

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 November 2016

## Walkout by Finnish shipyard employees

Workers employed by the Russian-owned Arctech ship building company in Helsinki walked out in a wildcat action last Thursday and Friday. Their union is currently in negotiation with Arctech over a variety of issues, including wages.

The walkout was triggered when Arctech insisted that the discussions should deal solely with the government-initiated competitiveness pact. Under this pact, working hours would be extended by a further 24 hours a year.

## Walkout by women in Paris over equal pay

Female staff from offices in Paris walked out on Monday at 4:34 p.m., with many joining a spontaneous rally at the Place de la Republique. They walked out at 4:34 as this represents the time at which on average women will be working for nothing for the rest of the year, compared to the average wage earned by men.

Among those participating were staff from the Musee d'Orsay, newspaper offices including *Le Monde* and those from Paris city hall. According to Eurostat figures for 2014, the average figure for men's wages was more than 15 percent greater than for women in France. A similar walkout by women in Iceland took place in October over wage inequality.

## Greek union announces nationwide strike

The GSEE union, which represents around 2 million Greek private sector workers, has announced it will hold a 24-hour strike on Thursday, December 8. It is to protest the ongoing austerity measures and job cuts being imposed by the Syriza-led government.

Pensioners in the central Greek city of Larissa held a protest Wednesday against cuts in pensions. They held a rally outside the Social Security Foundation office where they burnt copies of papers outlining cuts to their pensions.

## British car builders support strike over pension attack

Around 4,000 staff employed by car manufacturer BMW at several sites,

including Cowley and Swindon, have voted by a 96 percent majority in a consultative ballot in favour of strike action.

BMW, which made nearly £6 billion in profits last year and paid out nearly £2 billion in dividends, wants to scrap workers' final salary pension scheme.

In a press release, the Unite union said it would hold a full statutory industrial action ballot unless BMW rescinds its decision.

## Teaching assistants in northern England hold 48-hour strike over pay cut

Over 1,800 teaching assistants employed by County Durham in northern England began a 48-hour strike on Tuesday. They took the action in response to the Labour-controlled council's decision to only pay the teaching assistants during term time. This would mean a cut in pay of around 23 percent. The strike led to the closure or curtailment of classes at around 100 schools.

The council decided on the cuts in May but they were revised in September to include a two-year compensation package. The council presented this as a final offer. Teaching assistants represented by Unison and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) voted by big majorities to reject the offer. However, Unite and GMB members accepted it.

The striking teaching assistants held a lobby of the Durham Council on Wednesday.

## Teachers in Northern Ireland announce series of strikes

Northern Ireland's National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) has announced a series of one-day strikes. The first will take place later this month followed by others in January and February next year. Teachers are taking the action in protest against a zero percent pay rise for last year followed by a 1 percent rise for 2016/17. It will affect around 130 schools in Belfast and Newtonabbey.

Late on Tuesday the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) called off its series of strikes and refusal to cover supervisory duties. They had been taking the action in pursuit of increased pay and improved working conditions.

Schools that had been closed because of the lack of supervision by teachers reopened on Wednesday. ASTI announced the decision to call off the strike after receiving an invitation to talks with the Education Ministry, arbitrated by the Teachers' Conciliation Council. The action had led to the closure of around two thirds of Ireland's secondary schools,

affecting a quarter of a million pupils.

### **Strike by confectionary workers in Northern England**

Employees at the Tangerine factory in York, which makes boiled sweets, held a 24-hour strike on Monday. They are members of the GMB union. A further three one-day strikes are planned throughout the month. The workers overwhelmingly rejected the latest offer from the company of a 1.25 percent pay offer backdated to April, along with an additional 15 minute tea break.

### **UK equality commission staff strike**

Staff working for the government body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, held a one-day strike Wednesday. They are protesting government plans to carry through 25 percent cuts that would lead to the closure of offices in Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle and Edinburgh. Unite and Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members took part in the strike.

### **Further strike by technology workers in Northern England**

Around 300 staff working for the technology giant Fujitsu in Manchester began a 48-hour strike Monday, following a previous strike. Further strikes are planned. The members of the Unite union are in dispute over pay, pensions and job security as well as pay discrimination. The union says women staff are paid on average 16 percent less than their male colleagues. The union accuses the company of cutting pay rates over the years in spite of very healthy profit figures.

### **Bus drivers in southwestern England to hold further strike**

Around 70 drivers working for First Bus in the Weymouth and Bridport area of south-west England are due to hold a 24-hour strike Wednesday, November 16, as part of their ongoing five-month-long pay dispute. The drivers have rejected the latest offer from the company. Among the outstanding issues are back pay, overtime rates and the moving back of the payday start date anniversary from August to October.

### **One-day strike planned by bus drivers in north of England**

Around 750 bus drivers employed by Arriva in West Yorkshire are due to hold a 24-hour strike on Monday in a dispute over working conditions. They are members of the Unite union. The company plans to try and draft in nonunion drivers from its nearby depots.

### **Hunger strike by Ukrainian miners**

Around 50 Ukrainian coal miners at mine number 10 in Novovolynska began a hunger strike on Monday over three months' wages arrears. Around 300 miners at the pit protested over the same issue by blocking nearby border-crossing points at the end of October.

### **Strike of Israeli bus drivers averted**

An all-out strike by bus drivers working for the nation-wide intercity and urban bus company Egged, due to have begun Monday of this week, has been called off. Egged is the largest bus company in Israel, employing 6,000 drivers.

Egged drivers held a one-day strike on November 2 and rallied outside the Finance Ministry to demand financial support for payment of their wages. The Ministry of Finance had been holding back on giving financial support in an attempt to push through employment changes by which the drivers would be classed as contractors rather than employees.

The trade union federation Histadrut reached a deal with the Finance Ministry that only guarantees drivers' wages for the next few months.

### **Strike by Oman water employees**

Around 400 staff working for the government-owned Haya Water Company in Oman held a two-day strike beginning last Saturday. They were protesting mistreatment by the company and were demanding the removal of the CEO.

Among the issues were the intrusion of women's privacy, the fact that they were only being granted 10 days sick leave per year rather than the statutory 14 days and problems with an electronic fingerprint system used to monitor work attendance. According to the staff, the system was under-reporting their attendance and they were losing some of their annual vacation allowance.

They returned to work following intervention by the General Federation of Oman trade union.

### **Namibian security workers demonstrate**

Namibian security guards are threatening to go on strike at the end of the month if their demands are not met. The dispute has gone to arbitration after three months of deadlock. The guards took their string of demands onto the streets of the capital, Windhoek, and 11 other towns on Thursday, November 4.

Three security unions involved—the Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATUA), Namibia Security Guards and Watchmen's Union (NSGWU) and the Namibia Independent Security Union (NISU)—are demanding payment of outstanding wages and a wage increase.

Workers want a pay increase to N12.5 (\$92) an hour from N7 and N6.75 (\$.50) for new recruits. Other claims are over training, a pension scheme and legislation implemented related to their work.

## **TUC Zimbabwe says conditions better under Smith regime**

Workers at the Zimbabwe textile company, David Whiteheads, demonstrated against administration managers. The company has been under administration since 2013 and employees at the mill, owed \$20 million in unpaid wages, are concerned about the fate of the mill and jobs.

Textile workers accuse the administrators of not looking after their interests and allowing the mill to fall into disrepair. Since 2013, administrators have been promising to turn the company around, but neglect of the buildings and machinery, through rain damage, is rendering the mills useless.

Workers complain the company owes them \$20 million, while assets of the company are being sold off. Recent woven fabrics going out of the mill are also not being accounted for, according to workers. A spokesman for the workers is demanding the mill be given over to them in compensation for lost wages.

A spokesman for the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions commented in regards to the general condition of Zimbabwe's industry, saying Zimbabwe is a museum of factories and claiming they were better under the Smith regime, i.e., colonialism.

## **South African street cleaners strike**

South African workers in Lenyenye and Nkowankowa Township who keep the street clear of litter have gone on strike. The strike is being organised by the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) to demand recognition.

SATAWU claims it has achieved a sufficient level of membership among the workers to give it the right to negotiate. A certificate allowing strike action was given to the union after the services of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration had been exhausted.

SATAWU say it is looking for support from the South African Municipal Workers Union and the other Congress of South African Trade Unions affiliates in extending its subscription-paying base.

## **Kenyan doctors defy return to work order**

Kenyan doctors in Nyeri have been issued with a Labour Court order to return to work. The doctors organised in the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) have been on strike for two weeks. They were ordered back to work Friday, November 3, but refused to comply.

The doctors had recently returned to work on September 20, after striking over the same issues. Promises that their grievances would be resolved have not been fulfilled and so they resumed their strike.

The public hospitals have been brought to a standstill with doctors complaining of overwork and understaffing, living and working in life threatening conditions, and the hospital authority's refusal to allow doctors time to undertake postgraduate studies.

## **Nigerian food agency threatens strike**

Nigerian workers at the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration (NAFDA) completed a two-week warning strike November 2. A demonstration was held by the Medical Health Workers Union at the agency in Abuja the following day.

The union is demanding a review of their salaries and demanding a "substantive" director general for the agency and a review of recruitment. At the conclusion of the warning strike, the union gave the agency extra days to respond before calling an indefinite strike.

## **Kenyan nurses return to strike**

Nurses at hospitals in Tharaka Nithi County resumed industrial action after their grievances were ignored. Ninety workers have been removed from the county payroll.

Other outstanding issues include lack of promotion and salary increases, remittance of statutory dues, and conditions at work.

Nurses have been in continuous dispute with state and federal authorities and have resorted to strike action on over 10 occasions since nursing was devolved to the counties in 2010. The Kenyan National Union of Nurses has said its members will not return to work until all their grievances are addressed.



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