

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

8 November 2013

Europe

Georgian railway workers may strike

Around 6,000 railway workers may go on strike November 14.

The workers demand payment for overtime work, the thirteenth salary, as well as payment for work experience and services. They are also demanding a change in the railway's leadership.

Ireland: Aer Lingus cabin crew vote for action

Cabin crew at Aer Lingus have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike to oppose cutbacks and changes to work shifts.

In the ballot, among almost 1,000 cabin crew, 91 percent of workers backed industrial action.

“The closure of a cabin crew base at Shannon—which employs 87 workers—and the outsourcing of transatlantic crew deepened the fall-out between employees and management,” said the *Irish Mirror*.

Italian restaurant and catering workers strike

Restaurant and catering workers went on strike October 31 to oppose employer association plans to withdraw from the national collective agreement in the tourism industry.

Thousands of workers joined demonstrations in Rome and Milan and then held a picket line in front of the employer associations' headquarters. The associations represent corporations such as Sodexo, Compass and McDonalds as well as smaller companies.

Italian bank workers strike

Bank workers have gone on strike for the first time in 13 years to protest the Italian Banking Association (ABI) unilaterally pulling out of a labour contract covering more than 300,000 employees.

Thousands staged a rally in the northern city of

Ravenna on October 31.

The workers were also protesting against the widening pay gap between bank employees and bank executives. According to union sources, on average, bank employees earn around €2,600 a month, while the salary of a top manager is between €3 million and €4 million a year. Lenders including Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, IntesaSanpaolo and UBI Banca have announced that they will close or merge nearly 3,000 branches and cut 19,000 jobs by 2015.

Norwegian dockers in boycott

Dockworkers began a boycott at Risavika terminal November 1 after management refused to sign up to a national agreement covering the docks.

The web site of the International Transport Workers' Federation charged that rather than agreeing to pay dockers based on a national contract, the employer “is said to be proposing to use seafarers to carry out cargo handling duties.”

Norwegian maritime unions have requested that vessels divert to other ports where there is a NTF agreement in place, while the boycott is in force.

Spain: Madrid garbage collectors, outdoor maintenance workers strike

Around 6,000 outdoor maintenance workers struck Wednesday after private contractors proposed cutting wages by up to 40 percent and laying off hundreds of workers.

Angel Jornosa, 58, a gardener working for one of the contractors, told *BusinessTimes.com*, “We are fighting for our jobs. We've been working for years and they are going to kick us out with shameful severance pay. These are people who have worked 28, 30 years.” Among the companies with garbage, street cleaning and park maintenance contracts in Madrid are Ferrovial, Sacyr, OHL and FCC.

Africa

South African platinum miners strike

Miners at the Northam Zondereinde Platinum mine in Limpopo went on strike Sunday in pursuit of a pay increase of R2100 (US\$211) for core workers, such as rock drill operators, and R2000 (US\$201) for non-core workers.

They also want the living out allowance increased from R2200 (US\$214) to R3718 (US\$362). The miners are represented by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The company offered 7.0 percent for core workers and 6.5 percent for non-core workers.

Following talks on Tuesday between the NUM and Northam Platinum management, the employer made a revised offer.

Namibian fuel workers file dispute

The Namibian Fuel and Allied Workers Union (NAFAWU) has notified the labour commissioner of a dispute with the Association of Service Station Organisations (ASSO). The NAFWU is claiming the ASSO is dragging its feet in negotiations on a minimum wage. It is protesting the ASSO's failure to recognise the union as the sole representative for the workers. The ASSO insists on the use of middlemen in the negotiations.

The NAFWU is demanding an N\$4,500 (US\$438) minimum wage as opposed to the current arrangement whereby the fuel service station workers are paid on piece rate by the amount of fuel sold.

A recent planned strike was called off after the ASSO agreed to negotiate a wage settlement if the NAFWU could prove it has majority representation. The NAFWU states it has fulfilled the criteria claiming 800 members in Windhoek alone.

Kenyan health workers issue ultimatum

The Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN) together with the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentist Union (KMPDU) issued a 21-day notice to strike on Tuesday. They say the strike will go ahead unless the Kenyan government immediately stops the ongoing health services devolution process.

Under the devolution process, medical services and other essential services are being handed to counties to administer. The health unions are demanding the

government open talks with them.

Moses Lerre, secretary general of the Kenya Health Professionals Society, told the press, "Health care services can't be devolved at present. We first need proper systems and structures in place."

A government committee recently warned that the counties currently did not have the capacity to carry through the changes and that doctors were resigning rather than be transferred to the devolved bodies. It called for the process to be reversed.

KNUN chair Jophinus Musundi reported health employees are not being given the choice of where they should be employed or their terms of employment; they are just being transferred.

Ghanaian unions threaten general strike

Ghanaian unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Organised Labour are threatening to begin a general strike on Monday, November 18. Amongst the 17 affiliated unions are the Public Sector Workers Union, the Mine Workers Union, the Maritime and Dockworkers Union and the General Transport and Chemical Workers Union.

The proposed action is in opposition to the recent hike in utility prices. Electricity increased by 79 percent, and water increased by 52 percent.

Press reports state a secret government slush fund has been launched with a view to buying off union leaders and averting the strike.

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