

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 December 2016

Greek seamen hold 48-hour strike

Greek seamen began a 48-hour strike at 6 a.m. on Sunday, ending Tuesday. Panhellenic Seamen's Federation (PNO) members struck in opposition to the latest round of pension cuts and increasing job insecurity being imposed by the Syriza-led coalition government.

On Monday, the seamen marched to the Shipping Ministry where PNO representatives held talks with the Shipping and Island Policy Minister. The talks broke down without agreement.

Further strike by the Southern Rail workers in England

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) working on the Southern Rail network, operated by Govia Thameslink, took further strike action Tuesday. The action was scheduled to last three days, with staff protesting plans by the company to extend the use of driver only operated trains, eliminating the safety role of conductors who currently have responsibility for closing the doors and other safety measures.

At the same time, train drivers working for Southern who are members of the ASLEF union began an overtime ban.

By Wednesday, the current action had led to the cancellation of over 1,000 trains.

Glasgow council IT staff strike

Glasgow Council IT staff, employed by contractor firm Access, began a three-week strike December 1. An initial 39 members of the Unison union came out in response to the Labour-controlled city council's £400 million proposal to privatize the IT service.

Access is employed by Glasgow city council as an "arms-length company" in conjunction with Serco.

Another three-week strike is planned for January. Unison accuses the council of seeking to replace the striking IT workers with agency staff after an IT recruitment firm published details of vacancies exactly matching those of the 39 on strike. Those on strike cover business-critical IT roles the council would find difficult to cover using other in-house staff.

Scottish university staff strike

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Aberdeen University held a one-day strike Wednesday. They were protesting plans by the university's medical school to cut staff. Four members of the medical school staff have been told they must either accept redundancy or be re-employed on reduced contracts. The strike ballot showed a large majority in favour of action.

UK atomic weapons staff strike and lobby parliament

Workers employed at Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire held a further strike Tuesday. The Unite union members are opposing AWE's plans to phase out the defined benefit pension scheme.

AWE workers also lobbied Parliament on Tuesday to press their case. Unite said further strikes are planned for the New Year if AWE continue with its plans to scrap the pension scheme.

Strike of public transport workers in Lyon, France

The selective strike of Metro and funicular rail workers in the city of Lyon, which began last week, was extended this week to bus drivers. The walkouts are in response to the stalling of negotiations over a new contract for underground staff.

The public transport staff are members of the CGT union. Bus drivers stopped work between 7 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and again between 5 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. each day.

Strike threat by Swiss airport staff

Airport workers at Geneva airport have threatened to strike following the breakdown of talks with employer Swissport. The members of the Public Service Union are seeking a pay increase, saying they carry out a difficult job and live in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

The strike could go ahead with just two hours' notice. Swissport claims any such action would be illegal as the current collective agreement applies until 2019.

Strike threat by Irish optics workers

Staff employed by Bausch and Lomb at the Valeant plant in Waterford, southeast Ireland, are threatening to strike in the run-up to Christmas. The company manufactures contact lenses and other eye care products. A strike ballot has been organised by the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

Workers are seeking a restoration of pay and conditions to a pre-2014 level. In June 2014 SIPTU agreed a cost-cutting deal, which saw cuts in pay, lower bonuses, the introduction of a new lower pay grade and around 200 staff made redundant.

The company says failure to come to an agreement with SIPTU before December 16 will result in further attacks on jobs and conditions. It says it will lay off newly hired workers and stop plans to open up a further production line, if strikes are planned.

Strike threat by Irish bus workers

Drivers employed by Irish national bus company, Bus Eireann, are being consulted over possible strike action in the New Year. The bus workers are pushing for a 21 percent pay rise in line with Dublin Bus and Luas (Dublin tram system) workers.

The workers' union made the announcement after the company pulled out of a Labour Court hearing Tuesday. Bus Eireann claims it needs to make further savings and may have to make €5 million cuts in the wage bill, similar to those made in 2013.

Hungarian water workers plan nationwide strike

On December 1, water workers organised by the national federation of water workers' unions (VSZOASZ) announced they were preparing to launch a nationwide strike in support of a 30 percent pay claim. The workers say they have only received a 2.5 percent rise over the last six years.

If the strike goes ahead, around one-third of Hungary's water utilities would be affected.

Israeli airline pilots settle their dispute

Israeli pilots employed by the El Al airline ended their work to rule Sunday, following the intervention of the labour federation Histadrut. Under the agreement, pilots will get an 8.75 percent increase but the union also agreed that pilots will have shorter rest periods between flights. El Al also agreed to stop using leased flights to replace El Al scheduled flights.

Strike by Libyan airport ground staff

Staff working for the Libyan Ground Handling Company at Lebrag and Tobruk struck December 2. They were protesting the several months' arrears of wages owed to them.

Strike and protest by Tunisian lawyers

Tunisian lawyers launched an open-ended strike Tuesday and held a protest outside the prime minister's office in Tunis. The lawyers are protesting a tax being imposed of between \$8 and \$20 on each file they present to court. The government is imposing the tax as part of its austerity measures.

General strike by Tunisian public sector workers called off

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) called off a general strike of public sector staff due to have taken place on Thursday. The cancellation followed talks between the UGTT president and the Tunisian prime minister that took place in the government palace in Kasbah on Wednesday.

As a result, the union agreed public sector workers would only receive 50 percent of a planned pay rise from January to November 2017 and 50 percent of a planned premium between April and November next year. Both additional payments will cease in December 2017. The original pay increase, which has now been cut back, was initially agreed on September 22 this year.

Striking Kenyan plantation worker shot dead by police

A striking tea picker in Nandi County, Kenya was shot dead Monday for demanding the implementation of a court-ordered pay rise. Two others were wounded when armed riot police attacked the strike on the pretext that workers were setting alight their place of work.

Injured workers were taken to Nandi public hospital, which is involved in a national strike, but only private hospitals were operating and they did not get treated.

Workers came out on strike when 15 percent of an agreed 30 percent court-ordered pay rise was not forthcoming. Plantation workers held a hunger strike in June and 20,000 workers went out on strike in July.

Kenyan medical staff implements threatened strike

Medical employees throughout Kenya held a strike Sunday. The action is a response to unheeded demands, with some going back to 2013. Doctors and nurses have been demanding the implementation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) for three years. The government attempted to halt the strike by imposing a court injunction but workers ignored it.

The outstanding CBA covers promotions, job evaluation, wages, and conditions. Central to the medical staff concerns is the shortage of doctors throughout the public hospitals. Doctors estimate public hospitals need to recruit an extra 1,200 doctors each year. The ratio of doctors to the population stands at one to 16,000.

The strike affected around 2,700 hospitals, with patients being discharged home or to private facilities if able to afford it.

Nigerian dockworkers drops wage claim

A Nigerian dockworkers' wage claim has been abandoned by the National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC). A spokesman for the NJIC said this was due to concern for the economic state of the maritime industry and the general condition of the Nigerian economy.

The NJIC is made up of the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) and several employers' organisations. They carry out negotiations under the auspices of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The MWUN general president told the *Nigerian Guardian* that the union understands the economic situation and there is no need to push for a pay rise.

Malawi judiciary support workers end strike empty handed

Malawi judiciary support workers struck on December 2 over salaries, promotions and housing allowances. They are demanding a wage increase of 28 percent to bring them into line with a settlement reached with civil servants in 2014. The judiciary staff union had demanded negotiations with the Chief Justice but he did not respond, prompting the strike.

The strike was suspended on the basis of an undertaking by the authorities to look into the workers' grievances. The Judiciary Members of Staff Union called off the strike while grovelling to the Chief Justice to grant them an audience, which is still pending.

Although civil servants received a pay increase of around 45 percent in 2014, workers in the legal system only received 18 percent. The support workers went on strike at that time demanding pay parity with the civil service, but their demands were not met.



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