

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 January 2017

Europe

Strike by Italian textile and footwear workers

Some half a million Italian textile and shoe manufacturer workers went on strike January 13 to demand the renewal of national labour contracts. A new contract has been on hold for 10 months. The unions have called on the companies to return to negotiations.

The strikers held a demonstration in Florence, coinciding with a major fashion show.

Strike by Cypriot port pilots against privatisation

Port pilots at the port of Limassol held a half-day strike on January 11. The six pilots took the action to protest the privatization of the port, which will mean the outsourcing of their jobs. The pilots have been instructed to train the six Dutch pilots due to take over their jobs at the end of the month.

The pilots may take further action and are awaiting the outcome of a bill being discussed in parliament, which if passed would stipulate only Cypriot nationals would be able to act as port pilots.

In April last year, the Cypriot government signed a deal with a consortium led by Dubai Ports World for the port to be privatised as part of the deal over the bailout of the Cypriot banks.

Metro staff in Spanish city of Malaga strike

Staff working on the metro light rail system in the Spanish city of Malaga, who held a strike at the beginning of the month, plan two further days of action to take place February 2 and 9. In addition, protests will take place outside the network's stations in the period leading up to the strikes.

The staff represented by the CCOO union are seeking improved pay and conditions.

Spanish trade unionists hold protests over deaths

Trade unionists from the UGT and CCOO unions held a protest on January 14 over the death of a security guard at the Michelin Experience Centre in Nijar in the Almeria province of Andalucía, Spain. The death on Christmas day was the twelfth work-related death in the Almeria province last year.

Swedish dockworkers resume overtime ban

Dockers at the Swedish port of Gothenburg, members of the Swedish Dockworkers' Union, resumed an overtime ban on January 6, which is due to last till February 28, as part of a long-running dispute. A previous overtime ban, which began November 8, was lifted on December 31 last year. They are employed by APM Terminals, which is seeking to lay off 30 of the 440 full time employees.

As well as opposing the layoffs the dockworkers are seeking a separate collective bargaining agreement from that in force throughout the rest of the country. They are also opposing the use of casual workers.

The port, Sweden's largest, handles over 50 percent of the country's container trade.

UK atomic weapons staff strike to oppose attack on pensions

Around 600 staff employed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at its two sites, Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire, members of the Unite union, began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday. They are opposing plans by AWE to close the defined benefit pension scheme and replace it with an inferior defined contribution scheme. A further 48-hour strike is planned to begin January 30. The staff voted by a more than 90 percent majority to go on strike.

AWE is jointly owned by US firms Lockheed Martin and Jacob Engineering, together with UK security firm Serco. AWE had originally been a Ministry of Defence establishment, but was privatised in the 1990s. At the time of privatisation staff were assured their pension scheme would be maintained.

Further strike action by UK technology company staff in Manchester

Around 300 staff working for the international technology company Fujitsu held a one-day strike on Monday, the twelfth to date with a further strike planned for today. A strike planned for yesterday was called off by

their union Unite as talks between Fujitsu management and the union brokered by the reconciliation service ACAS took place.

There are a series of issues at stake, including the company's plans to cut 1,800 across its sites across the UK. Fujitsu has major plants in Bracknell, Crewe, London, Solihull, Wakefield and Warrington, Belfast and Derry in Northern Ireland in addition to the Manchester plant.

Other issues include a pay differential for women, who earn around 16 percent less than men performing similar roles. Their pension scheme is also under attack. Following a picket of the Manchester site on Monday, pickets went to the Post Office premises in Chesterfield. The post office is a major Fujitsu customer.

UK airline cabin crew hold further strike

Cabin crew employed by the UK airline British Airways on their mixed fleet services, members of the Unite union, began a 72-hour strike yesterday. This follows a 48-hour strike last week. They are striking over "poverty" pay.

Some workers say they have to hold down two jobs with others saying they turn up to work even when sick so not to lose the £3 an hour allowance earned when they are on duty. BA staff taken on after 2010 were employed on an inferior contract. BA announced it expected to cancel some of its short-haul flights as a result of the strike.

Strike by teachers in Northern Ireland

Teachers belonging to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) held a half-day strike on Wednesday in pursuit of an improved pay offer. Following a pay freeze last financial year, teachers have only been offered a 1 percent pay rise this year.

Around 7,000 INTO members took part in the strike, affecting some 800 schools. Teachers belonging to the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) in Derry, Strabane, Mid Ulster, Fermanagh and Omagh are due hold a one-day strike on January 31 over the same issue. NASUWT members in Belfast and Newtonabbey held a one-day strike on November 30 last year again over the issue of pay.

UK teaching assistants in Derby hold a week of strike action

School support staff including teaching assistants, school supervisors and admin staff in Derby in the UK Midlands have held a half-day strike each day of the week. They are members of the Unison union. The action is part of a long-running dispute, which included a two-day strike on January 4 and 5.

Their employer is seeking to change their contracts, removing pay over the school holiday periods which would mean a cut of up to 25 percent for some workers.

Strike by social workers in northern England threatened with legal action

Social workers in the northern England town of Huddersfield voted by a 79 percent majority to hold a strike on January 27. They are members of the Unison union. The vote was in response to allegations of bullying, case overloads, pay, an inadequate IT system and over-reliance on agency staff.

Their employer, Kirklees council, in which the Labour Party has minority control, has threatened to seek a court injunction to prevent the strike.

Middle East

Strike of Egyptian pharmacists postponed

Egyptian pharmacists belonging to the Pharmacists Syndicate have postponed a strike, originally due to begin January 15. They had planned to close their pharmacies for a total of six hours a day for three days and then begin an all-out strike thereafter. The planned action was to protest government plans to increase the price of medicines. The postponement took place following an indication that the president's office was considering their concerns.

Israeli pilots threaten action

El Al pilots are threatening to resume their programme of disruption, which included pilots calling in sick. The previous action was in pursuit of a pay claim. A deal was struck with the pilots' union resulting in an 8.75 percent pay rise.

El Al has begun compelling a third of its experienced pilots and flying instructors who are over the age of 65, to take mandatory vacations and so receive reduced salaries. Their union argues the action is illegal, vacations should be for rest and recuperation, not be imposed. El Al management's response is that the government is imposing an international ruling on them requiring commercial pilots to retire at the age of 65.

Africa

South African miners underground protest

Miners at Harmony Gold's Kusasalethu mine, South Africa, staged a sit-in on January 11 to enforce several demands. Some 1,700 miners out of the 4,500 workforce, stayed 2.4 kilometres below ground for 30 hours, demanding bonus payments, removal of the pit general manager and a guarantee that no miner will be victimised for the action.

The sit-in was deemed illegal and the two unions at the pit, the National Union of Mineworkers and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) claim they were not responsible for the miners' actions.

Management gave way to the demand for the overdue special bonus, in negotiations with AMCU, but would not commit on whether to impose disciplinary action. Miners returned to work on January 13 without a resolution on the removal of the general manager and could be subject to disciplinary measures.

Winery workers strike against wage settlement duplicity

Workers have at Robertson's Winery in South Africa have resumed their strike. They came out on strike in August to demand an R8,500 (\$625) wage increase but eventually settled for an 8 percent rise taking their pay to R4,264 (\$315) a month.

The renewal of the strike is in protest at the company's back payment and bonus agreement. Back pay of wages should have been paid from August 8 last year but was only paid from November after the return to work. Similarly, bonus payments were deducted for the period on strike.

The Commercial, Stevedoring and Allied Workers' Union (CSAAWU) says strikers are being disciplined, although the union recommended a return to work and put their grievances in the hands of lawyers.

Strike threat by Zimbabwean teachers union

Zimbabwean teachers have threatened to embark on a go-slow followed by an all-out strike if bonuses are not paid. For the first time, the annual 13th month bonus has not been paid to government employees.

Apex Council, the public-sector union, says it has not decided on what position it will take on the nonpayment of the 13th cheque, and is still discussing it. Last September, Patrick Chinamasa, the country's finance minister, proposed the suspension of civil servants bonuses alongside a raft of assaults on the public sector.

Zimbabwean President Mugabe and his cabinet denied they had agreed to take up Chinamasa's proposals, although they stated the government is not contracted by an agreement to pay bonuses.

Nigerian oil workers union calls off strikes

The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG) called off its three-day warning strike on its first day, January 11. The oil union called its members out over illegal treatment by oil conglomerates in arbitrary sackings and layoff compensation.

Other related and unrelated oil worker strikes were also called off. Oil hub operatives in Oleh in the Niger Delta, controlling pipeline flow, striking over unpaid wages, were simultaneously sent back to work.

A strike at Total Oil over sackings was also called off after a day, due to an unspecified settlement, alongside the rest of NUPENG members. The NUPENG president stated he was satisfied with commitments shown by Labour Minister Chris Ngige, who is reported by *Reuters* as saying; workers will be "entitled to all their entitlements", salaries and allowances.

More Nigerian public-sector workers strike over unpaid wages

Teachers in Abia State, Nigeria refused to return to work on January 9, the opening date of the new educational year. The educators stayed away in protest at not being paid five months' outstanding wages. Primary and secondary teacher's July salaries were paid in December.

Dates for the resumption of the education year were put back to January 16 on the promise that the two months' pay for August and September

would be paid before that date, but it did not happen.

While pupils were being turned away from state schools, private schools are fully attended and not affected by the strike. Teachers are in the invidious position of not being able to pay for their own children's education.

Strike threat by Kenyan health staff

Kenyan clinical officers are threatening to strike next week unless their pay demand is responded to. The Kenya Union of Clinical Officers (KUCO) is demanding promotions and better pay and allowances.

An evaluation and a defined structuring was carried out producing a grading of clinical officers' pay, and mandating the Salaries and Remuneration Commission to advise the government on its implementation. KUCO are questioning why the government went through the process but then did not put it into action.

Gabon oil workers strike over job security

Shell workers in Gabon went on a national strike in the OPEC country January 12. Shell, one of the largest oil companies in the world, is in the process of selling its operations in the country.

Workers are concerned over their future employment and are demanding of Shell a contract with a buyer that incorporates the whole workforce for five years. Shell produces 55,000 of Gabon's 220,000 barrels of oil a day.



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