Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 March 2017

French air traffic controllers strike

French air traffic control (ATC) staff, members of the UNSA union, at airports in Brest, Bordeaux and Aix-en-Provence, came out on strike Monday. Colleagues at Nice and Marseille airports joined them Tuesday.

The ATC staff are seeking parity of pay and working conditions in line with other ATC staff in other European countries. Airlines using French airspace said the action led to the cancellation of more than 1,000 flights.

Striking British Airways staff protest in Brighton

British Airways (BA) cabin crew on mixed fleet flights began a seven-day strike on Friday March 3. On the following day BA strikers, members of the Unite union, held a protest outside the BA-sponsored “world’s tallest moving observation tower” on the Brighton seafront. They rallied from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. to highlight their dispute.

UK rail staff on Merseyside begin limited action

Train guards employed by Merseyrail, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), began a ban on working rest days on Tuesday. The action will continue indefinitely. The action is to protest the plans by Merseyrail to increase the use of Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains, eliminating the critical safety role played by train guards. They voted by more than an 80 percent majority to hold a one-day strike on Monday March 13.

Deliveroo courier riders protest in Leeds

Courier riders working for Deliveroo are to hold a mass protest cycle ride in Leeds today. It is to protest the sacking of two of their colleagues and the cut in hours for another five, who had posted on an online union chat site. The company has 300 staff in the city, but only 30 are employed on a full-time basis. Some are members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Further strike by bus drivers in Oxford

Bus drivers working for the Oxford Bus Company, members of the Unite union, held a second 24-hour strike Monday. A vote resulted in a 90 percent majority in favour of the action. They are seeking a pay increase and additional payments for working public holidays. The company returned profits in excess of £4 million in 2015.

Further strike by rail staff in Athens

Employees on the STASY fixed rail system in Athens held a 24-hour strike March 3, the most recent of a series of strikes. They are protesting proposals to allow the commercially run Athens urban transport network, OASA, to have access to publicly owned STASY facilities. They fear this will pave the way for the privatization of the STASY rail system.

Fire brigade staff in Irish capital hold rally and plan strikes

Staff working for the Dublin Fire Brigade, members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), held a well-supported rally Monday to protest plans to remove the ambulance call and dispatch function from its operation. Following an over 80 percent majority vote last month, they will also hold two 24-hour stoppages on March 18 and March 27.

Rally by striking Irish garage staff

Workers at the Tim Hastings Volkswagen garage in Westport rallied outside a meeting of Mayo County Council Monday. They were publicising their strike, which began on February 3, in support of three colleagues who have been made redundant. The strikers are demanding the three receive their full redundancy entitlement.

Planned strikes of Spanish dockers cancelled

The union representing Spanish dockworkers, the Sea Workers’ Union (CETM), has once again cancelled planned strike action. It called off strikes scheduled to take place on February 20, 22 and 24 saying the action would take place instead on Monday and Wednesday of this week.

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However the CETM then cancelled these planned strikes.

The strikes were originally called in response to an EU ruling that the system requiring Spanish ports to give preference to dockers organised in stevedoring societies in each port, known as a Public Limited Company of Dockworkers Management (SAGEP), was a restraint on trade and must end. The SAGEPs recruit and train port workers before they are made available to employers.

It is not clear at this stage whether strikes planned for March 10,13, 15, 17, 20, 22 and 24 will go ahead.

Transport strike in Italian capital

Italian transport workers on the ATAC buses, trams, metro and light rail system together with workers at Cotral, which serves the greater Rome area, took strike action Wednesday.

Middle East

Israeli foreign ministry staff in dispute

Staff working for the Israeli Foreign Ministry are taking action after the government failed to fully implement an agreement on pay and improved working conditions. Their action includes refusing to process papers for thousands of Chinese construction workers drafted to work on a house-building project.

Kenyan doctors defy return to work order

Kenyan doctors resolved to continue their 95-day strike, despite the government's order for them to return to work. The doctors' union, the Medical Practitioners, Pharmacist and Dental Union (KMPDU), accuses the government of threatening the very existence of the union by referring them to the health ministry to review its function.

The doctors accuse the government of continuing to shift positions in negotiations. A collective bargaining agreement (CBA), settled Monday, which was to be signed by government negotiators, has now been delayed.

The date for signing was shifted 30 days forward and its registration even later, without the union's consent.

The doctors also accuse the federal state of having an agenda to destroy the health service on behalf of corporate interests.

Doctors claim the government is opposed to signing a CBA, as it would be regarded as equivalent to a constitutional agreement, which "has to be adhered to."

The union is looking to the directive of the Court of Appeal under the mediation of religious leaders.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said, "If the mediation by religious leaders fails, we will have a problem with them and we will sort them out."

Kenyan nurses prepare to resume strike

Kenyan nurses have threatened to resume their strike on March 13 if there is no response to their proposals on harmonising their collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

Nurses are demanding the conditions of county nurses be brought into line with those of federal state nurses, who were deployed to the counties under a reconfiguration of the health service.

Union members say although they do the same job, the now combined national and local nurses have different conditions.

Nurses were instructed to return to work on December 13 last year by the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN), ending a two-week strike over the CBA.

The strike was ended on the basis there would be further negotiations to resolve outstanding issues with the 2013 CBA. KNUN, which is opposed to resuming the strike alongside the doctors, has given the government an extra week to respond.

The KNUN chairman said the union would not be negotiating the terms of the CBA.

More Kenyan health employees to strike

Health workers in Kwale county Kenya came out on strike March 1, joining medical workers already on strike. Health workers from a broad range of disciplines joined the strike over non-payment of allowances and demands for pay increases. They include laboratory technologists, counsellors, physiotherapists, biological engineers, nutritionists, and pharmaceutical and health record keepers.

They are also protesting against discrimination and harassment, as well as a lack of promotions and are demanding improved working conditions.

A spokesman for the health workers said they would not be deterred from pressing their demands by threats to lay them off.

Kenyan lecturers continue strike

Kenyan lecturers demonstrated Wednesday to demand implementation of their 2013-17 collective bargaining agreement. The lecturers, members of the University Academic Staff Union, have been on strike for over six weeks and have been in official and unofficial negotiations without success.

They say the university negotiating bodies, the Inter-Public Universities Councils Consultative Forum and the SRC, are responsible for the impasse, as they will not address their demands.

Police assault Kenyan water and sewerage workers

Police lobbed tear gas canisters at Kenyan water and sewerage workers as they protested outside the offices of the Kisumu Water and Sewerage Company (Kiwasco). They were calling for the removal of the company managing director.

Residents, who had gone to the offices to pay bills, had to run for cover to avoid the police attacks.

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Strike by Nigerian health staff

Nigerian Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP) members came out on strike Monday with the health ministry threatening “no work no pay.”

The NUAHP president had threatened an indefinite strike at a February demonstration if nothing was done to change the deplorable conditions in the health service. He accused the health ministry of reneging on the implementation of agreed conditions set out in the 2009 collective bargaining agreement.

After three previous demonstrations without response from the government, the unions are concerned to maintain credibility. The indefinite strike will affect tertiary level health care, such as clinics.

South African bus workers dispute goes to arbitration

The nationwide dispute of South African transport workers has been referred to the Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) process in an attempt to avoid a national stoppage by 16 bus companies.

Three unions involved are the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the Transport and Omnibus Workers’ Union (TOWU). They are demanding a 30 percent pay increase over the year and a 40-hour work week without loss of pay.

The company’s negotiating body, the Bus Passenger Council, is said to have offered a straight 6 percent pay increase this year and 6.5 percent next year, in a two-year deal.

The unions also want a R1,500 (US$114) housing allowance, a R1,200 (US$91) sleeping out allowance, a time-and-a-half overtime rate and double time paid for working holidays.

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