Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 October 2015

National strike of Dutch ambulance staff

Dutch ambulance staff held a one-day nationwide strike Wednesday.

Around half of all 1,500 paramedics took part in the strike. They are members of the FNV union and responded to emergencies but did not carry out pre-arranged journeys to transport patients.

The strike follows rolling regional strikes taking place since May. They are seeking a 2.5 percent pay increase, more training and elimination of night shift work for those over 55 years of age.

Strike of London's National Gallery staff ends

After 111 days of strike action, gallery staff at London's National Gallery in Trafalgar Square returned to work on Monday.

The strike by members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) began after the gallery announced plans to privatise its visitor services.

The threatened privatisation has now taken place, with the Swedish-based security firm Securitas AB to take over the services in November, comprising two-thirds of the jobs. Management agreed to reinstate one of the staff, Candy Udwin, a union steward who was sacked during the dispute.

The deal ending the dispute will need ministerial approval and a ballot of PCS members before it can be sealed. PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka said in a press release, "We still do not believe privatisation was necessary but we will work with the new company and the gallery to ensure a smooth transition…"

Scottish medics rally in support of English colleagues

Around 100 Scottish junior doctors held a rally in George Square in Glasgow on Tuesday in support of their colleagues in England.

English junior doctors have held various protests against the plans by Tory Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt to bring in a contract for seven-day working that will eliminate current overtime payments for weekend and late evening work.

The proposed changes will only affect junior doctors in England, as the current contracts will be maintained for those working in Scotland and Wales.

The British Medical Association (BMA) is currently balloting its members over government plans to impose the changes. It is reported that 5,500 junior doctors joined the BMA in the space of a week to be able to oppose the new contract proposals.

Strike by Italian transport staff in Rome

Transport workers in Rome held a 24-hour strike October 2. The action was held to oppose plans by Rome authorities to privatise services and affected buses, trams and light rail services in the city.

The strikers were members of the USB union. Other unions who originally planned to take part bowed to city transport management pleas to call off their strike.

Greek food workers hold 24-hour strike

Greek food workers employed by Zavel held a 24-hour strike last Saturday, to protest wage arrears, planned layoffs and attacks on conditions.

Police responded by arresting leaders of the union. PAME, the trade union federation of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE), called for the release of those arrested. Workers employed by newspaper delivery agencies held a 24-hour strike earlier in the week.

Irish postal staff end strike

A strike by around 35 postal staff ended Monday after four days. The staff maintain automated mail sorting systems at four An Post (Irish mail company) mail centres, run by IO Systems under contract.

They are members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU). Workers struck after IO Systems unilaterally imposed a new rostering system that meant wages were cut by 22 percent. They returned to work after IO Systems withdrew the new rostering system, pending the results of talks with the CWU that began Tuesday.

The automated sorting centres are responsible for sorting the majority of Irish mail.

Irish train drivers announce strike date

Train drivers working for the Irish rail network, Iarnrod Eireann, have

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announced a three-hour strike October 23, the eve of a bank holiday weekend. They are seeking a pay rise to match productivity gains forced on rail staff.

The workers are members of the National Bus and Rail Workers Union and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union.

Go-slow by Maltese immigration officers

Immigration officers in Malta began a go-slow on Monday. The action included opening immigration booths 30 minutes later than normal, not wearing uniforms and refusing to answer the phone.

The dispute is over a regrading claim. It was called by the General Workers' Union (GWU), which has lodged an appeal in court. The government said it would only negotiate if the court case were suspended.

Croatian unions end teachers' strike

A weeklong strike by secondary teachers in Croatia ended October 2. Striking primary and university teachers had already ended their stoppage.

The secondary school teachers had been seeking a 4 percent pay increase. The government has made clear that no pay increase will be on offer.

Lebanese unions announce strike dates

Teaching and other unions announced they would hold a general strike on October 20, 26 and November 4 as part of their campaign for a wage increase.

The UCC has organised various strikes and other actions to demand parliament enact the wage scale originally agreed to by the government in 2012.

Nationwide strike in South Africa

The Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) held a 24-hour national strike Wednesday. COSATU called on all workers, apart from those in protected services, to join the strike.

The strike was part of an "International Day for Decent Work".

Strike of South African coal miners

South African coal miners have been out on strike since Sunday, October 4, demanding a substantial pay rise.

The Chamber of Mines, representing Glencore, Anglo American Coal and Exxaro claimed their offer represents 8.5 percent for the lowest-paid worker.

The National Union of Miners (NUM) and the Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU) have rejected the offer. Other smaller unions, generally representing skilled workers and supervisors, have accepted the offer.

The NUM is expected to bring out 30,000 miners, mainly from Witbank, the hub of the mining area.

Joint demonstration by South African academics and students

A demonstration of around 2,000 students, academics, outsourced workers and administrative staff took place Tuesday outside the University of Witwatersrand. It was called to oppose the outsourcing of support staff.

Similar demonstrations took place at the University of Johannesburg and Cape Town.

The protests were the start of a campaign by a student movement calling itself Oct6 against the outsourcing of jobs including cleaners, electricians and maintenance staff at universities.

Nigerian port workers walk out

Dockworkers downed tools at the Five Star Logistics Terminal in Nigeria, after a second worker was killed in less than two weeks.

Paul Ifah died when heavy-duty pipes rolled free, over their wood wedges, killing him instantly. The dock operators had been informed of the lack of safety measures. The Maritime Workers' Union of Nigeria warned that if the company does not implement safety measures they would put up pickets.

According to a union spokesman, only a few of the dock operators complied with safety requirements for dockworkers to carry out their duties safely.

Nigerian medics strike

Hospital doctors have begun a one-week warning strike at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital, Sokoto, Nigeria. The strike is over poor services and allowances.

The resident doctors say the services at the hospital are declining, regardless of the large sums of money the patients pay. Doctors accuse management of misusing resources.

The doctors' outstanding allowances should have been paid in response to an instruction by the federal government, after an agreement was reached and signed by doctors and hospital management.

Strike threat by Namibian fishermen

Namibian fishermen have threatened to strike on October 26 unless their employment conditions change.

On October 2, some 1,300 fishermen, representing 4,000 in the industry, packed out a meeting hall. They cited low wages and lack of benefits, such as medical aid, and working hours that do not comply with the

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Labour Act.

A spokesman for the seafarers said, “They only get about N6 ($0.4) per hour while they generate N11000 ($821) per hour for the fishing companies.”

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