

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 November 2014

Europe

Walkout by oil refinery staff in North East England

Around 450 contract staff walked off the job Monday and Tuesday at the Philips 66 oil refinery at South Killingholme, North Lincolnshire over safety fears. A gas leak at the plant last week led to two employees being admitted to hospital.

The GMB union is seeking talks with management to raise the safety concerns of workers.

Food production staff in North West England vote for action

Workers at the Jacobs biscuit factory in Aintree, Liverpool—part of United Biscuits—are to strike, having voted by an 84 percent majority for action. The plant employs hundreds of workers who are represented by the GMB union.

The threat of strike action was triggered by a letter from United Biscuits management to all its Aintree employees saying it intended to suspend the current company sick pay scheme with immediate effect. It advised the staff that the company was looking to transfer production from Aintree.

United Biscuits was bought out last week by Turkish-based Yildiz Holding, making the company the third-largest biscuit manufacturer in the world. According to GMB, the company is looking to transfer production to another part of the UK or abroad.

Strike by Welsh health workers called off/subhead]

A planned four-hour strike by health staff in Wales on Monday, followed by a work to rule for the rest of the week, was called off.

The majority of the workers are members of the UNISON union. They were due to strike against the low pay rise offer of £160 (\$260) a year. The Welsh Government Health Ministry has promised £187 (\$295). UNISON immediately called off the action, saying the deal was a “significant offer.”

Mass rally of Italian public-sector workers

Around 100,000 Italian civil servants took to the streets and marched through Rome last Saturday. Representatives of all the civil service unions took part. Their demands included new contracts, which have not been renewed for several years and a substantial pay rise for the three million civil servants. Union leaders are threatening a general strike next month.

Some on the march carried effigies of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi but with an elongated nose parodying Pinocchio, because of his broken promises over new contracts. Unemployment in Italy is at its highest level since the 1970s at over 12 percent and over 40 percent for youth.

Hunger strike at Belarus tractor factory

Four employees at a tractor parts plant in the Eastern Belarusian city of Babruisk were sacked last week. They are members of the Belarusian Independent Union and say their dismissal was an attack on the union.

They went on hunger strike and rallied outside the Babruisk city council building on Monday to appeal to the mayor for support. On Tuesday, some of the strikers, along with two journalists, were arrested as they made their way to the tractor plant. They were warned that they could be liable for fines for taking unauthorised strike action.

Cypriot workers demonstrate against unsafe working conditions

Workers held a demonstration last Friday, November 7 in the village of Yeri. They were protesting against unsafe working conditions, the lack of safety measures or protocols in workplaces throughout Cyprus.

The demonstration was sparked by the death the previous day of a 36-year-old Bulgarian working as a refuse collector. He was killed after being hit by the refuse truck being driven by one of his colleagues.

Slovenian rally against privatisation

Around 500 trade unionists rallied in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana on Monday to protest government plans to privatize state-owned companies.

Middle East

Israeli health insurance fund staff walk out

Dentists and other staff working for the private health insurance fund Meuhedet walked out on Sunday. It was prompted by Meuhedet management's decision to renege on an agreement reached with the Histadrut labour organisation.

As a result of Meuhedet's U-turn, dentists will receive a lower salary and dental technicians will lose status and will be on worse terms and conditions. Meuhedet and Histadrut signed a new collective agreement in February, but it did not include dental services staff. After intensive negotiations, the health fund company did agree in principle that the new agreement would include dental staff but then reversed their decision.

General strike in response to Israeli shooting

The majority of Arab cities and towns in the Negev region of Israel were closed down by a general strike Sunday. Most shops and services were closed down. The strike, organised by the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, was in response to the shooting death of 22-year-old Khair al-Din Rouf Hamdan from Kafr Kanna the previous day.

Arrest order of Egyptian medical workers

An arrest warrant was issued last Sunday for five medical workers who have been on strike at the Alexandria University Hospital since November 5.

The authorities are blaming the death of two patients on the strike action.

The medical staff began their indefinite strike to demand the hospital set a minimum wage and to pressure the Finance Ministry to begin distributing a 30 percent allowance that had previously been agreed. The Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services voiced support for the strikers and called for charges against them to be held in abeyance pending an investigation.

Rally by Iraqi oil workers

Last Friday, around 2,000 oil workers organised by the Southern Oil Workers Committee, held a rally in Basra. They were protesting the government's refusal to negotiate over skills training, higher pay for doing hazardous work and for the creation of jobs for the unemployed.

Africa

Strike by Ebola health workers in Sierra Leone

Over 400 health workers at a clinic in south Sierra Leone treating Ebola patients went on strike Wednesday in protest at the government renegeing on a promise to pay a weekly hazard payment of \$100.

Strikers include nurses, porters and cleaners. Although international staff work at the clinic they are not able keep the centre open. The government agreed to pay the bonus when the clinic in Bandajuma, Bo, the only treatment centre in the South, was established, but it has not been

paid since September.

South African shop workers in dispute

South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) members working at Freshmark, a delivery company owned by Shoprite-Checkers, have gone on strike demanding a 15 percent wage increase and a return to central bargaining. They refused the 8.5 percent pay increase imposed on Checkers employees.

SATAWU accuses the company of union-busting and attempting to divide the employees by offering casual workers double-digit pay increases. Pickets are out at the Centurion, Durban and Cape Town depots.

Nigerian health workers take action

The Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) a combination of four Nigerian health unions began an indefinite strike on Wednesday. There are many issues outstanding, including non-implementation of salary increases which should have been upgraded in January.

A JOHESU spokesperson said no circular has been issued, let alone increases paid, and there was no provision for the increase in the November budget.

At the same time, the Medical and Health Workers Union (MHWU) went on strike across Nigeria in protest of pay arrears, poor working conditions and for increased allowances. The strike shut down offices of the National Agencies for Food and Drug Administration and closed all the offices at seaports, land ports and airports. The workers say they will only return to work when their 2012 and 2013 salary arrears are paid.

Ghanaian oil workers face legal sanctions over industrial action

Workers operating an oil production and storage (FPSO) vessel off the coast of Ghana, involved in a sit-in last month, have been threatened with legal action to recover the cost from their action.

MODEC, the company threatening prosecution of the workers, carries out engineering, procurement, construction, installation, operation and maintenance of floating production systems. This also includes Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessels and Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) vessels.

The oil workers staged a sit-in demanding an end to the huge difference between expatriate income and Ghanaian workers' wages carrying out the same tasks. The 27 workers on the FPSO vessel, Kwame Nkrumah, have been sacked, leading to calls for the strike to be expanded nationwide across the entire energy industry.

Mauritian sugar workers to strike

Mauritian sugar workers threatened to go on strike Wednesday if their claim for a forty percent increase was not met. The companies have

offered just 8.5 percent.

The government has appealed to the workers not go on strike, but to accept the nomination of an independent referee to resolve the dispute. The government has expressed concern that the dispute will affect the general election on December 10.

Strike of Sudanese health staff protest police attack

Health workers at Khartoum Teaching Hospital went on strike November 6 in protest at being attacked by state forces. Several union members of the health and medical unions were detained for three days.

On October 30 a demonstration by staff at the hospital was violently attacked by police, injuring 12 protesters. The demonstration was opposing the closing of the dialysis department. Police used tear gas and batons to disperse the sit-in.

Malawi court staff protest

Support staff at Malawi courts went on strike this week in Blantyre to protest the refusal of their employers to implement a wage settlement previously agreed with the government.

Blantyre support staff offices are under lock-and-key and are at a standstill. All judicial support staff workers have been called to join the strike across Malawi. The workers are complaining that a government agreed pay increase for civil servants has been implemented, but they have been excluded.



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