

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 November 2014

Europe

## Firefighters in England strike

Firefighters in England held 96-hours of strike action starting October 31 in protest at government changes to pensions and the retirement age. The plans are part of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's austerity measures, which have targeted public-sector workers. Firefighters say the measures will effectively raise the retirement age from 55 years to 60 years and undermine their pension rights.

The action is the longest by firefighters so far in their 18 month dispute. Strikes in Wales were called off after the Welsh Assembly agreed to talks.

One firefighter from Buckinghamshire, Ricky Matthews, was sacked after he failed to work a shift during the strike. The Fire Service claims that Matthews was involved in an "illegal" action, after the Fire Brigades Union made an "administrative error" when it gave management the required seven days notice of action.

The FBU is required by law to provide a list of union members involved in strike action, the Buckinghamshire fire service said, and had failed to do so. The action was therefore deemed illegal, and Matthews dismissed for failing to report to work.

## Walkout by staff at Belgian football headquarters

Last Friday, staff walked off the job at the headquarters of the Royal Belgian Football Association (KBVB), in an unofficial strike. It was a response to the summary dismissal of two members of staff the previous day.

KBVB, faced with making cuts of 1.3 million euro (\$1.6 million), had dismissed the two staff claiming the jobs were no longer necessary because of technological developments. Talks between unions and management have been scheduled for this week to discuss the matter.

## Belgian rail union announce action

After walking out of talks the union representing Belgian rail workers, CGSP, has announced it will be holding a series of strikes against the national Belgian rail operator, SNCB. The strikes are due to take place between November 7-23 over pay and conditions. SNCB has rejected the union's pay claim. To date, no details of the strikes have been given.

## Poor response to strike call by French CGT union

The CGT called for a 24-hour strike of its members in the rail transport and energy sectors beginning late Monday evening. The companies affected were the French state-owned rail operator SNCF and the nuclear power supplier EDF. The strike had been called in response to government public-sector spending cuts. Power workers did walk out at several power plants leading to an 8 percent cut in power capacity. However, according to press reports, support for the strike amongst rail workers was low, with around 97 percent of services operating normally.

## German train drivers begin sixth bout of strikes

The 20,000 German train drivers represented by the minority union GDL began five days of strike action on Wednesday against the national rail operator Deutsche Bahn. Freight train drivers came out on strike Wednesday afternoon followed by passenger train drivers early Thursday morning. Their strike is due to finish in the early hours of Monday morning.

It is the sixth round of strikes by the small GDL union that is seeking a five percent pay increase for drivers, a two hour cut in the working week from 37 to 35 hours and the right to represent 17,000 train stewards. According to a leading German economic research institute the strike will cost the economy 100 million euro (\$126 million) a day.

## Recycling workers in UK city of Sheffield begin indefinite strike

Staff at five recycling centres in the northern English city of Sheffield began an indefinite strike on Saturday. They are members of the GMB union. The five sites are run by the Green Company which, in turn, subcontracts the waste management centres to French-based transnational company Veolia.

The issues include bullying by management, inadequate toilet and washing facilities and overtime pay rates.

## Athens protest against austerity

Thousands of protesters demonstrated in Syntagma Square in Athens on Saturday against the ongoing austerity measures of the Greek government.

It was organised by the Communist Party-affiliated trade union body PAME. They put forward several demands including a 751 euro (\$940) monthly minimum wage, free health care and abolition of the single-property tax amongst others.

### **March of Italian steelworkers in Brussels to oppose job cuts**

Around 200 employees of Acciai Speciali Terni (AST) stainless steel plant in the Italian city of Terni marched through the Belgian capital of Brussels on Saturday. They are members of the three industrial union bodies, FIOM, FIM and UILM. The march was part of their campaign against the management plans of AST owner, ThyssenKrupp, to lay off 500 workers at the Terni site as part of a cost cutting restructuring programme.

### **Portuguese airline staff begin series of walkouts**

Cabin crew staff working for Portuguese airline carrier, TAP, held a 24-hour strike on October 30. TAP was forced to cancel some 50 percent of its planned flights. The cabin crew are members of the SNPVAC union which says the company is pushing through a systematic attack on working conditions. The Portuguese government is preparing to sell the state-owned airline. Further 24-hour walkouts are to be held on November 30 and December 2. According to SNPVAC, 90 percent of TAP staff took part in the strike.

### **Health care staff in Serbia hold one-day strike**

Tens of thousands of Serbian health care staff went on strike Wednesday against government plans to cut public-sector wages by 10 percent as ordered by the International Monetary Fund in return for renewed credit facilities. Around 80 percent of the 160,000 employees took part in the strike. Medical staff provided emergency cover during the strike.

### **Welsh health staff set date for action**

Health staff in Wales, who recently voted by a margin of four-to-one in favour of strike action, will strike on Monday, November 10. The action follows the rejection of an £160 (\$260) annual pay rise made by the Welsh government. They are members of the Unison union.

The staff, comprising nurses, occupational therapists, porters, paramedics and others, will strike between 8:30 a.m. and 12 noon on Monday, followed by four days of action short of strike action.

### **London bus drivers prepared to strike over pay parity**

A consultative ballot of 7,200 bus drivers, members of the Unite union

indicated a 96 percent majority in favour of taking action of parity pay. Around 24,000 bus drivers are employed by 17 different bus companies within the Transport of London area. Pay varies between £17,000 (\$27,100) and £25,000 (\$40,000) Unite is seeking to establish a collective negotiating forum to cover the 17 companies.

Middle East

### **Iranian journalists call for release of photojournalist**

A letter signed by 129 journalists has been sent to government authorities calling for the release of the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) photojournalist Arya Jafari. He, along with two colleagues, had been arrested when covering a protest against several cases of acid attacks against women in the city of Isfahan. His two colleagues were subsequently released but Jafari remains in custody.

### **Iranian gas project workers pay protest**

A hundred workers on the Southern Pars Oil and Gas projects downed tools October 29 to protest non-payment of four months overdue wages. They represent 2,000 workers employed by 10 contracting companies on the project.

### **Unofficial strike by Israeli airport staff**

Flights at Ben Gurion airport were delayed on Sunday when Israeli Airports Authority employees called an unofficial strike. They were protesting plans by the Finance Ministry's decision to charge NIS 700m (\$184 million) in royalties on the Airport Authority's proceeds. The staff returned to work following intervention by the labour union body Histadrut.

Africa

### **Sudanese doctors protest low pay**

In Central Darfur, doctors and health workers from two displaced person camps have gone on strike protesting low salaries. The doctors and health workers informed the Sudanese American Medical Association that the strike would take place on Sunday until Tuesday at the health centres at Hamidiya and Tayeba camps. The workers on strike include medical assistants, nurses, pharmacists, midwives, nutrition workers, and administrators of vaccinations in the camps.

### **Nigerian aviation staff strike warning**

Aviation staff at the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency have posted a 21-day strike warning notice with the employer over pay and

outstanding allowances.

The Nigerian Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) demanded that all outstanding issues regarding air traffic controllers pay and allowances be settled by November 3. They also requested a review of allowances paid to their members at the Nigerian College of Aviation and Technology. The union said a review of controller's allowances has been pending before the National Salaries, Income and Wages Commission in 2010.

NATCA was opposing a non-trained air traffic controller taking the post of airspace manager and is also demanding improvements of its training facilities.

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### **Protest by Nigerian steelworkers**

Steelworkers at Midland Rolling Mills in Abeokuta, Nigeria protested against poor working conditions on Tuesday. The steelworkers brandished placards outside the company gates with their demands: "Upgrade in all allowances," "Implement Annual productivity package for all workers," "No more casual; casual should be upgraded to trainee," "Approve staff workers unionism," "Implement night allowance," and "Prompt medical benefit."

Workers displayed hands with lost fingers saying that these injuries are ignored and their representative said many appeals to management have been made but had also left unanswered. The personnel manager arrived with a police escort promising the workers their grievances will be considered.

### **Nigerian street cleaners protest**

Workers responsible for sweeping the streets in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria gathered in their hundreds to protest the non-payment of their wages this week. Their monthly income of N8000, (\$48) has not been paid for the last three months. The street cleaners, who are going hungry, are composed, to a large degree, of widows with children. They have to keep their children off school because they cannot pay fees

### **Strike of Zimbabwean medics continues**

Zimbabwean hospital doctors are continuing their strike into the second week. The striking doctors came out on strike against deplorable working conditions and pay. The doctors have gone out on strike throughout the country for an increase in pay from \$282 to \$1200 a month, an increase of housing allowance from \$250 to \$350 and the ability to buy a car duty free. The Ministry of health has offered an on-call allowance of \$10 an hour, up from 35 cents and a new risk allowance, but the doctors have said they will only accept this if put in writing. Military doctors, senior staff and nurses are covering for the 300 doctors out on strike.



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