

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 November 2016

## Walkout by teaching assistants in northern England

Over 1,000 teaching assistants working for County Durham in northern England began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. It followed a previous 48-hour strike two weeks ago. The action led to the full or partial closure of more than 100 schools throughout the county. The teaching assistants are members of the Unison union and Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL). Following the strike, from Friday, they will carry out a work-to-rule until the end of term. Under the work-to-rule, the TAs will only work their regular hours, so will not be working through their breaks, staying late, coming early or taking work home.

The dispute has gone on for several months and follows plans by the Labour-controlled County Durham to pay the teaching assistants only during term time, which would amount to a pay cut of over 20 percent. The council has said that if it cannot reach agreement with the teaching assistants it will impose the new contract on the 2,500-plus workers in January.

## Further strike by rail staff in southern England

Train conductors employed by Southern Rail, which runs services in southeastern England, held a further 48-hour strike beginning midnight Tuesday as part of a long-running dispute. They are taking the action in opposition to the company's plans to introduce driver-only operated (DOO) trains, bypassing the conductors' safety role. The conductors are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, which has gone along with DOO where it has been introduced on some services.

## Confectionary workers in northern England hold further strike

Workers at Tangerine confectionary held a further strike on Monday in their ongoing fight for a pay rise. They are members of the GMB union. The company is adamant that any pay rise conceded must be self-financing, i.e., from increased productivity.

## UK packaging workers set to take action

Over 2,000 staff employed by corrugated packaging companies, DS Smith, Saica and Smurfit Kappa at 40 sites throughout the UK are due to

begin an overtime ban on Saturday and a one-day strike on Monday, November 28. The staff are represented by the GMB union and their action is in pursuit of a 2 percent pay rise. The action could have an impact on pizza delivery companies and online retailers such as Amazon, who use the corrugated packaging on a huge scale. Including Black Friday, this coming weekend is expected to be a particularly busy period for pizza and on-line retailers.

## 48-hour strike of German airline pilots

Pilots working for Lufthansa began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday. They initially planned a 24-hour strike, but after courts rejected attempts by the company to have the strike declared illegal, the pilots union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) declared it a 48-hour strike. This strike is the fourteenth in a dispute that has lasted since the beginning of 2014.

VC, which represents more than 5,000 pilots, is seeking a 3.7 percent pay increase over a five-year period from 2012. The Lufthansa offer is for 2.5 percent over six years from 2013.

On the first day of the strike, Lufthansa had to cancel more than a quarter of its scheduled flights. Flights by other wings of the company such as Eurowings, Swiss, Austrian Airlines, Air Dolomiti and Brussels Airlines were not affected. In a separate dispute, cabin crew working for the Lufthansa Eurowings operation held a strike on Tuesday, leading to the cancellation of more than 60 flights.

## One-day strike by Greek civil servants and ferry staff

Greek civil servants, members of the ADEDY union, held a one-day strike Thursday. In Athens, they took part in a protest rally. After gathering in Klafthmonos Square, they marched to the Greek parliament building. The union called on the Syriza-led government not to press ahead with labour reforms, which will lead to job losses, lower pay and the loss of job security.

Also on Thursday, ferry workers held a national one-day strike protesting pension reforms and attacks on jobs and conditions. Their strike led to the cancellation of ferry services.

## Strike threat by Icelandic teachers

Grade teachers in Iceland are protesting low pay. According to Iceland

Statistics, pay for teachers is nearly 20 percent below the national average of all workers. Teachers say this is leading to many leaving the profession. With an aging population of teaching staff, insufficient numbers are being recruited to maintain education services.

The majority of teachers are represented by the Union of Icelandic Grade School Teachers, and have twice rejected pay offers negotiated by the union. The employers are represented by the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities.

Two weeks ago, teachers rallied outside the Reykjavik City Hall to present a petition of over 3,000 signatures pressing for higher salaries. They have since held protest meetings after walking out of school early. They walked out of school at 2:30 p.m. one day last week and this week they walked out at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Teachers hope the protests will lead to an acceptable pay offer from the employers but if this does not happen they will be pushing for a strike.

The action by teachers is supported by parents, who have sent letters to city hall demanding the teachers' demands be met. School students have also shown their support for their teachers.

### **Turkish miners die in landslide**

At least five miners at the Madenkoy opencast copper mine in southeastern Turkey died and 11 are missing following a landslide at the mine at the end of last week. The mine is owned by Park Elektrick. A similar landslide at the mine in Jul did not lead to any fatalities, but miners expressed concern at the lack of safety measures.

### **Thousands more Turkish workers lose jobs in post-coup crackdown**

Tuesday of this week, the Turkish government sacked around 15,000 civil servants and closed down nearly 400 organisations, including nine news media outlets. This is in addition to the 100,000 public sector staff, including teachers, police and military, who have been dismissed in the aftermath of the failed July coup. The organisations targeted in the latest batch included charities and research bodies.

### **Protest march against Polish education reforms**

Tens of thousands of protesters marched through Warsaw last Saturday to oppose proposed changes in the Polish education system. The government wants to change the current system to consist of an eight-year elementary school attendance, followed by four years in a secondary school.

The protesters handed in a petition at the parliament building and also created a pile of chalk sticks to represent the attack on the teaching profession.

### **Israeli airline pilots in dispute**

Pilots working for the Israeli airline El Al are mounting a work-to-rule,

which has led to flight cancellations. The pilots are seeking a pay rise, improved working conditions and for the company to stop its practice of cancelling scheduled flights and rescheduling them to other companies. In this way, El Al is able to get around paying its pilots overtime. The labour federation Histadrut has sought and been granted a labour dispute, which is due to come into effect shortly.

### **Iraqi teachers protest unpaid salaries**

Some 5,000 teachers held a protest in the city of Sulaimaniyah in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. They were protesting unpaid salaries. After gathering in front of the education ministry, they marched to the offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). PUK is the dominant political party in the Kurdish region. The teachers vowed to strike until the arrears were paid.

Public sector workers in this region have been protesting intermittently over the last 18 months in an ongoing dispute over pay arrears.

### **Kuwaiti cleaning staff hold strikes**

Cleaning staff contracted by private companies on behalf of the Ministry of Education have taken strike action to protest the nonpayment of their salaries over the last three months.

### **Demonstrators protest death of Moroccan fisherman**

Around 2,000 demonstrators marched through the northern Moroccan city of Hoceima last Saturday. They were demonstrating the death of Mouhcine Fikri, a fisherman, last month. He was crushed to death in a garbage truck after officials confiscated a swordfish in his possession. Currently it is out of season for swordfish to be caught.

The officials, including interior ministry staff, took the fish from him and threw it in the garbage truck. Fikri was crushed to death when someone turned on the garbage truck's crushing mechanism as he was trying to retrieve the fish.

### **Algerian public sector strikes against austerity measures**

Algerian public-sector workers began a three-day strike on November 17 and demonstrated in Algiers Monday against austerity measures. The strike by 12 unions is in response to tax increases, wage freezes and raising the age of retirement.

The Algerian government is proposing to raise VAT from 15 to 17 percent, increase tax on cigarettes, put up petrol prices, extend the minimum retirement age to 60 and freeze wages.

The government describes the austerity measures as a reaction to the fall in oil revenues, but economists say that these measures are just a beginning. A further three-day strike is proposed for November 27.

## **Doctors and pharmacists strike in South Sudan**

Doctors in South Sudan are striking over a wage increase, poor working conditions and violence against them by state forces. Intimidation of striking doctors by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) is continuing.

A member of the Sudanese Doctors Central Committee was picked up by the NISS last Saturday, questioned about the strike and then released. Other doctors have been picked up from their clinics and questioned by the NISS for hours, while some have been detained. Others cannot be accounted for. Pharmacists also protested last Saturday against the Central Bank of Sudan decision to free the exchange rate of the US Dollar for the import of medicines. The Pharmacists Union called the move catastrophic, as most medicines are imported. The shift has seen some medicine prices triple.

## **Kenyan casual workers strike**

Casual workers working for the Kenyan Migori County government demonstrated at City Hall demanding unpaid wages. The 300 casuals came out on strike Monday, demanding three months of wages owed to them. The street cleaners and revenue collectors picketed the state government headquarters. They complained they had lost their homes, as they had not been able to pay their rents. They also complained about the broken promise of permanent jobs.

## **Kenyan doctors join striking nurses**

Striking nurses in Tharaka-Nithi and Embu counties, Kenya, were joined by doctors in their three-week strike. Doctors joined several hundred nurses on Monday when the state governments did not respond to their two-week warning strike.

The doctors, members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), are demanding unpaid salaries, promotions, payment of deductions to appropriate bodies and the return to their jobs of those removed from the register as ghost workers.

Medics say there have been no promotions for over four years and the service needs more doctors. Public hospitals have been brought to a standstill.

## **Burkina Faso doctors strike**

Burkina Faso hospitals have been hit by a three-day strike. Medical workers are demanding a pay increase and better allowances.

The Syntsha union of medical workers says the strike is to make the government see sense. The government claims that out of 63 union demands just four remain to be resolved. Less than 1,000 doctors serve a population of 18 million people.





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