workers onto the company books as opposed to the 30-month plan by the Post Office.

Strike of South African diamond miners

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) went on strike at Diamond Corp's Lace mine in Free State, South Africa, on October 30. AMCU is demanding two full-time union representatives be funded by the company. The company argues that with only 260 men employed at the mine it does not warrant the cost of two full-time AMCU officials.

The company said they will invoke the no work, no pay, rule against workers involved in the Mediation and Arbitration approved strike. Other unions and contractors were continuing to work at the development site. Sixteen strikers were injured by rubber bullets while being attacked by the police.

Ghanaian oil workers in pay parity dispute

Forty Ghanaian oil workers operating the Floating Production Storing and Offloading (FPSO) vessel for MODEC Ghana Limited have gone on strike for parity pay. They have taken action because expatriate workers are paid up to 800 percent more than them, and enjoy better conditions for the same work. Oil production on the FPSO Kwame Nkrumah operating at Jubilee Fields is at a standstill. A workers' representative said workers would not be going back to work until their grievances are met.

Kenyan health workers strike against non-payment of wages

Staff at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Kenya were due to strike on Tuesday after the government failed to release the Sh5.2 billion (US\$58 million) funds to enable the hospital to function. The 3,200 Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN) had issued a warning notice three weeks ago. The hospital is unable to pay wages and purchase vital equipment.

KNUN has accused the government of supporting a group around the suspended chairman of the union, Jophina Musindi, who is committed to calling off a planned national strike next month. Musindi is quoted as saying the planned strike will not take place. Seth Panako, the functioning secretary general, said that if the government wants to know who's in charge of the union, they will find out if they fail to implement the collective bargaining agreement.

Strike of Zimbabwean medics

As junior doctors entered their second day of strike action on Wednesday, the Zimbabwean government were preparing to deploy armed forces doctors into the hospitals. Health and Child Care Permanent Secretary Brigadier Gerald Gwinji said Zimbabwe National Army, Air Force of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Republic Police were on standby awaiting to be deployed in the hospitals. The junior doctors are demanding their wages be increased from US\$282 to US\$1,200. Senior doctors are providing cover for emergency cases.



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