

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 November 2016

Walkout by Swedish dockers

Dockers in Sweden's largest port, Gothenburg, walked out on strike Tuesday. They are in dispute with their employer, APM terminals over pay, collective bargaining issues and improved facilities at the port.

The strikers were due to return back to work at 11am this morning. They are members of the Swedish Dockworkers Union, which represents 85 percent of the port's dockers.

Further strike at UK technology company

Staff at the technology company, Fujitsu, in Manchester began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday. It was the third such round of industrial action by the members of the Unite union.

The dispute is over pay, pensions and job security. Fujitsu had already announced plans to cut its workforce in the UK by around 20 percent, but has now written to 2,500 more staff saying their jobs are at risk. Female Fujitsu staff are also seeking pay parity with male colleagues. On average, they earn 16 percent less.

Ritzy cinema staff strike in London

Cinema staff working for the Ritzy cinema in Brixton and the Hackney Picturehouse in London held a strike on Thursday with a further strike to be held on Monday. The workers are currently paid £9.10 an hour and are demanding the London living wage rate currently set at £9.75.

They have already taken five days of strike action. In 2014, they held a series of strikes over the same issue but their union, BECTU, finally settled the dispute, accepting a 26 percent staged pay rise. This equated to less than the then London living wage. Many of the staff are on zero-hour contracts. Staff are only entitled to paid sick leave after working for a year but then only after the eight day of sickness.

Further strike by confectionary workers in York, England

Confectionary workers employed in York by sweet manufacturer Tangerine held a further 24-hour strike Monday. The GMB union members are seeking a pay rise. Tangerine insists any pay rise must be financed through productivity gains.

UK atomic weapons staff hold strike

Staff working for the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at its sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire, England held a one-day strike Monday. This was in response to AWE's move to end the defined pension scheme, and replace it with an inferior scheme. The Unite union represents the majority of the staff who took part in the strike, which was also supported by members of the Prospect union, representing professional staff. Further days of action are planned.

Strike threat by German pilots

The Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) union, representing pilots at the German national airline, Lufthansa, announced on Monday their intention to strike. The union said pilots working for the Lufthansa brand and its cargo section would walk out giving 24-hour notice. VC did not give any dates.

VC made the announcement after talks between itself and airline management broke down. The talks on behalf of over 5,000 pilots have been taking place for over four years and to date there has been more than a dozen strikes.

Pilots are demanding an average pay increase of 3.66 percent, as they have had no increase over the last four years.

German property management staff strike threat

Around 600 staff employed by Vonovia, Germany's largest housing association, are preparing to strike in protest at deteriorating working conditions and in pursuit of a pay increase.

The staff are represented by the Ver.di trade union, which has protested Vonovia's refusal to enter into talks. No date has been given for a strike, with Ver.di stating only that it will take place before the end of the year.

Vonovia manages around a third of a million properties.

Icelandic fishermen end strike

A strike of Icelandic fishermen was called off last weekend. The members of the Fishermen's Union of Iceland voted by a 90 percent majority to take action against the fishing vessel owner's association.

The fishermen were seeking a bigger share of the money at the auction

of fish caught, leave entitlement and were protesting owners' plans to reduce manning levels.

The fishermen returned to work following the intervention of the Icelandic government conciliation service. The proposed agreement will be voted on by the fishermen. The strike led to a shortage of fish in Iceland and threatened to lead to the laying off of fish processing workers.

Two smaller unions were not part of the agreement and remain on strike.

Irish health staff confront government

This week, the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) representing Irish junior doctors, announced its intention to ballot its members to demand the restoration of a €3,000 living-out allowance.

Talks between the IMO and Department of Health broke down after the government announced the recently formed public sector pay commission would now handle the talks.

Dr John Duddy, IMO president told the *Irish Examiner*, "No doctor wants to strike and indeed it would be with great reluctance that we would embark on such an action but in the face of a government that behaves in such a manner we will have no choice."

Last week the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) announced it would be balloting its members over bad working conditions. The union is calling for the government to recruit more nurses and take action to retain current nursing staff.

Nurses are concerned current understaffing is leading to excessive, unpaid working hours and creating dangerous situations for staff and patients.

Ukrainian miners end hunger strike

Fifty coal miners at the number 10 mine in Novovolynska ended their week-long hunger strike on Monday. They were demanding the payment of several months of wage arrears owed to several hundred mines at the pit. They ended the strike after being promised they would receive a portion of their back pay.

Irish public sector workers seek pay rise

Irish public sector workers in health, local authority and education could be balloted over action to demand a pay increase unless the government agrees to start new talks by next February. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which has around 60,000 members in the public sector.

Irish pilots vote for strike

Pilots working for Dublin-based CityJet voted to strike unless the employer agrees to their dispute, over a pay claim, being referred to the Workplace Relations Commission.

Pilots have been taking limited industrial action since September.

Around half the 80 pilots employed by CityJet are represented by the Unite union. More than 80 percent of members voted to escalate action to a strike to be held before Christmas.

Turkish suburban rail workers strike

Over 300 staff employed on the Izban commuter rail network in the western province of Izmir, Turkey, held a one-day strike last week. They walked out after talks over an agreement on collective bargaining broke down.

The Izban employees are seeking pay parity with rail workers on the Izmir Metro AS system who are paid around a third more.

Israeli airline staff may strike

Staff working for the Israeli state airline El Al are voting this week as to whether they are prepared to declare a labour dispute. The dispute, which could lead to industrial action, is over El Al's practice of cancelling flights and rescheduling them using other airlines. By doing this El Al avoids having to pay its staff overtime.

Israeli workers poised to strike over care insurance

This week the Histadrut labour federation met with workers committees and will declare a labour dispute. If a strike goes ahead, it would encompass most public sector workers along with many private sector staff.

The dispute is over the cancellation last year by the government of the payment of insurance for workers to fund their stay in nursing homes should it be required in their old age.

Palestinian UN staff strike

Staff employed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) held a one-day strike Monday.

They also held a protest outside the UNWRA headquarters in Gaza City to push their demands. The workers are protesting wage arrears, unfilled job vacancies and are pushing for a wage increase in line with the high cost of living.

Doctors increase strike in the Sudan

Sudanese doctors have resumed and escalated strike action to demand a wage increase, and an end to poor working conditions. A previous strike was suspended, but has now been resurrected after an agreement by the government to end the strike was not honoured.

Doctors in 138 hospitals throughout Sudan held a two-day strike at the beginning of November but after the government failed to meet their demands, they began a three-day strike on Tuesday. They are providing emergency cover. The doctors also demand protection against security forces that regularly brutalise hospital medical staff. The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) have been detaining striking doctors and some of those doctors cannot be accounted for.

Protesting teachers also face confrontation as a result of police state measures. A head teacher was detained by NISS forces in South Darfur after organising demonstrations on November 10 against militia attacks. Other protesting teachers have also been incarcerated and are being held in detention camps in Nyala state.

has not entered into discussion with any of the relevant unions.

Doctors are demanding a 300 percent pay rise and threaten to strike if they do not get it within 21 days. Nurses have issued a separate 21-day strike notice, in pursuit of a pay increase of between 25-40 percent.



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South African wine workers continue twelve-week strike

A strike by 220 workers at Robertson's Winery in South Africa has entered its 12th week. The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agriculture and Allied Workers (CSAAWU) is demanding a wage of N8,500 (\$628), with the company offering N4000 (\$295) and refusing to negotiate.

The strike was referred to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The CCMA pulled out after it failed to resolve the dispute, although the union is reported to have "parked" its N8500 wage demand.

The company is the subject of a Danish TV documentary titled, "Bitter Grapes—Slavery in the Vineyards," resulting in Robertson's products being taken off the shelves in Danish stores.

Nigerian academic staff protest

Academic staff at the Federal University of Technology (FUT) in Abeokuta, Nigeria came out on strike Monday demanding the reinstatement of 23 colleagues who were sacked last week. The walkout and protest was organised by the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities.

The protest was to demand an investigation into the sacking of the 23 staff and management activities over the last four years. The union claims the sackings were carried out after staff members called for transparency into how the institution was being managed.

Three workers that furnished information to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over corrupt activity of management were included in the sackings. The union accused the EFCC of passing their names to the university vice chancellor.

Members of the Non Academic Staff Union, who have been on strike for six weeks over corruption allegations, were threatened with losing their jobs at FUT if they did not return to work Monday. The university claims both academic and non-academic staff were back at work Monday.

Kenyan civil servants oppose pay cuts

Kenyan civil servants, along with doctors and nurses, are protesting wage restructuring. The Salaries and Remunerations Commission (SRC) intends to harmonize the remuneration of 600,000 public sector employees on the basis of "equality", in a cost cutting exercise. The SRC