

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 March 2017

Europe

Air France cabin crew strike

Five unions representing cabin crews at Air France held a three-day strike beginning March 18. Around two-thirds of the workers were involved. The strike was to oppose a new contract put forward by Air France that would impact pay, conditions and promotion prospects, and would see the introduction by Air France of a low-cost subsidiary operation, Boost.

French power workers strike for 24 hours

Power workers employed by the French power generator EDF held a further 24-hour strike beginning 9 p.m. on Monday. This was the sixth such strike this year and is in opposition to a pay freeze being imposed by EDF. The strikes were called by the CGT and other power sector workers' unions.

Protest by Belarus workers

Several hundred protesters in the city of Slonim, in the west of Belarus demonstrated Sunday against the introduction of a tax on workers who are employed for less than six months a year. The tax also applies to those not registered at unemployment centres. Plans to introduce the tax have been postponed for a year at the behest of authoritarian Belarus president Alyaksandr Lukashenka, for "corrections" to the measures.

At the end of the rally, participants issued a joint statement calling on the government to improve job prospects and not to raise the age of retirement.

Hypermarket workers strike at four stores in Belgian capital

Staff at four Delhaize hypermarkets in the city of Brussels held walk-off-the-job protests on March 17, to oppose the effects of a restructuring plan introduced in June 2014. The restructuring plan called for 1,800 job cuts across the Delhaize chain. The impact of the plan has meant each of the

stores in Brussels have lost around a dozen staff, which means remaining staff have to cover the shortfall.

The workers are members of the retail and service sector union CNE and demand the end of the use of short-term contracts. Delhaize stores sell food and household goods.

Union calls off strikes by Finnish airport workers

Ground crew at Helsinki airport held a four-hour strike on March 17. They belong to the Finnish Aviation Labour Union, which called the strike against Finavia—the state-owned airport operator—accusing it of paying less than the going rate for the sector. The strike led to the cancellation of some 200 flights.

Further four-hour walkouts were scheduled for three days this week, beginning Wednesday. However, following 30 hours of negotiations brokered by the Finnish National Conciliation service, a new three-year deal was drawn up, leading to the cancellation of the planned strikes.

Disabled protest austerity in Greek capital

Hundreds of disabled people, including the blind, held a rally in Athens on March 16 to protest the ongoing austerity being imposed by the Syriza-led government at the behest of the European Union and international financial elite. The rally was one of many recent anti-austerity protests held in the capital, Athens, and other towns and cities.

The government is seeking further loans from the European Union to avoid defaulting on a debt of €7.5 billion, which falls due in July. This is a tiny proportion of Greece's overall debt, which remains at around €300 billion.

Greek health protesters attacked by police

POEDIN, the national federation of Greek health workers, called a national strike on March 15. The strike lasted 24 hours throughout the country, except for Athens, where a four-hour strike took place.

Doctors and nurses held a rally in Athens outside the Ministry of Finance. Denouncing the "sellout" by Greek government ministers, the protesters demanded the provision of free health care, reimbursement of wages lost as a result of pay cuts and the recruitment of more health staff. Riot police responded by attacking the protesters.

Protest by Greek tax employees

Greek tax workers held a protest outside the Finance Ministry in Athens on Monday. Members of the tax workers' union draped a three-storey banner on the front of the ministry building bearing the slogan, "Stop Austerity."

They were protesting the Syriza government's plans to lower the income tax threshold level. The tax increases will further slash the incomes of low and middle-income layers.

Greek local authority staff strike over unpaid wages

Greek local authority staff held a nationwide strike beginning early Tuesday morning and ending in the early afternoon. They were protesting the non-payment of wages. In some cases two months' wages are owed. Some of the workers held a demonstration outside the Ministry of Labour in Athens to press their case.

Drivers at Ireland's Bus Eireann set to strike

On Wednesday, state-owned national bus company, Bus Eireann issued letters to its 2,600 staff saying it would implement 46 changes to working practices in order to cut costs. It will also go ahead with its plans to cut or reduce services on five routes.

The next day, unions representing the workers were to meet "to consider their response to moves by management to implement nearly 50 cost-saving measures without agreement," reported the *Irish Times*. The newspaper added, "Union sources believe industrial action will either get underway on Friday or next Monday."

Airport workers strike in Italy

Airport staff, including air traffic control (ATC) staff, carried out a four-hour nationwide strike in Italy Monday. The ATC workers are represented by five unions.

The strike led to the cancellation of a large percentage of flights. It was in response to the plans of national carrier Alitalia to cut thousands of jobs. A further strike has also been called for April 5.

Protest by Maltese broadcasting staff

On Tuesday, employees at the Maltese Broadcasting Authority (BA) held a protest outside the Maltese parliament.

The members of the UHM union handed in a letter to the prime minister, calling on him to dismiss the BA chairperson, Tanya Borg Cardona. BA staff accuse Cardona of imposing a regime of bullying and intimidation.

UK atomic weapon staff strike

Workers at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), based at Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire, were due to strike on Thursday. Around 600 AWE staff, members of the Unite union are involved in a long-running dispute over the company's plans to end the defined pension scheme and replace it with an inferior one.

AWE, which had been part of the ministry of defence, was transferred to the private sector in the 1990s. At the time, workers were promised they would retain their pension scheme. A further seven days of strikes are planned through May 8.

Middle East

Strike threat by Israeli insurance staff

Around 4,000 workers employed by Clal Insurance are due to strike on Sunday over delays in talks over a collective bargaining agreement.

Israeli bus drivers' strike called off

A nationwide strike by drivers employed by the coach company Egged that was due to take place on Tuesday was called off after a Tel Aviv District Labour Court intervened. The court ordered the company and unions to enter into negotiations.

The strike was called to protest the government's failure to give Egged a sufficient subsidy to maintain its services. The drivers are also protesting their working conditions.

Israeli Broadcasting Authority staff protest

Around 40 Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) staff held a protest in Jerusalem Sunday in opposition to its pending closure. The IBA's closure would lead to the loss of some 1,000 jobs.

A new Israel Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) is due to replace the IBA but will employ fewer staff. A protest outside the Histadrut trade union office in Tel Aviv was also planned, in protest at the labour federation's inaction over the issue.

Africa

Kenyan civil servants to resume strike

Civil servants working at Kenya's Migori County administration are set to go back out on strike. The county government workers' trade union has given the state government until April 3 to comply with an agreement made in December, that was used to entice the staff back to work.

In December, municipal workers returned to work after three weeks on

strike, in response to a state commitment to pay outstanding wages in stages. As is becoming familiar in Kenya, the state reneged on the agreement resulting in a further strike notice by the 1,600 employees.

Further strike notices by Kenyan health staff

Health workers in Kenyan counties are coming into conflict over unpaid wages and working conditions. The Nandi county health workers' union issued a 14-day strike notice on March 18, requesting the government respond to its demands.

Nurses, social workers, clinical officers and morgue workers in 391 facilities are demanding unpaid wages—going back in some cases six months—promotions and recognition of qualified staff as well as highlighting staff shortages.

Malawi workers campaign against corruption and for a wage increase

Workers struck at Malawi's Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) on March 14. The parastatal workers in Blantyre—Malawi's second largest city and centre of finance and commerce—have been demanding an increase in wages since 2013, with little response.

Responding to the strike, management have asked the agricultural workers to form a negotiating committee although ADMARC claims it cannot directly negotiate with the workers' representatives.

Malawi university staff demand a wage increase

A strike by staff at Malawi university's Chancellor College (CHANCO) Zomba, has led to the postponement of the new academic year. The academic year was due to begin March 20 but this was postponed because of the seven-day strike warning issued that day. Members of the CHANCO Academic Staff Union are demanding a 40 percent pay increase.

Mali health workers demand implementation of collective bargaining agreement

Mali health service workers held a nationwide strike March 9 to demand the implementation of an outstanding collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Hospital and health centre staff demand the government implement the CBA agreed to in November 2016.

A spokesman for the National Union of Health, Social Action and Family Promotion said it was not a matter of negotiation but a matter of implementation. Health workers are calling for improvements in infrastructure and in the conditions of hospital services.

Mozambique bus workers protest pay cuts

Bus workers in Maputo, Mozambique threatened to strike last week over arbitrary changes in remunerations. Bus workers were sent back to work after striking in early February, ostensibly to give the union a chance to negotiate.

Workers are complaining that there has been no clarification over unexplained deductions from their wages, but dramatic changes have taken place in bus employees' wages and conditions since the devolving of the national bus company to the Maputo Municipal Council.

Since January, the wages of the staff have declined because of the ending of overtime payments, premium payments for working holidays, night shift allowances, and the ending of their annual bonus payment. Transport previously provided to late workers and early starters has also been abolished.

Nigerian university staff are told return work or lose jobs

Striking members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) at Adamawa state university have been threatened with non-payment of wages and the sack. Workers have been on strike since the beginning of January over pay and university funding.

In an attempt to blackmail staff to return to work, the vice chancellor said he would implement a policy of "no work, no pay." In addition, a register was opened for returning staff to sign, and those signatures not on the register would not be recognized as employees. In response to the threats to his members, the chairman of ASUU said he would continue a dialogue with the university.

The ASUU are claiming that nationally, monthly funding for university staff is being reduced—in some cases to around 90 percent, and in others to around 45 percent.

Nigerian health professionals prepare to strike

The Nigerian Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP) has threatened the government with a strike on March 27.

The government responded with a court order barring it from striking on the grounds of health care being an essential service.

Strikes threatened by South African mining unions

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is threatening the "mother of all strikes" over the privatisation of Eskom. No action has been decided on as yet.

The threat is the response of NUMSA and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to the government's announcement that five power plants in Mpumalanga are to be closed over the next decade. NUMSA calculates that this will result in the destruction of some 30,000 jobs.



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