

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 October 2016

Protest by Greek television staff over job losses

Around 200 television journalists and other staff held a protest Monday outside the office of Syriza leader Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

They are protesting the threat to 2,000 jobs resulting from a reorganization of the Greek private television broadcasting industry.

Sixty of the protesters broke through a police cordon to hang a banner on a fence surrounding Tsipras' office.

A recent auction of television licenses raised around €246 million but left five out of seven current broadcasting companies without licenses and facing closure with subsequent job losses.

Protest by Slovakian teachers

On October 7, around 150 Hungarian teachers held a protest march in the Slovakian city of Bratislava to demand more pay. They marched to the Finance Ministry where they demonstrated. The same day, some 2,000 teachers from over 200 schools came out on strike. The marches and strikes were organised by the Slovak Teachers Initiative.

The teachers are seeking an across-the-board raise of €140 a month this year and a €90 per month raise from January.

The action was the latest in opposition to the government's refusal to include teachers in a 3 percent wage increase paid to public-sector workers.

A further strike is planned for October 19.

Norwegian oil workers end strike

A near three-week strike by Norwegian oil service workers ended Tuesday when they returned to work. The 300 staff walked out in pursuit of a pay claim. The strike impacted production at several oil platforms, including those of US conglomerate Halliburton.

The strike affected drilling for new oil and gas wells but did not affect production at existing wells. It resulted in the laying off of more than 2,000 employees in firms associated with oil production.

The Industri Energi union reached an agreement with representatives of the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association for a two-year collective pay agreement.

Protest by Portuguese taxi drivers

On Monday, convoys of taxi drivers drove slowly around the Portuguese capital Lisbon, passing the parliament building. An estimated 6,000 taxi drivers from across the country came to Lisbon to participate.

They were protesting against the use of apps such as Uber and Cabify, which allow passengers to hail a taxi via an app on their mobile phones.

Parliament is due to bring in legislation to control the use of such apps. Under the proposals, however, drivers seeking customers via such apps will be required to undertake 30 hours training, whereas traditional taxi drivers have to undergo 150 hours training before being allowed to trade.

UK: Southern GTR rail workers strike

Train conductors employed by Southern GTR (Govia Thameslink Railway) took three days of strike action this week in a long-running dispute over the imposition of Driver Only Operation (DOO) trains. The workers, members of the RMT trade union, are opposing plans to change their role to "onboard safety operators."

GTR had threatened to sack all conductors unless they agreed to their plans, and had sought a legal challenge to the strike. In response, the RMT reversed its opposition. It continued with the strike solely as a means of trying to pressure the company into talks.

Negotiations broke down however, on Wednesday, after less than one hour with GTR insisting that where DOO was in operation, it wanted the "flexibility" to run the service without a conductor or onboard supervisor present.

The 72-hour strike concluded Thursday, with threats of further action.

Bus workers in Irish capital end series of strikes

Bus staff employed by the Dublin Bus Company have voted to end their dispute. Around 1,500 drivers represented by the National Bus and Rail Union voted by a 79 percent majority to return to work, ending a series of strikes over pay which have taken place over the last few weeks. SIPTU trade union members, including drivers and other staff, also voted to end the strike.

Dublin Bus staff were seeking a 15 percent wage increase over three years to bring them in line with Luas Dublin tram system staff. The vote to end the series of strikes followed talks brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission. Under the agreement, Dublin Bus workers will get an 11.25 percent pay increase over three years.

Although the unions claim there is no productivity agreement associated with the deal, the company states the unions accepted so-called Lean Management techniques and random drug and alcohol testing which the

company reports would help reduce costs.

Road maintenance workers in Sheffield hold 24-hour strike

Staff working for the Streets Ahead road improvement project in Sheffield held a 24-hour strike Monday.

The dispute is over a wage claim and to protest 90 job losses announced by Amery, a private-sector company under contract to Sheffield City Council to carry out the work.

The workers, members of the street lighting team, will be made redundant by January. Other redundancies will take place over the next year. Amongst those to be laid off are former Sheffield City Council workers who were promised a 25-year contract when they were transferred from the council in 2012.

The strikers, members of the GMB union, set up a picket line outside the city's Olive Grove depot.

One-day strike by London journalists

Journalists working for Newsquest held a one-day strike on Thursday. Newsquest publishes a series of local newspapers across the London area.

The journalists are opposed to worsening employment conditions and plans by the company to cut jobs and drive up productivity among those remaining. They are members of the National Union of Journalists.

School cleaners in Wakefield, UK continue action

Three cleaners at a primary school in Kinsley, near the town of Wakefield in England, are in the sixth week of a strike. The women have nearly 30 years of service at the school. The school became a state funded but privately run academy last year and the cleaning contract was transferred to a private company, C&D Cleaning this April.

C&D Cleaning cut their wages from £7.85 to the minimum wage of £7.20 and also cut their pension entitlement, along with sick pay and leave allowance. In response, the cleaners walked off the job and have been holding a picket at the school since the beginning of September.

The women contacted their union, Unison, but the company is refusing to negotiate with it. Unison has taken the company to an industrial tribunal, arguing the company may have broken transfer of undertaking regulations.

Protests by public-sector workers in Iraqi Kurdistan

Public-sector workers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq have been involved in recent protests over nonpayment of salaries and cuts in salaries.

The Kurdistan Regional Government cut state salaries in September last year and has not paid them at all since July. This has led to a dire crisis for many public employees. A large demonstration of teachers and university professors was held in protest at the end of September.

National strike of Sudanese health care system

Doctors across Sudan began a strike October 6, providing emergency cover only across the country. An October 9 article in the *Sudan Tribune* reported that 78 hospitals were on strike with other hospitals and 26 health centres joining their colleagues.

The independent doctors' association, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, are demanding an improvement of their working conditions, protection from assault, and medicines to carry out their duties. Doctors who run police and armed services hospitals are also joining the strike.

This week, it was reported that directors of the medical centres were meeting in Khartoum and are expected to also come out in support.

The strike is not only confined to the public health care system. Private hospitals are also taking strike action.

South African workers demonstrate in 24-hour stoppage

On October 7, demonstrations called by Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) took place in states throughout South Africa. The strike and demonstrations were called to correspond with the International Decent Work Day annual demonstration.

The International Decent Work Day was established under the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2007 and takes place each year. It was reported that tens of thousands of trade unionists stayed away from work. Around 90 percent of textile workers also stayed away.

COSATU is calling for the banning of labour brokers, defence of jobs against retrenchments, a minimum wage, defence of collective bargaining, implementation of occupational health and safety standards in all workplaces, a national health insurance system and a demand for free education. The African National Congress government, which works closely with COSATU as a "partner," did not formally oppose the action.

South African union accepts redundancies

South African General Motors is set to cut around 200 jobs at its Port Elizabeth plant. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is threatening to strike but has no intention of defending its members' jobs.

The union is opposed to the fact that the redundancies programme was not discussed with them and fear it will be imposed arbitrarily. Complaining that the retrenchment package will leave those made redundant in poverty, the union is threatening to strike for the right to slightly lengthen the period before the workers are pauperised.

Nigerian college workers strike over unpaid wages and promotions

After seven months without pay, college employees at Abia State College of Education Technical in Nigeria, began industrial action this

week.

The college employees are among an increasing number of public-sector workers nationwide, that have gone without wages for several months.

The staff complain that contract agreements such as the Consolidated Polytechnics and College of Education Academic Salary Structure and the Consolidated Tertiary Education Institutions Salary Structure have not been honoured.

The workers fear that the education system is being undermined by the conditions they confront.

Mali is the third-largest producer of gold in Africa after South Africa and Ghana.



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Nigerian polytechnic workers in dispute over downgrading

Polytechnic workers at Ado-Ekiti College, located in the capital city of Ekiti State, struck this week. The workers claim management is ignoring their demands.

The strike began after college management did not respond to workers' grievances by a deadline they set.

The staff have been arbitrarily downgraded from Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Structure (CONTISS) 8 to CONTISS 7 and are subjected to less favourable conditions than colleagues in other polytechnics.

Two academic unions and one non-academic union involved in the strike are calling on the government to set up a panel to investigate the complaint.

Namibian trade union supports planned scabbing operation

Namibian teachers are preparing to strike over pay. In response, the government is threatening to recruit a scab workforce for the duration of the strike.

Teachers were set to strike Thursday and say it would be illegal for the government to use strikebreakers against them.

The Namibia National Teachers Union is demanding an 8 percent pay increase and called on other unions to back them.

The National Labour Organisation is opposed to the strike, with its president supporting the right of the government to use scabs. The government is also seeking a court injunction against the strike and the police commissioner. The commissioner claims he cannot police the strike in 14 states if it goes ahead.

Mali gold miners prepare to strike

Mali gold miners are set to strike on October 24 against members of the National Section of Mines and Industries. The mining companies involved are Resolute Mining Ltd and Robex Resources Inc.

Randgold Resources Ltd is already involved in a dispute over unpaid bonuses with members of Synacom, the mines, energy and civil construction union. Synacom organises 80 percent of miners nationwide. The unions contend that the gold mining companies are victimising their members by penalties and sackings.

A report suggests some CFA 800 million (\$1.7 million) of government revenues will be lost if the five-day strike goes ahead. All nine gold producers in Mali will be affected by the strike.