

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 November 2015

## Strikes by Finnish post staff continue

The strike by Finnish postal workers continued this week. It began November 19 when 4,000 members of the Post and Logistics Union (PAU) walked out. They are protesting plans by the state-owned Posti to push through restructuring measures, which will cut pay and increase job insecurity.

The major impact of the strike at the beginning of the week was felt in the capital, Helsinki, which accounts for half the country's mail. From Wednesday on the impact widened as postal workers in other regions took action.

Starting November 30, members of the Transport Workers' Union will refuse to handle post entering the country through the ports. Several other unions are considering joining the action.

## Twenty-four hour strike by French power workers

Power workers employed by the state owned EDF held a 24-hour strike beginning 9pm local time Monday. They are members of the FNME-CGT union. The strike protested austerity measures being imposed in the industry and pushed demands for 200 a month pay increase across the board.

EDF runs the 58 nuclear power stations in France supplying the overwhelming majority of electric power in the country. Due to the strike, France had to import power from the UK and Spain.

## German air cabin crew strike

Cabin crew working for the German airline Lufthansa began a second day of strikes Thursday. The members of the cabin crew union UFO also plan to strike on November 30. The stoppages follow a week-long walkout by Lufthansa crew earlier this month.

Flights operated by Lufthansa subsidiaries such as Germanwings are not impacted. The walkouts are part of a long running dispute in which Lufthansa is trying to reduce pension compensation. It is planning to end transitional payments that allow both pilots and flight attendants to retire at 55 and receive payments until they reach the legal retirement age.

## Greek workers strike to oppose Syriza's austerity measures

Protests by Greek workers are continuing over the ongoing austerity measures of Alexis Tsipras' Syriza government. Members of the ambulance service, EKAB, staged a three-hour strike Tuesday to protest the lack of ambulances and deteriorating state of the current fleet.

On Thursday and Friday state hospital workers, organised in the POEDIN union, struck against the rundown of hospitals, understaffing and underfunding.

Public transport workers in Athens announced their intention to hold a 24-hour strike during the first 10 days of December to protest the underfunding of public transport in the city.

## UK driving examiners in further strikes

Staff employed by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), who carry out driving tests and vehicle examinations, are to follow up their two days of strikes last week with further action next week.

They are protesting plans by the DVSA to extend the working day and increase the number of tests examiners are expected to carry out. They are members of Public and Commercial Services union (PCS). Its 1,600 members at 350 sites across the UK voted by very large majorities on a two-thirds turn out to strike.

Regionally based strikes will take place on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday followed by an all-out strike of all regions on Friday.

## Planned strike by Icelandic smelter workers to go ahead

Between 300 and 400 employees at the Rio Tinto aluminium smelter in Straumsvik are set to strike on December 2. The unions involved have drawn up plans to close down the smelter units in a planned manner.

The staff are members of six unions and are opposed to plans by the company to introduce contract labour. Negotiations between the unions and the company have failed to result in an agreement.

## Irish water workers vote against redundancies

Local authority staff providing services for Irish Water have voted by majorities in excess of 80 percent to strike or take action short of striking. They oppose plans by Irish Water to make around 1,500 of the workers redundant by the year 2021.

Employees in the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union

and the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union voted to take action. The unions have yet to make any statement as to when a strike, if it goes ahead, will take place.

Workers organised by the Impact union are currently conducting a ballot over the same issue.

### **Dutch port workers vote to strike**

Port workers in Rotterdam in the FNV Havens union have voted in favour of a series of 24-hour strikes to take place in December and January.

The strikes are to protest at the failure of talks, ongoing since April, with various employers at the container terminal. Employees are seeking guarantees of no job losses in the period up to 2024. They fear that two new planned highly automated container terminals at the port will lead to the loss of around 700 jobs. Currently around 4,000 are employed at the port.

### **Energy smart meter workers at UK firm to resume strike**

Smart meter installation staff employed by EDF Energy in east London are to hold a five-day strike beginning November 30. The approximately 70 workers are responsible for installing smart meters in supermarkets. The Unite union suspended a previous strike following negotiations, but the union accused management of bad faith and the strike will now resume.

Workers have a number of grievances, the main one being plans by the company to increase working hours including Saturday working hours. According to Unite, if the company pushes ahead with its plans, 500 staff could be affected across southern England.

### **Egyptian journalists strike**

Journalists working for the *Al-Shorouk* newspaper held a strike over the weekend demanding salary and bonus arrears dating back to September.

Journalists within all the paper's departments took part in the strike, leaving editors to put out the paper, which came out with a reduced number of pages.

### **Libyan airport staff strike**

Airport staff at Tobruk and Labraq airports held a short strike on Sunday over unpaid salaries over the last five months. They returned to work after management promised to pay the arrears but no details were given.

A strike by airport ground staff in Libya in May ended when promises were made to pay all salary arrears; promises which were not fulfilled.

### **Strike by construction workers in Qatar**

Around 300 construction staff working on the Msheireb project in downtown Doha walked off the job on Saturday demanding their unpaid wages. They are expat workers from India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

Following a demonstration that police were called to disperse, the construction workers were allowed to return to their accommodation block in the industrial area. They were promised that they would receive their wage arrears by Thursday this week.

### **South African refuse strike brutally attacked by police**

South African refuse workers have been on strike for a week at Pikitup waste management company in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. On Monday, workers protesting on the streets came under attack from police who used rubber bullets and water cannon. The police assault left at least nine workers injured.

On Thursday morning, the strikers were again attacked with police firing rubber bullets and using water cannon. The *eNews Channel Africa* web site reported, "There was a heavy police presence in the area as officers fired at the crowds in an attempt to disperse striking workers. A police helicopter had also been deployed into the area to monitor the situation as businesses in the vicinity remained closed."

The Thursday assault took place after Pikitup had obtained 24 hours earlier a court interdict preventing employees from striking.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) called the strike to demand the removal of Pikitup's managing director, labelling her corrupt and a victimiser of the workforce. SAMWU said the strike was also about the inconsistency of the company's remuneration policy, and that management should adhere to agreements to pay workers' transport costs when travelling to a colleague's funeral.

The union said they approached the company in an attempt to raise members' complaints, but were met with a barrage of insults followed by a threatening letter. Management backed this up by instituting a no work, no pay response and locking out striking workers.

### **Strike of South African parliamentary staff continues**

A strike at South Africa's parliament continues into its third week. The National Education Health Allied Workers Union rejected an offer by parliament, with the employees disrupting another sitting Tuesday.

Parliamentary staff object to the way bonuses are distributed. Currently a small percentage of high-earning staff receive big bonuses while the bonuses paid to the majority of poorly-paid employees is very small.

Parliament said it had "opened its books" and had spoken to the Confederation of South African Trade Unions and its affiliate NEHAWU to persuade them of the unaffordability of the workers' demands.

The house speaker said, "We want to remind ourselves that we do have the Powers and Privileges Act." The Powers, Privileges and Immunities Act gives the speakers the power to call the police in to remove protesters. The speaker went on to underline the previous remark by threatening, "Because if you start tinkering with the business of parliament, you are actually tinkering with the business of the state. And that is not what you want."

## **Strike by South African chemical workers**

Workers employed by South African company, Foksor, in Richards Bay have been out on strike for the last three weeks, demanding clarity over salary categories and bonuses. Staff at another plant receive bonuses, but those at Richards Bay do not.

The strike has brought the plant to a virtual standstill.

The union representing the 400 workers called in the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration to negotiate the dispute. The company produces fertilisers, phosphoric acids and feeds for agriculture and the medical market and exports to companies across the globe.

## **Zimbabwean health workers strike**

Zimbabwean health workers at a premium paid health provider went on strike Monday. Doctors walked out at the Premier Service Medical Aid Society demanding to be paid five months outstanding salary.

The Society was hoping to be paid funds owed by the Zimbabwean government to allow it to meet the doctors' demands, but no money was forthcoming. Clinics related to Premier Service have also been affected by the lack of funds and those seeking treatment have been asked to pay cash.

The medical workers union said it had been kept in the dark by the company. Although the government said it was aware of the Society's situation, it did not attend an appointment. The Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare minister claimed she had a Cabinet meeting to attend.

## **Kenyan hospital are sacked following strike**

The government of Busia state in Kenya has sacked 1,000 striking workers at Busia hospital. The workers struck to demand wage arrears and an increase in the supply of drugs to dispense in the hospital. The staff are in the Kenyan National Union of Nurses and the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists union.

The county governor has set about organising the military and appealing to faith-based organisations to provide medical cover for the hospital. Retired health workers were asked to apply for the jobs of their sacked counterparts. The state governor called on the police commissioner to provide security to defend the scabbing operation.



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