Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 March 2016

One-day protest by domestic staff at four London hospitals

Domestic staff who provide cleaning services and prepare and serve food at four south London hospitals held a one-day strike Monday. The affected hospitals were Maudsley, Bethlem Royal, Lambeth and the Ladywell Unit at Lewisham hospital.

The 175 cleaners, all women, are members of the GMB union and work for Aramark, an American multinational company that has a contract to provide cleaning services at the four hospitals. Their demands are for a living wage, sick pay and unsocial hours payments.

Currently Aramark, which made a $1.4 billion profit, pays its hospital domestic staff a minimum £7.38 an hour and provides only a maximum of 10 days sick pay per year. The sick pay is only paid after one year's service and does not cover the first three days of sickness.

The women voted by a 97 percent majority to strike.

Rally by teaching unions in UK capital

Teachers organised by the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers held a march and rally in London Wednesday. They were protesting the Conservative government's intention to force all schools to become academies over the course of the current parliament.

The moves would end local authority control, hand schools over to the private sector and leave schools free to set their own pay levels, hours and conditions.

Protests were held in 12 other cities and towns in England.

UK rail engineering staff strike

Engineers working for the UK rail infrastructure company Network Rail, walked out yesterday to begin a four-day strike until midnight on March 28. They are members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA).

Around 80 maintenance and safety staff voted by 80 percent for action, accusing Network Rail of failing to pay annual bonuses.

TSSA said the strike would lead to the cancellation of essential maintenance work on track and overhead electric cables scheduled for the Easter weekend.

Scottish museum staff step up fight over weekend pay

Staff working for the National Museum of Scotland, are to strike over a series of weekends, due to begin Saturday, the Easter weekend, and run through until May's Scottish Parliament elections. The action was called by the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), following previous weekend strikes.

The staff are seeking the restoration of weekend working allowances that were withdrawn three years ago for all new employees.

French air traffic controllers strike

Air traffic controllers across France began a three-day strike Monday. They are protesting a hold on recruitment and lack of investment in air traffic systems.

Delays were experienced at major airports across France, particularly in Marseille. The strike led to delays and cancellations of hundreds of flights across France, including from Britain.

Further walkout by German Amazon staff

Workers at the Amazon warehouse in Koblenz, Germany walked out on strike Monday night and did not return to work until the end of the Wednesday night shift. It is one of a series of stoppages organised by the Verdi trade union since May 2013.

They are demanding pay and conditions in line with mail order and retail staff employed by other companies in Germany. Warehouse staff conditions are currently in line with logistic staff. Verdi argues they should be classed as retail workers and have the same employment conditions.

Italian IT staff fight layoffs

Staff employed by Almaviva in Palermo, the capital of Sicily, held a one-day strike Tuesday and a demonstration in the Piazza Indipendenza.

It was in response to the announcement by the major Italian IT company of plans to make nearly 3,000 redundancies. Confirmation of the layoffs came on Monday in an announcement by the telecommunications staff union, Uilcom.

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Almaviva operates in seven countries and the redundancies represent around 6 percent of their total workforce. Of the nearly 3,000 jobs, 400 will go in Naples, 918 in Rome but the majority (1,670) are slated to go in Palermo.

Cypriot dockers strike against privatisation

Dockers in the Cypriot port of Limassol, organised by the SIDIKEK-PEO union, came out on an indefinite strike Monday against privatisation. The privatisation of the port is one of the conditions being imposed by the European Union on the Cypriot government in return for being bailed out with loans as a result of its debt crisis.

The transport minister responded by saying he could not understand the reason for the strike. He claimed there would be no job losses but that some dockers may be transferred to other public sector jobs.

Israeli airport staff on go-slow

Ground staff at Israel's Ben Gurion international airport are operating a go-slow action, leading to flight departure delays. Airport management announced it would ask the labour court to intervene to stop the action.

Striking Moroccan workers evicted from company site

Police acting on instructions from the American multinational packaging company, Crown Holding Inc., began evicting striking workers encamped on their site in Agadir, Morocco last Friday.

The UMT trade union members have been on strike at two Crown factory sites, in Casablanca and Agadir.

They came out on strike on March 2, over a range of issues, including the non-implementation of an agreement reached in November 2014, pressure to work more than 10 hours a day, and for access to social benefits. They are also aggrieved over the dismissal of 60 of their colleagues without union consultation.

South African rail workers oppose casual labour

Workers employed by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) marched to the company's offices at Cape Town rail station, demanding an end to the use of casual labour and the removal of the regional manager.

They are members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU). Around 400 of SATAWU's 1,600 members employed nationally by the passenger rail agency took part in the demonstration.

Some casual staff have worked for PRASA for more than three years without being brought onto the company books, and feel insecure with unemployment standing above 25 percent. The union warned the company that if they do not respond within seven days it would consider striking.

PRASA retaliated by declaring that those attending the demonstration would be considered to be absent from work illegally. PRASA runs the passenger side of South Africa's Metrorail System with Transnet Freight Rail providing the rest.

South African refuse workers continue strike

Four thousand South African Pikitup refuse workers continue their three-week-old strike. Workers, who are demanding an increase in pay, from just over R6,000 ($390) to R10,000 ($650) a month, claim their counterparts get from 20 to 40 percent more at other waste management sites.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) is also calling for the sacking of the firm's managing director. SAMWU has handed the city council a file of the complaints they have against him. Although Pikitup has hired another company to keep Johannesburg tidy, the media claims that rubbish is building up in the city.

This is the third strike since December, and on each occasion police have violently attacked strikers. Pikitup, in league with the city council, has deemed the strike illegal and issued pre-dismissal notices to workers. Angry workers have opposed the national unions' demand that they return to work, while local officials try to maintain control of the workforce who are clashing with the police and upturning rubbish bins.

The City of Johannesburg said that two Pikitup trucks were fired on Wednesday night, causing them to collide.

South African gold miners threaten to strike

The Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU) has put the question of strike back on the agenda after Sibanye, the mining company, declared that AMCU should accept the wage deal that members of other unions in the conglomerate have agreed to.

South African gold miners voted to strike last October, but the AMCU postponed it while negotiations took place.

Sibanye recently acquired Anglo American Platinum's Rustenburg mines and Aquarius Platinum. It claims 500 jobs have become surplus through the takeover, which AMCU is opposing.

AMCU told Sibanye management it should respond or be served a 48-hour strike notice. The National Union of Miners has predicted that around 35,000 jobs could be lost within the next few months, around 7 percent of the industry.

Zimbabwe junior doctors oppose contracting out their jobs

Zimbabwe junior doctors are to continue their strike in opposition to the Health Service Board reducing their status to contractors.

The doctors are petitioning the Ministry of Health to change the contract as they say it abrogates their rights, but have had no response. The junior doctors complain the contract does not stipulate what they will earn, as well as barring them entering into associations, for example trade unions, or bodies to protect their rights.

The consequences are already being felt in the hospitals where the doctors are being asked to undertake tasks they should not be expected to do.

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Female doctors are under threat of losing their right to maternity leave. Besides the severe effects on hospitals from the strike, there is an endemic shortage of senior doctors. Junior doctors are not prepared to sign the contract until it is amended in accordance with their rights.

Nigerian health unions to continue dispute

Nigerian doctors and health service workers, united in a coalition of unions under the name of JOHESU (joint health service unions), are continuing a strike at the Jobs University Teaching Hospital.

The dispute is over the non-payment of allowances dating back to the 2013 Consolidated Health Structure agreement, with the joint unions demanding implementation and back pay for the period to the present day. The union says it will not order an end to the walkout until workers demands are met.

Nigerian insurance staff protest

Workers employed at the Nigerian National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) in Abuja are on an indefinite strike. They gathered outside NAICOM's headquarters early morning Monday to demand improved conditions of employment and blocked management from entering.

As a regulator of the insurance industry, NAICOM's oversight of insurance companies will be suspended over the period of the strike.

The two civil service unions involved say all their demands have been agreed previously and not implemented. The previous agreement covered confirmation of employees' contracts, promotions, staff training and improved security. Workers are also complaining that staff are being employed from outside when there are qualified staff within the company to fill the posts.

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