

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 October 2016

## Italian workers hold 24-hour general strike

Hundreds of thousands of Italian workers took part in a 24-hour general strike on October 21. The strike was organised by the major unions, the USB, USI, SI, Corbas, Unicorbas, ADL and the CUB Transporti Lazio. It involved private and public-sector workers, such as teachers, nurses, bus drivers, flight attendants, fire fighters and administrative staff.

The strike was called to oppose proposed legislation that will weaken labour rights. Workers also demonstrated against education cuts and attacks on welfare provisions being imposed by the government of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

Participating public transport workers in Rome brought traffic to a halt. A march took place in Rome, as well as demonstrations in front of the Education and Economy ministries. Marches also took place in Milan and Turin and demonstrations were held in other cities including Genoa.

In Rome, marches culminated in the Piazza San Giovanni, and some of the protestors remained overnight to take part in the “No Renzi Day” demonstration, which took place on Saturday.

## Irish teachers’ action may lead to school closures

Secondary school teachers in Ireland are in dispute over newly qualified teachers being taken on at a lower pay rate and the deterioration of conditions.

The Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) members are due to take a series of one-day strikes over the next three months. In addition, from November 7 they will refuse to carry out supervision and substitution duties.

The Joint Managerial Body, representing nearly 400 voluntary secondary schools, warned that after the teachers return to work next week, after the current half-term break, the refusal to carry out supervision and substitution duties might lead to the closure of schools. Without teachers carrying out such duties, schools would be in breach of health and safety regulations.

The teaching body at voluntary secondary schools is mainly ASTI members and the action will have a major impact on them.

## Norwegian train drivers’ strike

Train drivers employed by the Norwegian State Railways (NSB) and CargoNet have been on strike since the end of September. The strike is in opposition to plans by two railway companies to cut back on the training

for drivers.

The train drivers are members of the National Union of Norwegian Locomotivemen (NLF). The strike is impacting mainly commuter services, especially around Gothenburg. Around 20,000 commuters have had no train service during the strike.

Talks aimed at resolving the dispute, which included the state mediator, began on Tuesday. They lasted 16 hours but failed to end the dispute. A further round of talks began Thursday.

## Polish women in further protest over abortion laws

Polish women held a further demonstration outside the Polish parliament on October 23. They were protesting changes to proposed abortion laws in Poland, which would further restrict access to safe abortions. Protesters also demanded full access to birth control.

Those attending collected signatures to petition the Polish government to provide comprehensive birth control.

## Strike by security staff at Portuguese airports

Security guards employed by companies such as Securitas and Prosegur went on strike at airports throughout Portugal Thursday. The strike led to disruption of flights.

The guards, who are responsible for screening passengers and scanning baggage, are demanding the rights to collective bargaining. They are also imposing an overtime ban.

## Further strike by UK refuse collectors in Sheffield

Refuse collectors in the northern English city of Sheffield held a half-day strike Tuesday. The members of the GMB trade union are seeking a higher pay increase than the one offered by their employer Veolia. Veolia holds the contract from Sheffield city council to collect household refuse in the city.

The half-day strike follows two 24-hour strikes earlier in the month. The GMB accused Veolia of bringing in staff from London to cover the work of the Sheffield strikers.

### **Walkout by UK post office staff next week**

Workers at Crown Offices, as well as Crown Office admin and supply chain staff, will hold a one-day strike October 31. The Crown Offices are the only part of the post office still in state control, all other branches of it having been privatized.

The Members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) are opposing plans by Crown Office management to push through staff cuts and downgrade their pensions. Management plans to end the direct benefit pension scheme.

### **Manchester Fujitsu staff vote to take action**

Staff working for the Japanese technology firm Fujitsu in Manchester will strike over the issues of pay, pensions and job security.

Earlier in the month, Fujitsu announced it intended to cut 1,800 jobs in the UK. This figure represents 10 percent of its UK workforce.

On October 31, Unite union members will begin a work-to-rule and ban overtime, among other measures. This will be followed by other stoppages, including a 24-hour strike on November 1 and a 48-hour strike to begin November 8.

Fujitsu's main UK sites are in Manchester and Belfast.

### **Israeli teachers threaten strike**

Israeli teachers belonging to the Israeli Teachers' Association are threatening to strike. There are a range of issues in the dispute, including late payment of salaries, problems with pensions and failure to pay teachers for additional duties.

### **General strike threat in Tunisia**

The UGTT Tunisian labour union is threatening to call a general strike over the government's plans to freeze public-sector wages.

On October 21, lawyers in Tunisia held a strike in the capital, Tunis. They were protesting new taxes and tighter financial control of the legal profession by the government. Several hundred demonstrated outside the Palace of Justice where they chanted slogans denouncing the government's plans.

### **Gabonese oil workers return to work**

Gabonese oil workers employed at the Oanl Field site of French firm, Maurel and Proms, returned to work Wednesday. The ONEP oil workers' union members came out on strike October 17, protesting the dismissal of their colleagues. They returned to work after the company agreed to reinstate the dismissed employees. The strike cut production at the site by around a third.

### **Strike by Ghanaian dock workers**

Dock workers in Ghana employed by the Ghana Dock Labour Company went on strike Tuesday. The dockers, who are employed on a casual basis, were awarded a pay rise after negotiations.

The increase, which was due in March and deferred until September, gave them a 10 percent pay increase. Workers are now demanding the increase be backdated to March.

The dockers accuse the leadership of the Maritime and Dock Workers Union of conniving with the company to deny them their back pay.

### **Kenyan doctors resume strike**

Doctors in Nairobi County, Kenya have vowed to march each day to the Governor's office from Wednesday of this week to push their demands.

They had returned to work on September 30 following a three-week strike after which the county agreed to their demands. They came out over unpaid wages and delayed promotions, but resumed their strike on October 14 after the agreement was not honoured.

The doctors are members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists' union.

### **Kenyan health workers in Meru county end strike**

Nurses in Meru County came out on strike on October 5 after their employer failed to implement staff promotions. After talks between management and a legal officer from the Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN), they returned to work Wednesday.

The employer agreed all promotions will be implemented by December 16. KNUN said if the employer fails to honour the agreement, they will resume their strike on December 26.

### **Mali gold miners suspend strike**

Gold miners in Bamako, Mali suspended their strike, which was due to have started Monday. The miners are protesting the unfair treatment of their colleagues, especially union members. Some have been sacked or disciplined.

They suspended their strike after the intervention of the Mali mines minister.

### **Nigerian judiciary workers strike continues**

Judiciary workers in Nigeria are continuing their strike. The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), representing Nigerian judiciary workers, announced this week that the strike in the state of Abia would continue. JUSUN's chairman said state government representatives failed to attend a scheduled meeting to discuss the issue.

The judiciary staff are calling on the state government to comply with a

2014 court order regarding government financing of the courts. Their other demands include payment of outstanding salaries and arrears from the 2015 CONJUSS agreement.

### **Nigerian teachers suspend their strike**

Nigerian primary and secondary teachers in the state of Bayelsa have suspended their strike and returned to classrooms in time for the start of the new teaching session.

They had struck after the state government reneged on an agreement to pay salary arrears. The Nigerian Union of Teachers said the state government had agreed to further talks to try to resolve the issue.

### **Strike by South African clothing workers**

Clothing workers employed by Queenspark in Cape Town went on strike at the end of last week. The members of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union are seeking a 15 percent pay increase. The company is only offering 6 percent.

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration failed to resolve the dispute and issued a certificate of non-resolution granting a legal strike.



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