

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 December 2016

Europe

Anti-austerity march in Spain

Some 30,000 workers demonstrated in Spain's capital Madrid Sunday to protest the right-wing government's labour "reform." The protest was called by the UGT and CCOO labor federations under the slogan, "People and their rights first."

Those on the march called for an increase in salaries and pensions and for an end to the austerity measures being imposed by the government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. The march was supported by the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Podemos and United Left parties.

Dutch rail workers strike

Dutch train drivers and conductors are due to strike today at 11 a.m. They work for the NS rail service covering the Randstad area, which comprises Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Hoofddorp. The members of the WMC union are in dispute over new working conditions introduced in September.

Strike by German Amazon staff

Several hundred staff working for the German arm of the online retailer Amazon walked out Wednesday, beginning a three-day strike. The Verdi union members are employed at three of Amazon's nine warehouses in Germany. Staff at the Koblenz warehouse came out on strike Monday.

The strike is part of a long-running dispute over the demand that Amazon staff be paid in line with other German retail staff, rather than their current wage which is in line with other lower-paid logistics staff.

Strike by London cinema staff over poverty pay

Some staff working for the Hackney Picturehouse cinema in London began a five-day strike December 15, returning to work Tuesday. The BECTU trade members are in a long-running dispute with the company to force it to pay the current London Living Wage of £9.75 an hour.

UK ferry employees balloted for strike

Staff employed by Briggs Marine Contractors Ltd, which runs the Woolwich Ferry service across London's river Thames on behalf of Transport for London, are to be balloted. Balloting will begin on January 3 and last for 10 days. The Unite union, which represents 36 of the ferry staff, is organizing the ballot. It claims the company has failed to stand by agreements. The union also cites concerns over health and safety issues.

Planned strike by UK airport baggage handling staff called off

Over 1,500 staff working for the airport baggage handling company Swissport, which covers several UK airports, were due to strike on Friday and Christmas Eve. This week it was called off by the Unite trade union.

Staff had voted by a near two-thirds majority to strike after rejecting a 4.65 percent pay offer covering the period 2015 to 2017. The company has made a revised pay offer which is being recommended by the union.

On Thursday, Unite was involved in further talks over ending another planned strike, also over pay, by British Airways cabin crew scheduled for December 25 and 26.

Weetabix cereal workers in UK vote to strike

Over 240 Weetabix cereal manufacturing staff at factories in England have voted in favour of a series of strikes. They are opposed to the new 24/7 shift pattern brought in by the company. The action by the Usdaw union members at Weetabix sites in Corby and Kettering will comprise a 24-hour strike once a week beginning in the New Year.

Protest by Hungarian teachers

On Monday, teachers protested outside the Hungarian parliament to demand the resignation of the Human Resource Minister and for an independent educational ministry to be set up, along with a new law on public education. The protest followed a press conference organised by the Civic Public Education Platform.

The protests are against the public education law brought in five years ago. Speakers outlined how that law had led to continuous change and the resulting chaos. One speaker explained how it had led to teachers having

to teach more lessons with larger class sizes and burdened them with more administrative duties.

Icelandic fishermen strike enters second week

The strike by Icelandic fishermen, which began on December 14, has entered its second week. The action is a resumption of last month's strike over a collective bargaining agreement. Last week, members of the four unions representing fishermen, The Fishermen's Union Iceland, the Westfjords Union, the Seamen's Union of Iceland and Velstjorafelag Grindavikur, all rejected the collective bargaining agreement reached after last month's strike.

The issues at stake include the pricing of catches and employers' proposals for lower manning levels on trawler decks which the fishermen fear would compromise safety.

The strike is beginning to impact the fish processing plants, with four out of six plants in Vestmannaeyjar having to stop production and the other two likely to cease production this week.

Irish nurses vote to strike over staff shortages

Irish nurses belonging to the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) have voted by a 90 percent majority to strike over staff shortages. According to INMO, there are 3,500 fewer nurses today than in 2009, while demand for health services has increased.

The proposed action comprises one-day stoppages, a work-to-rule, only working rostered hours and a refusal to be redeployed to other wards to cover staff shortages. It is reported that the action is unlikely to begin until the end of next January.

Strike threat by staff at Irish youth detention centre

Residential care workers and night supervising officers, together with middle managers at the Oberstown youth detention facility in County Dublin are threatening to strike on January 3. The Impact union members are threatening to take action over fears arising from repeated violent incidents at the facility. The staff accuse Oberstown management of refusing to make protective clothing available. Reviews of safety concerns at the facility are under way.

Middle East

Israeli municipal workers stage general strike

On Wednesday, workers at all local, regional and municipal authorities, with the exception of Jerusalem, struck in opposition to austerity and cuts outlined by the government of Benjamin Netanyahu in its latest budget.

Among services hit were waste disposal and sanitation and social services. High schools, kindergartens and cultural institutions were closed. The Jerusalem Post reported that although primary school teachers did not strike, their schools were "without secretarial, sanitation and caretaker

staff."

The strike began following a breakdown in talks with government representatives. Jerusalem was not affected, as its public services are funded from a different budget.

On Sunday, the government approved total budget cuts of NIS 3.3 billion per year (\$0.87 billion). All told, the cuts will affect 190 of Israel's local authorities.

Israeli tax authority employees' go-slow action

Israeli tax authority employees are taking part in a go-slow, which is leading to delays in real estate deals and the collection of taxes. They are seeking a pay increase in line with bank employees who have a similar career path and expertise to tax authority staff. The latter have been awarded a \$400 pay increase.

Protest in Kuwait over pay arrears

Cleaning workers recently held a protest in Kuwait to highlight the fact that they have not received their wages for the last three months.

Africa

Kenyan doctors and nurses continue their strike

The strike by Kenyan doctors entered its third week on Wednesday. The Kenyan Medical Practitioners, Pharmacist and Dentist Union (KMPPDU) has been served a court ruling ordering the doctors to return to work.

KMPPDU claims it has not been issued a stay of the strike by the court. The union stated it will not have further meetings with the federal government until it implements the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) of 2013. This includes increased wages, promotions, and increased medical staff and funding for improved hospital conditions.

Three hundred consultants who initially stayed at work have agreed to withdraw their services in support of the doctors until the CBA is implemented.

Kenyan nurses' demands betrayed by union

Kenyan nurses on strike alongside doctors over the 2013 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) are continuing their strike, in the face of the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN) signing an agreement calling for a return to work. A KNUN meeting on December 14 with the Nigerian Council of Governors broke up in disarray when a section of the nurse's union, led by the union secretary general, walked out.

The union secretary general said the governors wanted a return to work before negotiations. A report in the December 19 Kenyan Star said an agreement had been made based on 47 county governments agreeing on union recognition. KNUN says the recognition agreement allows the union to strike a new collective bargaining agreement next year.

A new CBA will now be agreed and a monthly pay of between

Sh15,000 (\$146) and 20,000 (\$195) depending on job grade—previously rejected by the nurses—is to be paid in stages in January and July next year. Many of the other issues in the 2013 agreement raised by nurses have not been resolved.

The striking nurses are insisting that the 2013 CBA is the only basis for a settlement.

Kenyan public workers strike to demand outstanding wages

Public-sector workers in Migori County, Kenya, called a strike December 13 to demand payment of outstanding wages. The Kenya County Government Workers Union is demanding payment in back wages and auxiliary payments of Sh134 million (\$1.3 million), covering over 1,500 workers.

Nigerian airline workers strike over unpaid wages and conditions

Three unions at Arik Airlines in Nigeria struck Tuesday demanding payment of wages. Members of the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers, National Union of Air Transport Employees and Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria mounted picket lines at 6 a.m. at the air terminals, completely closing the airline down.

Riot police were sent to confront pickets at the airline's head office.

Negotiations were called by the National Aviation Authority, allowing flights to resume from Lagos and Abuja in the afternoon and normal flights to continue the next day. Apart from seven months unpaid wages and the non-remittance of statutory dues, other reasons for the strike are the victimisation of employees campaigning to form a union, and a labour quota law.

Other airlines took advantage of the lack of airline capacity by increasing airfares by 100 percent. Arik is Nigeria's largest airline, with some 40 percent of the market and is billions of naira in debt to its dependents.

Nigerian oil workers union calls off strikes

Workers in the Nigerian oil industry went on strike over illegal sackings imposed by US conglomerate ExxonMobil. Oil unions have been demanding the federal government take action against international oil companies illegally sacking workers from their operations. ExxonMobil gave out sacking notices to 115 of its workforce while negotiations over jobs were taking place.

Protests have also taken place at other Exxon operations, including 1,000 youth in Akwa Ibom State blocking entrance to offices, over the arbitrary sacking of local workers. Members of the Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria trade union protested at Exxon offices in Lagos over the breaching of labour laws, forcing them to close down.

Union members also shut down operations of offshore rigs, threatening approximately 30 percent of Nigeria's daily output of 2.2 million barrels per day.

The strike was then called off and a proposed strike on January 9 postponed, on the basis of forming a committee to look into the issues. All action has now been called off until the committee reports on January 10.

Zimbabwe mine employees sacked for entering mine premises

Zimbabwean gold miners, out on strike since November 24, are facing unlawful dismissal. They are demanding unpaid salaries and payment of remittances to relevant bodies. The mine, owned by the British company Clarity Capital, responded to the strike with sackings and suspensions.

The National Mine Workers' Union of Zimbabwe is calling on the government to get the company to issue a "show cause order" for the sackings.

This is the latest example, as with many other cases across Africa, of workers going on strike for not being paid and being hit with a court injunction declaring their action illegal. The union said that workers attempting to return to work are being assaulted by management.



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