

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 November 2015

Finnish postal workers begin strike

Thousands of Finnish postal workers began a strike at 4 p.m. Thursday, after talks between the Post and Logistics Union (PAU) and management broke down on Wednesday. The strike will affect postal services over the next seven days.

The stoppage is over plans by the state-owned postal service Posti to make redundancies and employ temporary staff. The Finnish government is seeking to push through restructuring, cutting pay and increasing job insecurity. Speaking prior to the failure of the negotiations, Posti CEO Heikki Malinen said, “[O]ur goal remains the same. Posti must modernise, and the rigidities of collective bargain agreements drawn up in the monopoly era must be dismantled.”

The strike will hit mail sorting and delivery in the capital region of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen, as well as Uusimaa on November 20 and November 23-25. Parcel delivery will be stopped nationally from November 19 to 21 and November 23 to 25. The delivery of newspapers will be halted in the capital region and Uusimaa on November 20-21, and November 23-25.

PAU also intends to hold strikes in December if the dispute is not resolved.

Greek hospital staff to take action

Greek state hospital staff are to strike two days next week—November 26 and 27.

The union POEDIN declared the strike to oppose the continuing rundown of hospitals due to understaffing and underfunding, caused by the austerity measures being imposed by the Syriza-led government. They are also protesting the use of private cleaning companies in the hospitals using cheap unregulated labour.

Protest of Irish teachers

Teachers organised by the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) held a protest Wednesday outside Leinster House, the Irish parliament building in the capital, Dublin. The event was in protest of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) bill currently being discussed in parliament.

The FEMPI bill is based on measures in the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) between the unions and the government. The TUI says it rejected the LRA. In part, the LRA provides for lower pensions and at

an increased cost to workers.

Library staff in UK capital walkout

Library staff in the Lambeth borough of London walked out in unofficial action on Wednesday. They were protesting plans by the Labour-controlled council to reduce the library service in the borough. The staff are members of the Unison union. The council was due to discuss the cuts to the library service at a council meeting being held the same night.

The walkout led to all 10 libraries across the borough being closed. The council admits its plans will lead to job losses and reduction of its library service. One of the proposals being considered is to give control of some of the libraries to Greenwich Leisure Limited, which will run them as gyms. Workers attended a protest Wednesday night outside the council building as it discussed the library proposals.

UK: Open University staff plan series of strikes

Plans by the prestigious distance-learning Open University (OU) to close regional centres are being opposed by OU staff, belonging to the University and College Union (UCU), who have planned a series of strikes.

The OU plans to close seven support centres in Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Gateshead, Leeds, London and Oxford. The closures will lead to hundreds of job losses.

The OU staff are holding a national strike on Wednesday, November 25, followed by 10 regional OU office strikes across the UK from the end of November through to December 11.

Industrial dispute closes Italy’s La Scala theatre

The opening night of a new ballet production of Kenneth MacMillan’s *Manon* had to be cancelled at Italy’s famous La Scala opera house in Milan last Thursday. The cancellation was a result of technicians at the theatre going on strike.

The technicians, members of the SLC-CGIL union, went on strike to protest staff shortages. An SLC-CGIL spokesman told the press: “This battle is not only about the stage technicians, who have been understaffed for months. It is up to everyone to oppose the company philosophy of

doing more with fewer resources.”

Workplace accidents rise in Spain due to precarious employment

Workplace accidents in Spain rose by nearly 7 percent in the first six months of this year compared to the same period in 2014. The CCOO trade union body attributes this to the rise in the temporary short-term workforce since labour reforms were introduced in 2012.

According to the CCOO, 25 percent of temporary contracts last fewer than seven days, leaving little opportunity for occupational safety training. Many workers faced so-called overexertion accidents. An *Equal Times* article of November 16 quotes an anonymous waitress: “Rather than having the two days off a week established in the collective agreement, we only had one, and we would often work 10 hours in a row. We wouldn’t even take the 30-minute break, and we would often eat standing up, even leaning on the rubbish bin.”

Protest by bus drivers in Egyptian capital

Bus drivers working for the Public Transportation Authority (PTA) in Cairo held a protest last Saturday. Rather than being under the auspices of the Cairo governorate PTA, they are demanding to be transferred to the Ministry of Transportation.

The drivers say they will enjoy improved pay and conditions if they were to be employed under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation rather than the PTA. According to the drivers, pensions under the Ministry of Transportation are worth 100 months’ salary rather than the 28 under the PTA; other benefits include improved health care.

Wildcat strike by Israeli rail workers

Rail workers in Israel held a lightning strike on Sunday afternoon, which led to the closing of the rail line between Hod Hasharon and Beer Sheva. The dispute arose over Israel Railways’ plans to unilaterally transfer the staff base from Lod to Beer Sheva, which rail staff argue would increase their working day to 14 hours.

Normal working resumed Monday after management met with employee representatives to discuss the transfer.

Moroccan unions announce general strike

Four union bodies in Morocco—the Moroccan Labour Union (UMT), the Democratic Labour Confederation (CDT), the General Union of Workers of Morocco (UGTM) and the Democratic Labour Federation (FDT)—have announced a general strike of public service and local authority workers for December 10.

They have also called a march on Sunday, November 29, in Casablanca and a rally in the same city on December 8. The strike and protests are in pursuit of improved pay and conditions.

Action by oil and gas workers in Oman called off

A strike of oil and gas workers in Oman to have taken place later this month has been called off. The strike, which is illegal under Omani law, had been called in response to increasing layoffs of oil and gas production employees as the price and demand for oil falls. In the recent period, some 1,600 Omanis working in the oil industry have been made redundant.

The planned strike was cancelled following ongoing talks between the unions and a ministerial committee, which considered a policy of firing expatriate workers first would be a solution.

South African parliamentary workers end strike

Striking workers at South Africa’s parliament returned to work Wednesday, having reached a tentative agreement. They came out on strike two weeks ago in a dispute over how bonuses are calculated. Parliament has agreed to consider their demand for an annual assessment.

A joint committee of Parliament and the National Education and Health Workers Union will look into how much an annual bonus payment will cost. Parliament’s Secretary said any agreement must be within existing spending limits and must not be at the expense of other programmes. Any money lost by striking workers would be repaid but will be deducted from future overtime payments.

Protest by Kenyan water workers

Kenyan water workers, members of the Kenya County Government Workers Union, began a go-slow Tuesday at the Nairobi Water and Sewage Company. They are demanding an outstanding Collective Bargaining Agreement be ratified by the company.

Tanzanian textile workers strike

Workers at the Tanzania China-Friendships Co. Ltd Textile mill, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, went on strike November 12. Some 1,200 millworkers are demanding a wage increase and better working conditions.

The government set the minimum wage at SH210,000 (US\$97) per month, which includes SH60,000 (US\$28) company allowance, in 2007, but the company employees are paid just SH100,000 (US\$46) per month.

The company claims the dispute is being dealt with through the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration, which was expected to rule Wednesday.

Nigerian university staff protest

Three Nigerian unions in the Joint Action Committee (JAC) at Calabar University blockaded the university entrances Friday of last week. The JAC comprises the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, the

National Association of Academic Technologists and the Non-Academic Staff Union.

The frustrated protesters were demanding payment of earned allowances, off-duty allowances for security staff and overtime outstanding for 10 months.



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