

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 February 2016

Planned strike by English medics to go ahead

The British Medical Association (BMA), representing junior doctors in England, announced a planned strike for February 10 will go ahead as talks with the Ministry of Health, under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services (ACAS) had failed to reach agreement.

The BMA called off a planned 24-hour strike on January 26 while the negotiations were taking place after the initial 24-hour strike went ahead on January 12. The third planned strike had originally been scheduled to be a nine-hour all-out strike with no emergency cover. Now junior doctors will walk out at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, February 10 and not return until 8 a.m. the following day but will provide emergency cover.

The government is seeking to impose a new contract on junior doctors that would bring a cut in pay, longer working hours and less opportunity for career enhancement. The offer in the course of the ACAS talks for premium rates of pay to come into effect earlier in time for overnight and weekend work was not enough for the BMA to sell to the junior doctors, so the strike has been called. Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has threatened to impose the new contract if no agreement is reached by mid-February.

Strike of Cypriot doctors to be followed by nurses

State doctors in Cyprus were on strike Monday over government plans to increase their retirement age from 65 to 68. They were protesting staff shortages and unmanageable demands. Following the one-day strike beginning Tuesday, they rationed the number of patients to be seen each day. Specialists said they would see only 20 patients each day and GPs would see no more than 30. Currently, doctors report they can be seeing up to 70 patients a day.

Nurses, who are members of PASYDI, the government workers union, have voted to strike on Monday, February 8. Nurses across all state health facilities will walk out between 7:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Among their demands are promotions and new posts to be unfrozen and that understaffing be addressed. They accuse the government of opening new departments in hospitals without appropriate staffing levels. They are seeking better treatment for temporary staff who are currently paid 10 percent less than permanent staff working at the same level. Being classed as temporary can sometimes last 24 months.

Planned protest by Hungarian teachers

Hungarian teachers organized in the union PSZ are to hold a series of demonstrations throughout Hungary including Budapest on Saturday, February 13. They are demanding improved working conditions and a reversal of the centralization of the education system including the curriculum which came into effect after the elections in 2010.

They issued a 25-point list of demands, which includes putting the school-leaving age back up to 18 from 16, an end to the state monopoly on textbooks so teachers can have flexibility to use alternatives, a decrease in the number of obligatory lessons and for teachers to be paid overtime for any additional lessons taught.

PSZ has threatened to hold a strike in March if its demands are ignored.

One-day strike of Irish lecturers

Around 4,000 lecturers at the 14 institutes of technology across Ireland held a one-day strike on Wednesday. The strike was organised by the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) following a ballot of members in December in which they agreed by a more than 90 percent majority to take action up to and including strikes.

They are protesting a 35 percent fall in funding of the institutes since 2008. Over the same period the number of students attending has risen by a third while staff numbers have fallen by 10 percent. Other grievances include the casualization of temporary lecturing contracts and lack of essential equipment.

Staff are reportedly at a breaking point over the deteriorating conditions they are expected to endure. The strike and protests have been supported by the Union of Students in Ireland.

Irish coach drivers vote to strike

Bus Eireann coach drivers and staff, employed on the company's Expressway service, have voted by more than a 90 percent majority in favour of a strike on a 75 percent turnout. They are members of the National Bus and Railworkers Union (NBRU).

The strike threat is in response to the Irish government's refusal to release a strategic report on the service, which is likely to recommend cost-cutting measures and job losses, until after the general election called for February 26.

Strike of Egyptian medics following assault by police

Doctors at the Matariya teaching hospital have gone on strike following an attack by police on two doctors at the hospital. The two doctors say a policeman who was treated in the A&E unit at the hospital last Thursday asked the doctors to file a false report to include fake injuries. When they refused the policeman called a group of colleagues to the hospital who then assaulted the two doctors. The medics say the strike will continue until action is taken against the officers they accuse of assaulting them.

A meeting of the doctors' syndicates, representing medics, on Saturday announced they would refuse to admit any new patients at Matariya hospital and would only deal with current patients. A meeting of the syndicate has been arranged for February 12 to further discuss the situation. The Interior Ministry has suspended the group of accused policemen.

Israeli municipal staff to hold general strike

Histadrut, the Israeli labour federation, announced Monday a general strike of local authority and regional authority staff would begin midnight on February 9. It is expected around 100,000 will be involved in the general strike which will affect education, planning and construction services.

Histadrut called the strike after it said the Finance Ministry reneged on deal to award municipal employees a one-off NIS 1,000 (\$250) payment as part of a public-sector wage deal.

Zimbabwe sugar workers not paid

Zimbabwe workers employed at the Tongaat Hulett sugar company are demanding three weeks wages owed while they were on strike. Sixteen thousand workers at the company took strike action for four weeks in December, but have only been paid for one. Workers would normally expect to be paid while on a sanctioned strike, but Tongaat Hulett used a labour act that applies to "those that don't turn up for work" not to pay them. Workers attempting to breach the strike turned up for work but were locked out.

The strike had been for a pay claim to be brought into line with fellow workers across the company. They demanded a wage rise from \$170 to \$350. The union instructed its members to return to work when the company offered a \$10 increase.

Tongaat Hulett operates in three other Southern African countries—South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique.

Protesting Nigerian workers attacked by police

Workers employed by the Linda Manufacturing Company, Lagos state, Nigeria were attacked by police while protesting sackings. A female employee had to be rushed to hospital with severe facial injuries after being struck by a teargas canister.

Ten workers were sacked, receiving job dismissals by courier over the weekend. They were targeted for their involvement in a strike the previous week. Among the ten were union officials.

The thousand workers who turned up to protest the sackings of their colleagues were met with locked company gates and confronted by riot

police.

The original dispute is concerned with continually increasing production targets. Those workers failing to meet the increased targets are sacked.

The company achieved notoriety after the body of a worker who died on the production line was not removed for two days. In response, the state temporarily closed the factory, which produces hair extensions and wigs.

Nigerian local government workers strike over nonpayment of wages

The Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees, (NULGE) in Kuje, the local government area of the Federal Capital Territory, has embarked on a three-day warning strike over nonpayment of November, December and January wages and will go on indefinite strike if the arrears are not paid.

The nonpayment means they can't afford travel to work, pay school fees or debts. Bank debts and other wage deductions have not been remitted by the council to appropriate bodies. Workers don't accept the council's argument that their fund allocation is declining as they are still recruiting staff.

Nigerian weather agency workers strike notice

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NIMET) workers issued a seven-day strike warning last Friday. The Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE) is demanding the implementation of an agreement reached in December.

According to the *Vanguard* newspaper, the agreement called for the full implementation of recently approved conditions of service, mandatory training for potential retirees and payment of an ex-gratia lump sum for 2015.

Strike by Gabon health workers

Health workers in Gabon went on strike last Friday over unpaid salaries, as well as calling for better working conditions and a pay increase.

A doctor explained that while they have a beautiful building to work in, there is not enough staff. He called for training schools to be reopened to create qualified staff. The Union of Health Staff condemned the government for failing to enter into negotiations.



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