

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 December 2012

Iberia airline workers threaten January strike over job cuts

Workers at Spain's national carrier, Iberia, could strike in January over plans to lay off a quarter of the workforce, a union source said Tuesday.

The move comes after unions sabotaged intended strikes due on December 14 and December 17-21.

"The strikes would likely have hit Spain's image and Iberia's bottom line. Rival airlines would have suffered because of the absence of Iberia's baggage handlers", Reuters reported.

Iberia is part of the International Airlines Group IAGL which announced last month that it is to lay off 4,500 workers at the Spanish flag carrier and to cut salaries by up to 50 percent for the remainder.

The cuts are part of a massive bloodletting operation at airlines across Europe. Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) is to eliminate 6,000 jobs, 40 percent of the total workforce of 15,000, and make pay cuts of up to 30 percent.

Similar cuts are underway at British Airways, Lufthansa and Air France/KLM. In each instance the trade unions are working with management to enforce the changes. At Lufthansa, unions have announced a deal with management that includes cuts to wages, flexible working patterns and new pay structures to cut costs.

Striking health workers march in Madrid against budget cuts and privatisation

On Sunday, thousands of striking health workers marched in Madrid, Spain to protest against budget cuts and plans by the regional authority to privatise the management of public hospitals and medical centres.

Health workers in the capital launched an indefinite strike last month. They are striking from Monday to Thursday each week and seeing patients only on Fridays, while responding to emergencies.

This was the third time doctors, nurses and health workers had staged a protest since the proposals were

mooted in October to privatise six hospitals and dozens of medical practices and to charge patient for prescriptions.

Some of the health workers came dressed in white scrubs for the march. They chanted "Health is not for sale" and "Health 100 percent public, no to privatizations."

The country's 17 autonomous regions control health, education and spending priorities and have all implemented steep cuts this year driven by European Union-agreed austerity measures.

Strike call for German airport security personnel

Security personnel at airports across Germany are in dispute over pay and conditions.

The Associated Press reported, "The ver.di service workers' union said members working for private security companies walked off the job early Monday morning and strikes at some sites were set to continue until midday. It said the airports involved include Duesseldorf, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Berlin's two airports as well as Frankfurt [the country's busiest]."

Postal workers in Bristol, England stage 24-hour strike

Around 100 postal workers in south Bristol walked out for 24 hours Monday after being asked to do more work with fewer staff.

At least 40,000 households and businesses were estimated to have been affected. Staff at the Mead Street Royal Mail depot that serves large parts of south and east Bristol, could strike again on December 17.

The strike took place during one of the busiest weeks of the year for Royal Mail. It plans to bring in managers from across the country to prevent a backlog.

According to the BBC, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) says "delivery rounds have been revised, forcing too much work on the staff that work there and that some members had been bullied by managers."

UK workers at meat processing company vote for strike

Around 1,200 workers at UK meat processing company 2 Sisters Food Group, have voted in favour of industrial action in a dispute over pay.

The workers voted by 98.5 percent for strike action and 97.2 percent for industrial action short of a strike. The turnout was 57 percent.

The staff, spread over two plants in the West Midlands, will hold three 24-hour stoppages after rejecting the inadequate company pay offer.

Just-food.com reported: “The first strike will take place at 2 Sisters’ sites in Smethwick and Wolverhampton next Friday. Workers will hold industrial action on Tuesday 18 December and a third strike is scheduled for Friday 21 December.”

The next strike will be held on 18 December and the third is scheduled for 21 December.

Two-day “truce” for unresolved Israeli nurses’ dispute

A two-day “truce” was called in the nurses’ dispute in Israel on Wednesday.

The day before, the Tel Aviv Labor Court rejected the state’s request to issue back-to-work orders for nurses after negotiations between the finance ministry and unions broke down and nurses across the country went on strike.

The dispute centres on new wage agreements and a severe staff shortage. According to 2011 OECD statistics, Israel has one of the lowest proportions of professional nurses among developed countries—4.14 per 1,000 people.

Around 30,000 employees of the Clalit Health Care Services have threatened to come out in a solidarity strike with the nurses if negotiations between the Finance Ministry and the Nurses’ Union break down.

South African miners continue struggle

Miners at the Mooiplaats coal mine near Witbank, South Africa have been on strike in a wildcat action since December 3, when 178 miners were dismissed by Coal of Africa Ltd. Those dismissed were accused of breaching picketing rules and the terms of a court ruling while on an official strike.

National Union of Mineworkers officials have made it their job to bring an end to the strike. An NUM spokesperson said, “We have sent a delegation to persuade those workers to return to work while we’re

engaging management on the possibility of [rehiring] workers that were unfairly dismissed.”

Miners at the Dishaba mine in Amandelbult, Limpopo have gone on go-slow to demand the closure of the NUM offices at the mine. One of the workers told the media, “We, as workers, want the NUM offices to close as we no longer want to be represented by them.”

Nurses in Nairobi, Kenya to join national strike

Nurses at hospitals and training colleges in Nairobi, Kenya are joining a strike called by the Kenya National Union of Nurses to demand union recognition and payment of allowances totaling 130,000 shillings (€1,151 / \$1,492) per employee per month. Nurses at public hospitals around Kenya have already been on strike since December 3.

According to reports, more than 200 in-patients at the Malindi District Hospital had to be discharged from the hospital on Wednesday due to the strike.

Ugandan hospital workers get release of back pay

Workers at the Kabale Regional Hospital in south-western Uganda went on strike to demand payment of their salaries for August and October. According to an article in the *New Vision* the unpaid salaries had been released by the Ugandan government and most of the workers had received their back pay.

Sit-at-home strike in Nigeria

Public workers in Plateau State, Nigeria held a sit-at-home strike Wednesday in protest of the government’s failure to implement the N18,000 minimum wage and pay public sector workers and teachers their salary arrears.

The action was called by the Nigeria Labour Congress after a 10-day ultimatum it issued to the government to resolve the issue expired.

The government sought to stop the strike, gaining a court injunction from the National Industrial Court to prevent it. But NLC state chairman Jibrin Banchir said this did not apply as the strike had been officially directed by NLC headquarters.

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