

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 October 2015

Europe

Protest rally of German hospital staff

Around 7,000 hospital workers attended a rally on September 23 in Berlin, organised by the medical union DKG. It was called to protest German government proposals that would financially penalise hospitals offering “poor” care and would lead to a reduction in hospital beds.

They were also protesting the lack of staff in hospitals. According to the Ver.di union, nationwide there are around 160,000 unfilled vacancies within the hospital system.

Bus drivers strike in Welsh capital

More than 500 bus drivers working for Cardiff Bus began a 48-hour strike Thursday. The drivers, members of the Unite union, are seeking a 5 percent pay rise.

The action coincides with Rugby World Cup fixtures at the Millennium Stadium on Thursday and Friday.

Maltese bus drivers hold one-day strike

Bus drivers organised by the General Workers’ Union (GWU) held a one-day strike September 25 in pursuit of a 30-minute break every six hours, a pay increase, a fixed day off and introduction of a new shift pattern.

The strike began at 4 a.m. and finished at 11 p.m. The GWU stated that Spanish-owned Malta Public Transport (MPT) had only been able to run 2 to 3 percent of its normal service, in spite of a court ruling declaring the union should comply with a legal requirement to offer a 50 percent service.

Following the strike, MPT agreed to offer a 15-minute break after six hours (previously, breaks had been for five minutes), but the other issues are unresolved.

UK brewery workers at Carlsberg’s Northampton plant protest pay freeze

Around 200 brewery workers employed by Carlsberg at its plant in Northampton began an overtime ban and work to rule from midnight Wednesday.

They are protesting Carlsberg’s decision to impose a pay freeze throughout its brewing empire. Members of the Unite union voted 77 percent for strike action and 89 percent for

action short of a strike. The union is currently limiting the action to an overtime ban and work to rule.

Other grievances include plans to close the final pension salary scheme in April 2016 and the transfer of 30 percent of longer-term employees to an inferior scheme.

Strike threat by Belgian rail staff

Belgian rail workers in the capital Brussels have announced a 24-hour strike to begin 10 p.m. on Thursday, October 8.

The members of the public workers’ union, ACOD, are opposed to modernisation plans announced by the Belgian rail network, SNCB.

Although confined to the capital, the strike is expected to have a significant impact, as many rail services are routed through Brussels. The union has said it may hold further strikes later in the month.

Icelandic public sector workers vote to strike

Icelandic public sector workers in the Union of Public Servants (SFR) and the Paramedics Society of Iceland (SLFI) have voted by more than 85 percent to strike.

The dispute is due to the failure of government negotiators to reach an agreement over collective bargaining.

Around two thirds of staff entitled to vote took part in the ballot. They have organised a series of 48-hour strikes to begin mid-October and last until mid-November. Those due to take action include local government staff, tax office employees, customs officials, and workers in hospitals and health clinics.

Dublin tram drivers seek pay rise

Drivers and other staff working for Luas, the tram system in the Irish capital, Dublin, are seeking a 40 percent pay increase to bring them in line with train drivers on the national rail company.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) lodged the pay claim on behalf of the 170 Luas staff in a hearing of the Labour Court Tuesday. A previous hearing by an internal industrial relations tribunal failed to resolve the issue.

SIPTU said it would ballot its members for strike action if the Labour Court did not rule in favour of the drivers. A

decision is not expected for several weeks, and any strike action, if it goes ahead, would not take place until November or December. This could coincide with possible strike action by drivers working for Iarnrod Eireann seeking a pay rise to match increased productivity gains forced on rail staff.

Middle East

Wildcat action brings Jerusalem's tram system to a halt

Tram drivers employed in the Israeli city of Jerusalem brought the system to a standstill Tuesday when a third of drivers phoned in sick.

Tram workers are seeking a pay rise and objecting to plans by CityPass to increase the frequency of trams to one every six minutes.

CityPass, which manages the Jerusalem tram network, sought a court ruling on the de facto strike. The Jerusalem District Labour Court ruled the drivers should return to work immediately.

A strike in August, organised by the trade union body Histadrut, was ruled illegal by a labour court. The wildcat strike coincided with the Succot holiday, which sees increased use of the tram system. The Israeli Transportation Ministry was forced to arrange extra buses. The service returned to normal on Wednesday.

Africa

Kenyan teachers' strike continues

The strike by Kenyan teachers is continuing in defiance of a court judgement demanding a return to work. The court imposed a 90-day go-back-to work period supposedly to create an interval in which the issue of the unpaid 50 percent wage increase can be resolved.

Several court rulings have been made during the month-long strike. A ruling demanding the government pay the increase was ignored, putting the government in contempt of court.

Kenyan nurses forced to end dispute

Many nurses were forced to return to normal working at the Mama Lucy Kibaki Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya, last week. The hospital workers began a go-slow on September 7 over a list of demands including salary harmonisation, an end to discrimination, salary delays and poor working

conditions.

The nurses feared that they would lose their jobs like the 63 Pumwani Maternity Hospital nurses whose jobs were suspended for striking. The reinstatement of the Pumwani workers was part of their demands. Some nurses at the Kubaki hospital have ignored the demand to return to normal working, defying threats of discipline by the Nairobi Health Executive.

South African fruit growers' strike continues

A strike at the South African Ceres Fruit Growers (CFG) has entered its fourth week with no resolution in sight. Twelve hundred workers are seeking a 12.5 percent pay increase, with the company offering 7.5 percent.

The company has lost millions of rand as the workers have halted trucks from entering or leaving the plant by blocking the road. The Food and Allied Workers Union said it is prepared to reduce its demand to 10 percent if the company agrees to talks. It promised the "mother of all demonstrations" if CFG does not concede.

South African miners continue strike

South African miners at West Coast Sand Mines, outside of Vendral, have been striking since September 4 over wages and working hours. The company, which employs 250 workers, offered an 8 percent wage increase that the miners turned down. It is owned by Australia's Mineral Commodities (MRC) group and extracts minerals from sand. The miners are protesting wage cuts, racism and unfair dismissals.

Police armed with rifles have used tear gas against pickets trying to stop traffic entering the mine. One worker was run over by a vehicle driven by a manager and hospitalised. The South African Police Force has arrested 27 miners and community members who face charges of public violence.



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