

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Protests hit Syriza government in Greece

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature
Europe

Protests against policies of Syriza government in Greece

Members of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece affiliated PAME trade union federation held a demonstration outside the Ministry of Labour on Tuesday. Riot police were called to disperse the protest and used tear gas.

The protest was called after the Syriza-led government proposed to increase the quorum for strike action from a third to 50 percent. On Monday, the government decided not to go ahead with the change, for the time being.

Meanwhile, staff at Public Power Corporation (PPC) lignite power plants held protests this week against plans by the Syriza-led government plans to privatize the facilities.

On Monday, workers at the Florina plant in northern Greece held a protest outside the plant. Local people and businesses that are economically dependent on the plant supported them. A similar protest took place on Wednesday at the Megalopoli plant in the Peloponnese.

A spokesman for the GENOP union said further action could take place, including strikes.

French capital hit by strike of refuse workers

Refuse collectors in Paris began a strike on Monday to demand a pay increase. It affected half of the arrondissements (districts) of the city.

According to *Le Figaro*, around 900 workers blockaded refuse trucks and three plants that treat the collected waste. The strike went into a second day on Tuesday.

UK driving test examiners strike

Over 1,000 driving test examiners in the UK held a 48-hour strike on Monday and Tuesday. The action took place to coincide with the introduction of a new driving test, with only a fraction of tests taking place.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are protesting changes in working hours brought in by the UK government body the Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA). Under the changes, examiners will be expected to work longer hours for no increase in pay, increasing the working week to six days a week up from the current five days and being expected to travel for up to 90 minutes a day without reimbursement.

Staff voted by an 84 percent majority to strike, with many fearing the changes could be a prelude to privatization of the service.

Bus workers in Surrey, England hold strike over union recognition

A strike by workers employed by Quality Line Epsom in Surrey in southeastern England went ahead on Monday.

They are demanding the company recognize the right of the workforce to be represented by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union.

Refuse workers in, Kirklees, England to be balloted for possible strike

Refuse collection staff employed by Kirklees council in Huddersfield, England are to be balloted by the Unison trade union over changes to bin collection schedules and claims of bullying.

Currently staff work a 38-hour week Monday to Thursday, but the council is demanding a collection on Friday January 5. The workers accuse management of bullying, refusing leave requests and refusing shop stewards time off to attend meetings.

In November, a handful of collectors carried out a wildcat action finishing early one day and leaving around 4,000 bins unemptied.

School cleaners in UK capital balloted for strike

School cleaners in the London borough of Hackney are being balloted for possible strike action. The 42 workers are employed by outsourcing company, OCS Group Ltd.

They are demanding the company pay the proper holiday rate over the Christmas period. They also demand the company negotiate a five percent

pay claim beginning April next year and are opposing the imposition of term-time only contracts. The ballot is being organized by the Unite union and closes December 18.

Delivery drivers in Scotland hold protests

On Tuesday, drivers working for parcel delivery company, DPD, held protests outside DPD depots in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. The GMB union members protested changes in working conditions imposed by DPD, including a reduction in delivery rates and enforced weekend working.

Blacklisting protest outside UK parliament

A lobby of the British parliament took place on Wednesday as part of a day of action to highlight the ongoing campaign against the blacklisting of construction staff.

At the same time, protests were held outside companies, across the UK, accused of carrying out the blacklisting. Protests took place in Leeds, Birmingham, Manchester, and Edinburgh among others.

The protests were organised by the Unite union, which is demanding a full public inquiry, for blacklisting to be made a criminal offence and for companies that have carried out blacklisting to be barred from bidding for contracts in the public sector.

German pilots refuse to carry out deportation flights

Figures released this week show that over 220 deportation flights were cancelled in Germany in the period from January to September after pilots refused to fly.

Many pilots were concerned about flying deportees to Afghanistan because of ongoing violence taking place. The German government insists the war-torn country is a "safe country of origin". Over a third of the flights involved Lufthansa or its Eurowings subsidiary.

Strike threat by metro staff in Hungarian capital

Staff working for the Metro transit system in Budapest are seeking a pay increase. So far, they have rejected two offers from the employer dismissing them as inadequate.

The Trade Union of Retail Employees (KASZ) has set up a strike committee and is threatening industrial action in the Christmas period unless an improved offer is made.

Protest against closure of Italian ice-cream factory

Fifty workers from the Froneri ice cream factory in Parma in northern

Italy travelled to Switzerland November 29 to hold a protest outside the headquarters of Nestle.

Nestle own the Froneri plant and the workers are opposing the conglomerate's plans to close it and make over 800 staff redundant. The trade union at Froneri accuse management of refusing to negotiate with them.

Strike call by Ryanair staff in Italy

Pilots and cabin crew based in Italy and employed by Irish airline, Ryanair, have given notice of a planned strike. A four-hour stoppage has been called on December 15.

The industrial action was called by the Anpac trade union that is seeking to negotiate on behalf of Ryanair staff. Currently the airline refuses to acknowledge negotiating rights by any trade union throughout its international operation.

Portuguese pilots working for Ryanair vote to strike

Pilots working for Ryanair in Portugal have voted by an overwhelming majority to take industrial action, up to and including strikes.

The vote is driven by the recent debacle over annual leave allowance that led to the cancellation of thousands of flights. Pilots are also incensed by Ryanair's continuing refusal to recognize trade unions.

The pilots are members of the Portuguese Civil Aviation Pilots Union. As yet, no date has been set for any possible strike action.

Union signs sellout five-year deal with Maltese airline

Air Malta has signed a five-year deal with the Association of Airline Engineers (AAE). In return for a pay increase, the union has agreed to longer working hours and increased flexibility in staff rosters.

Air Malta said, "This is the first of five collective agreements the airline is concluding and expecting to sign with various unions representing its workforce in the coming weeks."

Maltese tourist minister, Dr Konrad Mizzi, who is responsible for Air Malta, said the deal was vital for industrial relations stability and hailed it as a "symbol of the partnership between Air Malta and its cabin crew."

Middle East

Iranian sugar workers strike over non-payment of wages

Workers at the Haft Tapeh sugar plantation and mill in Shush, northwest Iran came out on strike on Saturday. It was called after the workers had not received wages or benefits for the last four months.

The workers formed an independent union in 2008 following a 42-day strike over the same issue. Union leaders have been subjected to harassment, imprisonment and blacklisting. The company was privatized in 2015.

Africa

South African cleaning company demands payment for jobs

Workers responsible for cleaning the Brooklyn shopping mall in Pretoria, South Africa are protesting a scam over payment for jobs.

A new replacement cleaning company, Brilliant, hired by the mall management, was demanding R500 (US \$37) from each worker to be transferred from the previous company onto their books.

The Academic Professional Staff Association claim the financial requirement is an attempt to deter workers from demanding they be maintained as employees.

Mall management put pressure on Brilliant to return the workers' money to those who had paid it, but the company responded by refusing to employ any of the cleaners.

Ugandan nurses strike called off

A threatened strike by Ugandan nurses that had been scheduled for Tuesday has been called off.

It was set to follow the three-week old doctors' strike that was also suspended. It was called off after Ugandan President Yoweri Museni promised to meet nurses' demands. Doctors suspended their strike on similar promises by the president.

At the beginning of the doctors' strike, the president said he would call a state of emergency and arrest them if they persisted with the strike.

The nurses union, the Ugandan Nurses and Midwives Union (UNMU), is playing a divisive role. It took legal action alongside the government in an attempt to force the striking doctors and interns back to work. UNMU claimed the doctors had no right to call a strike.

Kenyan airline workers threaten strike in Nigeria

Employees of Kenyan Airways in Nigeria called a strike to commence midnight Tuesday over an outstanding collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The two-year-old agreement covers a wage increase, paid leave and life insurance.

The National Union of Air Transport Employees said its 100 members would ground the airline. Nigeria depends on Kenyan Airlines for flights, as it does not have its own national carrier.

Kenyan Airlines engineers and technicians sacked for striking

Kenyan Airlines is in conflict with the Kenyan courts after it sacked its 131 striking engineers, following their demand for a wage increase to match its Middle Eastern airline counterparts.

Though the court ruled the engineers' strike was illegal, a further ruling stopped Kenyan Airways from appointing a new engineering workforce.

The workforce, which is continuing the stoppage, has nominated a seven-man committee and is refusing to speak to management. They have elected to oppose their sacking through the courts.

Nigerian university staff resume strike after government reneges

Non-academic staff at all Nigerian universities went out on strike Monday. The three unions involved previously went out on indefinite strike in late September, but called it off after government promises.

However, yet again the government reneged on its promise and the unions involved-the NASU, SSANU and NAAT have resumed industrial action. The renewed action was further provoked by the government imposing a share out formula to distribute N23 billion (US \$64 million) funding of earned allowances.

Staff represented by the Academics Staff University Union (ASUU) who had recently returned to work following a strike received 75 percent of the funds, while the non-academic unions got 25 percent.

At Kogi State University, 135 of the returning academics faced the sack for not responding to an earlier state government return to work order.

University management have maintained the order although the court has deemed the dismissals illegal.

Kenyan lecturers pledge to stay out until promised wage increase is paid by government

Kenyan lecturers are continuing their one-month strike until a government promise to pay a back-dated wage claim is deposited in their bank accounts.

An initial agreement by the University Academic Staff Union to call off the strike was suspended until a promised proportion of a Sh5.2 billion (US \$50.5 million) funding was paid out as wages.

A preliminary survey by the union of Kenya's 31 universities revealed no money had been paid in so far. The government had agreed that Sh2.1 billion (US \$20.4 million) would be paid into accounts immediately and the remaining Sh3.1 billion (US \$30.1 million) distributed monthly.

Outstanding issues to be resolved include demands by lecturers for a signing off on the 2013-17 collective bargaining agreement and a negotiating date for the 2017-2021 CBA.



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