

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 December 2015

Finnish postal workers action ended

A strike by Finnish postal workers, which began November 19, was called off on Monday. The strike of around 4,000 members of the Post and Logistics Union (PAU) was in opposition to plans by the state-owned post service Posti, to push through restructuring measures including the use of agency workers.

The strike was to have widened Monday when the Transport Workers' Union was due to join the action to stop post at the ports entering the country. This has also been called off.

A settlement was reached under the auspices of the Finnish conciliation service, Minna. Under the agreement, postal workers won a pay increase but it also allowed the company to make "restricted" use of external labour.

Irish teaching unions strike warning

On Monday, the Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform signed the commencement order, which will bring into effect the Landsdowne Road Agreement by next June.

The agreement was signed between most unions and the Irish government, but not the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) and the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI). Under the deal, workers on pay scales will be awarded any increment due to them. However, those in unions who have not signed up to the agreement will not receive their increments. It is estimated some teachers could lose up to 2,000 euros.

The TUI and ASTI have warned that if the government does not enter into separate talks with them regarding teachers' terms and conditions, they will consider taking strike action.

Irish meat processing workers in dispute

Meat processor workers at Meadow Meats, Rathdowney in County Laois came out on strike November 30 after the company refused to pay a wage increase recommended by the Labour Court. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

Latvian teachers stage 24-hour protest

On November 27, over 24,000 teachers in Latvia organised by the Trade Union of Education and Science Employees held a one-day strike. It led to the closure of nearly 1,000 schools and pre-schools and affected some universities and research institutes. The teachers are demanding higher pay and an increase in funding for schools.

Bus drivers in Huddersfield UK hold 24-hour walkout

Around 180 bus drivers working for First Bus in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire held a 24-hour all-out strike beginning at 3:30 a.m. local time Monday. The drivers, members of the Unite union, picketed the bus garage and the town's bus station.

The drivers accuse First Bus—the largest bus operator in the UK—of reneging on a pay deal signed earlier in the year. The union says management introduced additional conditions as part of the pay deal, which had not been the subject of negotiation.

These additional conditions relate to holiday leave for new recruits. Under existing conditions, after two years' service drivers then proceed to a higher pay scale and are entitled to five weeks holiday and 10 days leave (which can be banked for up to three years to take a prolonged break). Under the new agreement, drivers going on to the higher pay scale will continue to receive only four weeks holiday and eight days bankable leave associated with the lower pay scale.

Management say the new conditions will only apply to newly recruited drivers. Striking drivers who spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters attending the picket line say currently employed drivers will also be affected.

While First Group operates on an international basis, the union Unite that has members throughout the First Bus group isolates its members forced into action over local disputes. This has led to the proliferation of disparate pay and conditions agreements. For example, in Huddersfield top paid drivers can earn a basic £11.15 an hour; in nearby Bradford the top rate is £12 per hour.

Teachers at UK college oppose imposition of longer teaching day

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at the Alfreton Grange Arts College in Derbyshire, northern England went on strike December 1 through December 3.

They are opposing plans by college management to increase the number of teaching periods from 25 to 43 and shorten lesson breaks, thereby increasing the teaching hours each day.

They plan to hold a strike over three days next week unless their

demands are met.

labour court ruling.

Scottish teachers to ballot over staff cuts

Teachers employed by West Dunbartonshire council near Glasgow are being balloted for possible strike action by the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS). They are opposing plans by the council to cut the numbers of senior staff employed in its secondary schools.

Work-to-rule by UK housing association staff

Staff working for the housing association, Thirteen, in northeast England are due to begin a work-to-rule, call-out ban and overtime ban on Saturday. The 450 staff members of the Unite union are taking the action over pay.

The housing association has offered a 2.5 percent pay increase for 2015-16, but with strings attached such as reduced call-out payments, removal of essential car allowances, lower overtime rates and a complete pay freeze for the year 2016-17.

Rail staff in southern England to ballot for strike

Around 400 conductors working for Southern Rail are being balloted this week for a strike or action short of a strike.

The rail staff members of the Rail and Maritime Transport union (RMT) accuse the company of failing to deal with rostering issues, failure to adhere to the Conductors Restructuring Agreement and a shortage of staff. The ballot closes on December 15.

Threat to Egyptian tour guides jobs

Around 18,000 Egyptian tour guides say their jobs and conditions are under threat because of low occupancy rates of foreign tourists in Egyptian hotels, partly as a result of the ban on flights to the country from the UK and Russia.

Tour guides who normally work 15 to 20 days a month at a daily agreed rate of LE300 (US\$38) say that many tour operators are violating the agreed rate and are only now paying around LE100 (US\$13) a month.

Wildcat action by Israeli port workers

Last Friday port workers in Haifa imposed a go-slow when unloading the ship, the Gunvor Maersk. Going against a Haifa labour court ruling outlawing any action at the port, they unloaded the ship at only half the normal rate.

A week earlier, the trade union federation Histadrut had sought to declare a dispute at the port, but its application had been refused by the

South African refuse workers dispute continues

The strike by Pickup refuse workers in Johannesburg, which began November 23, continues.

The strikers were violently assaulted last week by police, using tear gas and water cannon on the streets of Braamfontein with many injured. A labour court ruling declaring the strike illegal cleared the way for the police violence. Not only is the strike illegal, but the company has also instituted a lockout, preventing workers returning.

Central to the strike is a discrepancy in wages and a demand for a wage increase. The union is demanding an increase in wages to R10,000 (US\$690). Some workers who have worked for the company for a long time get paid R6,000 (US\$420), while others that have been hired recently are getting R8,000 (US\$558).

South African parliamentary staff strike in fourth week

The strike by parliamentary staff in South Africa is now in its fourth week. Parliament has been secured by a massive police presence keeping the striking employees, members of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, from entering the building.

The parliamentary workers are striking over a discrepancy in bonus payments and staffing issues. They say that vetting processes in particular are becoming ever more intrusive.

Kenyan medical workers continue their strike

Kenyan medical workers in Busia County Referral Hospital in Busia State are continuing their strike, which began on November 16. It has been deemed illegal by the courts and the governor is threatening to sack the 1,000 workforce.

Among several issues involved are inadequate medical supplies, unpaid wages, and workers' remittances not paid to relevant bodies.

Nigerian training staff strike threat

Nigerian training staff have carried out a three-day warning strike alleging corruption and high-handedness. Staff at the Industrial Training Fund accused the director-general of a string of misuses of the funds resources, including not paying remittances to the appropriate claimants. All of the 37 area offices across the country were closed down by the strike, including the headquarters in Jos, principal city of Plateau State.

The Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service, Technical and Recreational Service Employees, (AUPCCSTRSE) say contributors to training have not been paid their expenses, which effectively makes them redundant.

Nigerian food and drug staff return to work

Nigerian food administration workers were sent back to work on November 26 with no resolution to their demands.

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) workers held a one-week warning strike demanding a review of their allowances.

Workers are complaining they have not had a review since 2013. One due in 2014 was denied and the National Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) has also failed to review their wages this year. Their union, the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria, (MHWUN) said they were going back to work to give the government more time.



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