

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 September 2015

Pay protest by Hungarian health care staff

Around 20 health care workers blocked one of the main bridges in Budapest for about 15 minutes early one morning last week. They held up traffic, allowing only buses to move.

The workers displayed posters protesting low pay for health workers that drive many of them to seek employment abroad. Police eventually ended the protest, charging eight of the protesters with traffic violations.

Irish rail unions threaten walkout

Talks between the Irish national rail carrier, Iarnrod Eireann and the unions representing train drivers, the National Bus and Rail Union and the Services Industrial Professional & Technical Union broke down this week, leading to the possibility of strikes by train drivers.

It followed the company's refusal to consider rewarding drivers for a past productivity deal which saw big increases in drivers' workloads.

In an agreement brokered in September of last year under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission, Iarnrod Eireann had agreed that the issue of increased productivity could be revisited at a future date. However, in the recent talks, the company is saying it is losing €1 million a month and is not in a position to reward past productivity gains.

A joint meeting of a committee representing drivers from the two unions is due next week.

Irish care staff dispute

Around 400 care workers employed by the voluntary organisation Brothers of Charity & Ability West, in the Galway and Roscommon area of Ireland, began working strictly to contract Tuesday of this week with plans to escalate the action in the future. The workers look after people with learning difficulties, and the organisation supports around 500 people.

The issue is over "twilight payments" for anti-social hours that some health care staff receive. The payments began 10 years ago, but two grades of staff, social care workers and social care leaders have only been getting the payments since the beginning of this year. A ruling by the Labour Relations Commission in June this year recommended the care staff should be paid retrospective payments for the three years of 2012 to 2014.

Unions representing care staff have called for the Health Minister, Leo Varadkar to intervene.

Strike planned by rail staff in UK town of Blackpool

Rail staff, members of the National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport Workers (RMT) at the north west England coastal resort of Blackpool are due to begin a 48-hour strike starting midnight today. They are protesting the dismissal of a colleague, Chad Vickers following a disciplinary process.

The RMT says there is no evidence of misbehaviour to warrant his dismissal. Allegations against Vickers were passed to the police, who found no basis to act against him.

UK National Gallery strike continues

The strike by some 200 staff at the prestigious National Gallery in London's Trafalgar Square has entered its second month. The all-out strike is over the privatisation of their posts.

Around 300 gallery jobs were hived off to private security firm Securitas in August. The firm is due to take over in November. The striking staff, members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), are demanding that they retain their current pay and conditions when employed by Securitas.

French toilet attendants fight for their jobs

Eleven female public toilet attendants, known as "dames pipi", employed in five tourist hotspots in Paris were thrown out of their jobs on June 30. They are aged between 45 and 70 and some of them had worked as attendants for many years. On June 30 the contract for the public toilets was transferred to 2theloo, a Dutch company.

Francoise, one of the attendants, told the press: "One morning I received a call from 2theloo telling me not to go to work because they were refurbishing the toilets. A few days later, a colleague saw we had been replaced by two men."

Under French labour law, 2theloo should have taken on the 11 attendants. The firm argues that it provides a completely different service, describing it as a "luxury concierge service", charging for the previously free service and offering "designer restrooms" with attached shops.

For the last six weeks, the 11 sacked attendants have been demonstrating each day outside the toilets in Montmartre. They have also begun legal proceedings through the labour courts.

Egyptian social security staff protest civil service law

Staff from the Egyptian national authority for social security held a demonstration last Saturday opposing the civil service law enacted in March. Under the act, bonuses have been limited. It also gives more power to managers to determine their employees' pay rates and promotion prospects, leading to accusations of discrimination against employees who do not curry favour.

Other government workers are expected to join a demonstration by tax authority employees on Saturday to protest against the newly enacted civil service law.

Lebanese public sector staff strike

Lebanese public sector unions came out on strike at 11 a.m. local time to coincide with the "National Dialogue" scheduled for the same time in the parliament building.

A Union Coordination Committee (UCC), which includes various public sector workers' unions along with the public school teachers' union, called the strike. The UCC represents around 17,000 employees.

The strikers joined with "You Stink" demonstrations, sparked by the mountains of rubbish that have built up after the government failed to negotiate a new contract for waste collection and disposal. The scope of the demonstrations quickly widened into protests about the provision of basic services such as electricity, water and a host of other grievances including government corruption.

Strike at South African fruit growing farm

Around 1,000 fruit farmworkers employed at South Africa's Ceres Fruit Growers in Cape Town, members of the Food and Allied Workers Union, came out on strike Tuesday. The union is demanding a 12 percent pay rise while the company offered only six percent. They are also complaining that the bonus scheme benefits only management, thus discriminating against their members.

Kenyan nurses protest

Nurses in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi began a go-slow on Monday to protest against discrimination, late salaries and poor working conditions. They are also protesting against nurses in the same job category being paid different rates. The county government has declared the go-slow illegal.

Striking nurses at Kerogoya County hospital in Kenya were attacked by "intoxicated youth" according to the nurses. Several of the striking nurses who had gathered at the hospital were injured. A nurse's union representative accused the county government of hiring militia to intimidate the strikers.

Supreme Court rules Kenyan teachers' action illegal

A two-week-old strike by teachers in Kenya is continuing, even though the government regards it as illegal.

The teachers are demanding an agreed pay increase of between 50-60 percent must be paid. A Supreme Court ruling supported the unions and ruled the government should pay the increase. The government has since flouted the ruling, leaving it in contempt of court.

The government went on to get a court ruling declaring that the lack of notice given to the government by the unions rendered the strike illegal. The two teachers unions are appealing on the basis that the right to strike is constitutional irrespective of a 2007 ruling that the unions must give notice of action.

Strike of government workers in Nigerian state of Ebonyi

Nigerian Ebonyi State workers began a seven-day warning strike last Friday. They are demanding the State governors respect an earlier agreement in April, backdated to February, to pay new wage levels.

Nigerian road sweepers demonstrate over wage arrears

Nigerian road sweepers in Lagos State demonstrated on Monday at the legislators offices over wages arrears of five months. They used to be employed by the Minister of the Environment but since being transferred onto the books of the Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) have experienced problems getting their due wages.

The sweepers are usually paid N12, 000 (\$60) with supervisors getting N20,000 (\$100) a month. LAWMA maintains payment to its original workforce but refuses to pay the transferred workers. Midwives are also suffering up to 12 months' outstanding wages after being transferred to Lagos State.



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