

National strike of postal workers in Finland; mass strikes in Algeria; struggles continue in Lebanon and Zimbabwe

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 November 2019

National strike by Finnish postal workers

Around 9,000 Finnish postal workers at the state-owned postal service, Posti, walked out on Monday. Initially planned as a two-week strike, it has now been extended to four weeks.

The PAU union members are opposed to plans by the company to create a tier of lower-paid workers, increase working hours and amend shift patterns.

The union said it wanted to negotiate rather than call a strike, but the negotiations broke down. Striking postal workers were angry that Posti management had cut a hole in a fence at the Posti logistics centre in Lieto in south-west Finland. The hole enabled scab labour to enter the facility without running the gauntlet of pickets.

PAU announced that from November 25 an additional 1,000 Posti workers employed at post offices and other facilities will join the strike. On Tuesday, some 200 striking postal workers held a protest rally outside Posti headquarters in the capital Helsinki.

Airport workers in the Finnish Aviation Union, IAU, are refusing to handle mail at airports in solidarity.

Freight train yard workers, in the JHL trade union, are to hold a one-day strike on November 19. Freight train drivers will strike the following day.

Strike by postal workers in Slovenia

Over a thousand Slovenian postal workers came out on strike Monday. The Trade Union of Postal Workers members are demanding a 10 percent pay rise and an end to staff shortages.

According to a Slovenian Press Agency (STA) report, the strike was joined by Trade Union of Transport and Communications Workers members, who are not officially part of the dispute.

UK: Workers strike in London's St Mary's hospital

Around 150 mainly overseas workers at London's St Mary's hospital in the UK held a sit-in at the hospital lobby on Monday. It coincided with the fourth of 15 days of strikes.

The workers who provide portering, cleaning and other support services

are employed by the French-owned outsourcing company Sodexo. The United Voices of the World union members are seeking parity of pay and conditions with directly employed NHS staff at the hospital carrying out similar roles.

A group of 50 doctors working at the hospital have written to the chief executive of the hospital in support of the strikers.

Staff at UK Foreign and Commonwealth office strike

Security staff, cleaners and maintenance workers employed at the UK government Foreign and Commonwealth Office began a four-day strike on November 7. They work for outsourcing company Interserve.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are seeking union recognition and a pay increase.

Strike at McDonald's fast-food outlets in London

UK workers at six McDonald's restaurants in London walked out on Tuesday. The outlets affected were in Balham, Catford, Crayford, Deptford, Downham and Wandsworth. The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union members are demanding £15-an-hour wage and guaranteed working hours.

German airline cabin crew union calls off strikes in return for union recognition

UFO, the trade union for cabin crew at Lufthansa in Germany, has announced it will not be calling further strikes in its current pay and conditions dispute with the airline. Last week, a two-day strike by cabin crew led to the cancellation of 1,500 flights.

In return for Lufthansa dropping lawsuits over its legal status in representing cabin crew, the union said it will not call further strikes at Lufthansa and its subsidiary companies, Germanwings, Eurowings Germany, Lufthansa City Line and SunExpress Germany.

Stoppage by Icelandic journalists

Around 200 Icelandic journalists and photographers held a four-hour stoppage on November 8 with a further strike due today. This is the first strike by Icelandic journalists in more than 40 years. The Union of Icelandic Journalists members are seeking pay parity with graduates and skilled workers in other employment sectors.

More than 80 percent voted in favour of the action. A further strike is due November 22. A 12-hour strike including print journalists is planned for November 28 if negotiations provide no resolution.

Irish pharmaceutical workers locked out

Around 90 Irish workers at the SK biotek pharmaceutical plant in Swords, in County Dublin, were locked out on Wednesday. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members have been taking industrial action since October.

SIPTU accuses the company of refusing to adhere to the terms of a collective agreement signed in December 2017. The agreement entailed protection of employees' terms and conditions in a transfer of undertakings (TUPE) agreement signed when SK biotek took over the company. The company refused to attend meetings organised by the state mediation service, the Workplace Relations Commission.

The workers have engaged in two weeks of industrial action with a series of two-hour rolling stoppages, an overtime ban and picketing of the plant. The company gave notice it intended to suspend operations at the weekend. In response, SIPTU suspended the action. However, the company went ahead with the lockout. SIPTU has called on the company to end the lockout and resume negotiations.

Ukrainian miners protest wage arrears

Ukrainian miners at state-owned pits have resumed protest actions over wage arrears. The Ukrainian government had promised it would pay the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU) members the money owed over three to four months.

On Tuesday, miners at the Girska mine in the Luhansk region held an underground protest. Miners in the Donetsk region were due to hold a protest Wednesday. Miners across the Ukraine have pledged to hold a protest in Kiev over the issue.

Algerian general strike hits all sectors

A three-day general strike took place in Algeria on November 5, 6 and 7. It is estimated around 50 percent of the population took part. The sectors hit included industry, transport, and energy as well as the public sector.

The strike was part of ongoing protests against the Algerian government, which began earlier in the year. The ailing president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, had attempted to run for a fifth term but was forced to stand down.

Workers are demanding an end to repression and the right to strike. The

mass movement is part of an international upsurge of working class struggles against austerity and inequality as in Hong Kong, Chile and the Lebanon.

Ongoing protests in Lebanon

Schools and banks were closed on Tuesday as part of ongoing demonstrations in Lebanon. The demonstrations are against the corruption and mismanagement of the ruling elite. Students protested in front of the Palace of Justice in central Beirut to prevent judicial staff entering. Students also gathered in front of the Education Ministry.

Iranian sugar workers begin further strike

Iranian workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar facility began their latest round of strikes on November 4. They are demanding payment of wage arrears, reinstatement of sacked workers and renationalisation of the company. They are also demanding the release of and dropping of charges against workers arrested in previous demonstrations.

The Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' union members have undertaken a series of walkouts and mass protests in the thousands over the last three years over job losses, pay and conditions and for renationalisation.

Haft Tappeh, the oldest sugar factory in Iran, was privatised in 2015. Since then, wages and conditions have deteriorated.

Exports of Iran's crude oil have been slashed by 80 percent due to US sanctions, reimposed just over a year ago. The prices of food, housing and necessities have soared, while there is a shortage of medicines.

Strike by Kuwaiti airport staff

Around 1,500 ground staff at Kuwait City airport held a one-hour strike on Monday. They were protesting working conditions at the airport, including pollution and noise levels, as well as demanding the implementation of an agreement on the payment of an allowance promised to all civil aviation workers. A two-hour strike was planned for Wednesday and a 24-hour strike for Sunday.

Zimbabwe doctors' strike spreads to other sectors as doctors are sacked

Zimbabwe's junior hospital doctors are continuing their national strike for a living wage begun 10 weeks ago. More experienced mid-level doctors have joined the action, along with other public sector workers including nurses and teachers.

Some 230,000 doctors, nurses and public sector workers are staying away from work, as they cannot afford travel costs on their wages. Runaway inflation at 500 percent has pauperised them, so they are demanding to be paid in US dollars. The price of basic foodstuffs is increasing weekly.

A total of 286 doctors have been sacked for defying a back-to-work ruling and not attending disciplinary tribunals set up by Health Service Board. Up to a third of Zimbabwe's 1,601 doctors could be dismissed. Striking nurses face the same threat, as their stoppage has been made illegal.

Public sector workers demonstrated on November 6 over poor wages. Although given the official go-ahead, police attacked the demonstrators, arresting many. Police also prevented an Apex Council leader from delivering a memorandum to the Ministry of Finance. The leader then tore up the memorandum.

The Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe offered to bring in Chinese doctors to work in some public hospitals.

Opposition members of parliament accused the UK of trying to recruit sacked doctors to help resolve the shortage of doctors in the UK's National Health Service. The Zanu-PF government led by Emmerson Mnangagwa—Zimbabwe's richest individual according to WikiLeaks—expressed no concern.

South African airline workers threaten strike over wages and job losses

Workers at state-owned South African Airlines (SAA) are threatening a stoppage over pay and job losses.

South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA) members are demanding a pay rise of 8 percent. They are also protesting restructuring, with around 944 jobs threatened out of a workforce of 5,146.

NUMSA and SACCA announced balloting is complete and they have received a strike certificate, but they have not set a date for action to begin.

Pilots Association members are also threatening to walk out, advancing the corporatist demand that pilots be brought onto the board of directors. Over the last eight months, the PAA has collaborated to impose an 18 percent reduction in pilots.

Over the last 13 years, the government has bailed out SAA's losses amounting to R28 billion.

Renewed strike threat at South Africa's bus operators over unpaid bonus

South African bus drivers threatening to strike over an unimplemented lump sum payment agreed on with Tshwane Bus Services have been locked out.

The South African Municipal Workers Union and Independent Municipal & Allied Trade Union members originally demanded an 18 percent rise as received by group heads in the municipality. The unions settled for a one-off payment and called off strike action in August after it was made illegal. The workers were threatened with dismissal and accused of causing R500 million of damage.

South African coal miners' union attempts to head off strike action

A threat of strike action by miners at Glencore coal mining in South Africa has been delayed by the union.

The National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa (NUM) met with management on November 12 to negotiate "rights and living standards" of its members. The NUM previously gave a deadline of November 8 for the company to settle or the miners would go out on strike three weeks later. The NUM announced a new deadline of November 18.

The company and its financial backers say they are not concerned about the strike threat, as coal stocks are high

Sacked South African security guards' protest stops railways

South African rail security guards protested job losses by blocking railway lines with concrete slabs and rubble in Pretoria to disrupt services.

Thousands of guards were dismissed when the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) terminated their contracts at the end of October.

PRASA appealed to the South African Police Service and other federal agencies to provide rail security.

Nine unions shelved a strike threat in early October by half a million security guards over a wage increase of 80 percent. The employers offered 5 percent.

Medics' strike threat in Kenyan state declared illegal

A planned strike by Kenyan medics over non-payment of wage arrears has been deemed illegal by the county governor. The strike was set for Monday involving thousands of workers in Taita-Taveta County medical sector.

The Kenya National Union of Nurses, Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union, Kenya County Government Workers Union, Kenya Health Professional Society and Kenya Union of Laboratory Technicians were invited to an emergency meeting on Tuesday by the authorities.

The unions ended a stoppage last month when employers promised the arrears would be paid, threatening a renewed walkout if the arrears were not paid by November 10.



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