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collective bargaining

Issue 9/2011 | October

This newsletter presents up-to-date information on collective bargaining developments across Europe since February 2008. It aims to facilitate information exchange between trade unions and to support the work of the ETUC's collective bargaining committee.



AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED LABOUR STUDIES
UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



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Austria

Postal union calls for strike action

October 26, 2011

On 25 October, the Federal Executive of the Union of Post and Telecommunications Staff (GPF) voted unanimously for a strike in protest to what it described as “unfair treatment” of postal workers. The decision is now awaiting approval of the ÖGB union confederation. The strike may take place in early November. The GPF said unreasonable measures had been taken across Austrian Post in recent months, leading to intolerable consequences for its members, and that management had refused to alter their plans. A massive post office closure programme around the country has seen workers moved against their will, the union claims. In particular, the GPF argues that older workers are being persuaded to take a small payment to leave, and that those who refuse face dismissal.

English: <http://postandparcel.info/43177/news/austrian-postal-union-calls-for-strike-action/> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Austria

German: http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20111025_OTS0258/gpf-einstimmiger-beschluss-zu-moeglichen-streikmassnahmen

Major agreement provides 5.3% extra for lowest paid

October 24, 2011

In the early morning hours of 18 October, the joint negotiating team of the unions in the metal, mining, gas and heating sectors, GPA-djp und PRO-GE, could finally conclude a major new collective agreement for about 165,000 employed that provides an average pay increase of 4.2%. However, with a minimum guaranteed increase of €80 a month, this means that those on the lowest pay rates will get an increase up to 5.3%. The previous counted off parental leave time of 10 months has been extended to 16 months, a step regarded by the unions as important to narrow the gender pay gap: female workers get fewer promotions because of periods away from employment, such as on maternity or parental leave. The agreement runs for 12 months from 1 November 2011. It was reached after the failure of two bargaining rounds and industrial action: large-scale warning strikes and work stoppages took place in 200 companies, involving more than 100,000 workers. According to union negotiators, in particular important were strategic and early strikes on 13 and 14 October that moved third-round bargaining up from 20 October to 17 October.

English: message of PRO-GE for EUCOBAN network of EMF / EFFAT / ETUF-TCL / EMCEF;
<http://www.icem.org/en/78-ICEM-InBrief/4738-Surprise-Strike-Brings-Austrian-Metalworkers-Sizeable-Wage-Gains>

German: http://www.gpa-djp.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=GPA/Page/Index&n=GPA_o.a&cid=1318866565628

Unions campaign over social care funding

October 10, 2011

The vida and GPA-djp services unions are working together in a campaign to ensure better funding for social care and improved pay and conditions for workers in the sector, the vast majority being women. The unions are concerned to act now to defend and improve pay and conditions in order to prevent the increasing demand for social care, leading to pressure both to keep wages low and to increase workloads and working time for staff.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>

German:
http://www.vida.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=So3/Page/Index&n=So3_15.1.a&cid=1317301556871

Belgium

Confederations present program of alternatives

October 25, 2011

The major trade union confederations, ABVV/FGTB and ACV/CSC, have launched a program of concrete alternatives against blind budget cuts and mass lay-offs. Concerning collective bargaining issues, the confederations plea for maintaining the automatic price indexation of wages and social benefits, arguing that this system is not the problem but the rising prices of for example energy and food are. Wages and social benefits should be regarded as built-in stabilizers as to maintain workers' purchasing power, being the motor of the economy. The confederations also plea for maintaining the bridge pension system, the penalties for employers dismissing older workers, and the current system of unemployment benefits. On 15 November, they jointly organise a demonstrative meeting for union militants as to discuss the program.

Dutch: http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-nl/-/article/430839/&p_1_id=10187; http://www.acv-online.be/Images/Platformtekst1511_tcm9-257599.pdf

French: http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/press-releases-fr/-/press/430850/&p_1_id=14124; http://www.csc-en-ligne.be/Images/plateforme_propositions_sortir_impasse_tcm22-257966.pdf

Street cleaners protest over threat to transfer jobs

October 10, 2011

On 22 September, unions organized a demonstration over proposals to transfer 600 street cleaners from the Brussels region to local authorities. The unions are concerned that the issue of the employment conditions of the workers has not been dealt with and they are surprised by the unexpected announcement of the transfer as the government and region had appeared to put any restructuring plans on hold. As a result, the regional government gave assurances that any proposed changes to the service will be undertaken subject to negotiation with the unions.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>

French: http://csc-services-publics.csc-en-ligne.be/Nouvelles/Sectorielles/region_bruelles_capitale/actualites/protestation_transfert_bxl_p_roprete.asp

Bulgaria

Minimum wage to be increased

October 31, 2011

By 1 April 2012 the country's minimum wage will be increased from BGN 270 (just over €139) per month to BGN 290 (€149.50), Labour Minister Totyu Mladenov confirmed on Monday 31 October. The date of 1 April was backed by the employers' organisations, while the trade unions demanded the increase to become effective three months earlier, on 1 January 2012. An increase in Bulgaria's minimum retirement pension level (up to BGN 200 or €103 monthly) is under consideration but still uncertain, it was also made clear on Monday; nearly 1.2 million retired would be affected by that measure.

English: http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=133498

Czech Republic

Health care unions deliver ultimatum to government

October 25, 2011

Doctors' and nurses' trade unions delivered an ultimatum to Health Minister Leos Heger and the whole government on Monday 24 October, saying they will demand their resignation unless medical staff's pay is raised by 10% in 2012, as promised in spring this year. The ultimatum was announced by representatives of the emergency committee uniting three unions, the Doctors' Trade Union (LOK), the Health and Social Care Trade Union (OSZSP), and the Professional Trade Union of Medical Workers (POUZP). According to OSZSP chairwoman Dagmar Zitnikova, "Unless the minister gives clear guarantees that the spring memorandum (on the pay rise in 2012) will be fulfilled, we have a mandate from our organisation's members to launch any protest action."

English: <http://praguemonitor.com/2011/10/25/health-care-unions-give-government-pay-rise-ultimatum>

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Estonia

Teachers continue demonstrating for higher wages

October 26, 2011

On 25 October, the Education Personnel Union organised another demonstration in front of the House of Parliament, with 1,500 teachers demanding a salary increase. In numerous talks between the Ministry of Education, local governments and unions no consensus could yet be reached over funding such an increase. At the last meeting, on September 20, the Education Personnel Union stood by its 20% increase bid, while the Association of Teachers demanded a 43% increase. According to Statistics Estonia, the average monthly salary in Estonia this year is €857, whereas teachers make an average €608. Opposition members of parliament have supported the teachers' claims, calling for a 20% hike to be incorporated into next year's state budget.

English: <http://news.err.ee/Education/2a9211d1-f1b5-4d3f-bf29-141097694da6>;
<http://news.err.ee/politics/oa025910-f2ab-47b8-b46a-b25a6c9977ec>

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Finland

One strike follows another in technology industry

October 31, 2011

The strike initiated on Friday 21 October by the Metalworkers' Union and Trade Union Pro in 45 companies in the technology industry ended on Tuesday 25 October when the unions approved the conciliation accord of the State Conciliator Esa Lonka. The new collective agreement, covering about 250,000 wage and salary earners, starts retroactively on 1 October and ends by the end of October 2013. Its framework follows the framework of the national agreement as of 13 October (see below). The agreement requires that the head shop steward and the employer start negotiations at workplace level on the amount, timetable and implementation of the pay rise. If no solution can be reached by 5 December, the general rise of 2.4% will be paid retroactively from October on. It is expected that the other key issue in the dispute, a three-day annual training and education leave over which employers sought to use their own control, will be settled by the government through legislation. The union presidents emphasized that negotiations were characterized by strong co-operation between the Metalworkers' Federation, Pro, and YTN, the Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff. However, YTN has not renewed its agreement. On Monday 31 October both a majority of the YTN board as well as the employers' association rejected the proposal of the State Conciliator in this respect, and YTN announced for 1 November a strike of 10,000 professional and managerial staff, likely hitting about 40 export companies (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 September 2011).

English: messages of Metalworkers' Union and Trade Union Pro for EUCOBAN network of EMF / EFFAT / ETUF-TCL / EMCEF ; <http://www.icem.org/en/23-Nordic-Countries/4724-Conciliator-s-New-Proposal-Expected-to-End-Short-Finnish-Metalworkers-Strike>; http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/10/tech_strike_begins_tuesday_2991993.html

Catering workers threatened with pay cut

October 24, 2011

JHL, the public and welfare services union, is concerned that government plans to transfer the Ministry of Defence catering service to a new company will lead to large pay cuts for the 580 workers involved. The transfer would mean workers being covered by a different collective agreement and this could involve pay cuts of around €200 a month and possibly as much as €400 for some workers. JHL is eager to focus the impact this will have on increasing the gender pay gap as most of the catering workers are women.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>; <http://www.jhl.fi/portal/en/news/archive/?bid=1390>

National agreement implies modest increase of purchasing power

October 14, 2011

On 13 October, for the first time in four years union confederations agreed on Thursday to a central collective agreement. Union economists expect the 25-month agreement to slightly improve the purchasing power of wage and salary earners. The signatory parties are the union confederations Akava, SAK and STTK, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the employer organs of the State, municipalities and the Lutheran church. The agreement includes two pay rises of 2.4% and 1.9%, a €150 lump sum payment and changes in working life regulations. In addition, the government has promised to make the agreement more attractive by tax cuts for both employees and companies. The agreement will not come into effect unless a substantial proportion of national unions and employer organisations agree on sectoral collective agreements, respecting the framework set up by the confederations. Rejecting this framework would mean losing out on tax cuts as well as putting at risk the concessions made by the employers in the confederation-level negotiations. Confederation presidents - SAK's Lauri Lyly, STTK's Mikko Mäenpää and Akava's Sture Fjäder – place much emphasis on the increase in purchasing power and the qualitative improvements of working life (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 July-August and September 2011).

English: <http://www.artto.kaapeli.fi/unions/T2011/041>

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France

Mass support for public sector demonstrations

October 24, 2011

Public sector unions within the CGT confederation joined a major day of action on 11 October, calling for an increase in salaries and policies to tackle precarious employment. The CGT confederation estimated that nearly 200 demonstrations took place across the country, calling for pay rises to protect purchasing power and as a step towards a fairer distribution of income in the face of the trend to higher pay for top executives. A preliminary union estimate during the day of action came at 270,000 participants in 150 demonstrations, not counting those participating in the many work stoppages.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

French: <http://www.cgt.fr/Une-journee-dynamique-pour-les.html>

Driving test examiners take strike action

October 24, 2011

The FO civil service federation is supporting strike action by driving test examiners and other workers dealing with driving licences and road safety. The Ministry undertook to revalue their salaries in 2007 but four years later with increasing pressures of work and lengthy negotiations, the civil servants are still waiting for the salary review to be implemented.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

French: <http://www.fo-fonctionnaires.fr/>

Union calls for better pay and conditions for subcontractor staff

October 10, 2011

The FNME-CGT energy federation organized a national day of action on 22 September to highlight the situation of the employees of sub-contractors in the nuclear sector. The union points out that these workers are facing some of the most serious safety risks in the sector but are missing out on the pay and employment conditions enjoyed by permanent staff. The union has delivered a 10,000-signature petition to the energy minister calling for improved pay and conditions for all sub-contracted workers, arguing also that all the contracted out services should be brought back in-house. It regards in particular sites of EDF, AREVA, CEA, ANDRA and IRSN.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>

French: <http://www.fnme-cgt.fr/pages/communiqu.php?id=195>

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Germany

Chancellor in favour of minimum wage

October 31, 2011

Chancellor Angela Merkel is looking to introduce a “market-based organised lower limit for wages”, though her Christian Democrat (CDU) party has always objected a minimum wage. A proposal for the annual party congress in November mentions the importance “to introduce an overall binding minimum wage in sectors which do not have such a wage determined by collective bargaining”, and sources say Merkel backs it. A manager magazin already called it a “minimum wage light”, as the proposal does not envisage a statutory or “political” minimum wage but a minimum to be determined by a commission of employers and employees. The level should be in line with the minimum wage already in place for temporary workers, set at €7.79 per hour in the Western part of the country and €6.89 in the East. Though the trade unions have welcomed the news, they also show reservations. Frank Bsirske, chairman of the ver.di union, was quoted saying: “We need a legally binding minimum wage on the level of our western European neighbours, so at the minimum €8.50 per hour.”

English: <http://www.thelocal.de/politics/20111030-38541.html>;

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/10/30/uk-germany-labour-idUKTRE79T27N20111030>

German: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/o.1518.794987.00.html>; <http://www.manager-magazin.de/politik/deutschland/o.2828.794867.00.html>

IG Metall starts campaign in steel industry

October 27, 2011

IG Metall has started the campaign for a new collective agreement in the steel industry in two bargaining regions, North Rhine-Westfalia and Lower Saxony and Bremen, covering 75,000 workers, and East Germany, representing 8,000 workers. On 19 October, the collective bargaining committee of the first region decided on demanding a wage increase of 7% for 12 months beginning 1 November 2011; guarantee of unlimited employment of apprentices after completion of their apprenticeships; improving the collectively agreed right of partial retirement, and unification and continuation of existing collective agreements on securing employment, partial retirement and demographic issues in one agreement dealing with all issues during working life. On 21 October the first negotiating round in the region North Rhine-Westfalia and Lower Saxony and Bremen ended without results, with the steel employers' association rejecting the union demands. Negotiations will continue on 7 November.

English: message of IG Metall for EUCOBAN network of EMF / EFFAT / ETUF-TCL / EMCEF

German: http://www.igmetall-kueste.de/files/D_159056001.pdf

Strikers take direct action

October 24, 2011

On 20 October, after five weeks on strike employees of the Charité Facilities Management (CFM) company have taken their campaign to the Berlin high street with a leafletting and sit-down protest in the large Dussman book and music store. The store is owned by the Dussman group, a multinational service company that partly owns CFM. The strikers' basic demand is to have a collective agreement and higher pay (€168 for a full-time month) for non-medical staff. CFM provides a range of services to the Charité hospitals in Berlin. Ver.di had also organised a demonstration in support of the strikers, on 15 October.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

German: <https://www.verdi.de/themen/geld-tarif/++co++e9e02bd2-fb13-11e0-4596-0019b9e321e1>; <https://www.verdi.de/themen/geld-tarif/++co++2a8c74e8-fofo-11e0-55f7-0019b9e321e1>

Ver.di threatens strike action at EON

October 10, 2011

According to the ver.di union, the management of utilities giant EON is considering to create a so-called transfer company in which it would put thousands of its workers. This gives the impression of EON being in a difficult financial situation. This is not acceptable, argued Sven Bergelin, ver.di's national energy officer, saying that workers are particularly angered by EON's plans as the company is making good profits. He announced that workers will seek strike action if the company does not come to terms with demands for job guarantees. Bergelin stated that EON has developed plans to get rid of up to 11,000 of its 79,000 workforce worldwide, whereas ver.di wants to negotiate a job security agreement that would exclude compulsory redundancies after 2012.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/a/8041> ; <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>
[http://world.seenews.com/news/Ver di says strikes at E on not excluded report 152519](http://world.seenews.com/news/Ver_di_says_strikes_at_E_on_not_excluded_report_152519)

Greece

Unions continue actions against austerity package

October 28, 2011

The Greek trade unions continue their protest and strike actions against the austerity package that is imposed on the country by the Troika: the European Commission, European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). In a message for fellow European trade unions, the GSEE union confederation revealed that the Troika had demanded the abolition of the National Collective Labour Agreement, which establishes minima for salaries and other terms and conditions, in this case even surprising the government, also as this Agreement is enshrined in the country's Constitution. This demand topped a number of anti-labour and anti-union legislative measures already enforced. Moreover, the substantial increases in indirect taxes, along with the massive income drain, most heavily hit low-wage earners and pensioners. The GSEE jointly with the civil servants union confederation ADEDY organized a 48-hours' general strikes on October 19-20 and a 24-hours' strike on 5 October, which both got massive support (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 February, March, April, May, June and September 2011).

English: message of GSEE for ETUC and EUCOBAN network of EMF / EFFAT / ETUF-TCL / EMCEF; <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700190129/Greek-civil-servants-plan-new-strikes-next-week.html>; http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/europe/protesters-gather-in-athens-on-second-day-of-strike.html?_r=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss

Hungary

Lay-offs and salary freeze at telecom company

October 27, 2011

Magyar Telekom plans to lay off 250 employees in 2012, the Hungarian telecommunications group announced after reaching an agreement with trade unions on staff reduction and other cost

efficiency measures for 2012. The majority of those to be made redundant are expected to leave the company by the end of 2011. The agreement with the trade unions also states there will be no general increase in the base salary for employees in 2012. However, to meet the government's expectation to compensate employees with below average wages for adverse tax law changes, benefits in kind will be increased for effected employees. These additional employee benefits will be cut at managerial positions.

English: Máté Komiljovics, union correspondent

Government approves new draft labour code

October 27, 2011

The government has approved the new draft labour code, which aims to improve the country's competitiveness and put small and medium-sized enterprises on the right footing, the government spokesman told a news conference. Andras Giro-Szasz was joined by Sandor Czomba, state secretary of the economy ministry, who said the draft's content corresponded "99 percent" to the version agreed on over the past few weeks with the social partners. Czomba said concerning the remaining one percent that there were differences of opinion about rules governing trade unions, though, even in this area, he said there was still room for further proposals and opinions. The state secretary added that the 20-day basic holiday with an extra 10 days of time-off available remained in the labour code, as well as the protection of employees above the age of 55 (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 April, May, July-August and September 2011).

English: Máté Komiljovics, union correspondent

Ireland

Teachers challenge lower wages for new entrants

October 25, 2011

Teachers are planning to challenge cuts to pay levels for new entrants to the profession, claiming that they discriminate against younger teachers. The new teachers are appointed on a wage scale of €30,000 to €34,000, which is up to €6,000 below the 2010 figure. The National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) claims this amounts to discrimination on age grounds and is preparing to take a case to the Equality Tribunal on the grounds that the vast majority of people likely to be affected by the move are younger public servants. Separately, the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) is considering similar action.

English: <http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/education/latest-news/teachers-plan-to-challenge-lower-wage-rates-for-new-entrants-2915308.html>

Government carries on pension raid

October 24, 2011

According to newspaper information, the government defied the Troika's express wishes not to continue with its €2 billion "smash and grab" raid of private-sector pensions. It has emerged that the Troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) expressed serious concerns to the government during discussions earlier in 2011, but they were flatly ignored. In May 2011, hitting private-sector pension funds for over €460 million a year to fund the government's jobs initiative was announced by Finance Minister Michael Noonan. The plan already met serious opposition of unions, employers' associations and the pensions' industry.

English: <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/government-defied-the-troika-with-pension-raid-2914401.html> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Ireland

Italy

Manyfold protests against government

October 28, 2011

During October, manyfold protests took place against the government and more broadly, against the way the country is governed. For example, on Friday 28 October public sector workers went on an eight-hour strike and rallied in Rome en masse to highlight the threat to public services and collective bargaining posed by the Berlusconi government. Their action was also in protest to the demand that the public sector should be subject to the same bargaining model as the private sector. About 20,000 people vocalized their desire for a public sector reform and claimed that credibility and dignity need to be restored in public sector workplaces. About 500 meters away, another 20,000 took part in a rally organized by the Italian Pensioners' Union, demonstrating against the changes to the pension system announced a few days earlier by PM Berlusconi, as to gradually raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 by 2026. These demonstrators worried in particular about the purchasing power remaining for pensioners.

English: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/207176.html> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Italy

Metalworkers' strike at Fiat

October 21, 2011

In early October, the FIOM-CGIL metalworkers' union called a nationwide strike at Fiat on Friday 21 October. The strike was decided after Fiat's CEO Sergio Marchionne some days earlier announced that his company was to quit the employers' group Confindustria in a dispute over labour contracts. FIOM leaders argued this could be a precursor for a gradual disengagement from Italy. Yet, in a reaction on the strike Marchionne threatened to continue shifting manufacturing to sites in Eastern Europe and North America, pointing at the productivity gap between these locations and the firm's Italian facilities. About 12,000 Fiat workers joined the strike (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 3 July-August, September and December 2010; Year 4 January 2011).

English: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/08/fiat-strike-idUSL5E7L8oCK20111008>;
<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/fiat-threatens-to-quit-italy-10272011.html>

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Netherlands

Campaign aims at abolition of youth wages

October 31, 2011

On 31 October, 50 FNV Bondgenoten union militants from all over the country signalled the start of a campaign for a new supermarket collective agreement, in front a large Albert Heijn supermarket in Amsterdam. The unionists gave many examples that the current price war in the supermarket sector has put wages and conditions under heavy pressure, in particular those of low-paid youngsters working as shelf-stackers. Main Bondgenoten negotiator, Arie van der Pijl, stressed at this occasion that negotiations are already lingering for nine months, and that the 0.9% wage offer from the VGL employers' association remains by far insufficient. He argued that a main union demand, and for FNV Bondgenoten a precondition for a restart of negotiations, regards the abolition of the very low youth wages. The other union involved, CNV Dienstenbond, still sees possibilities to continue talks.

Dutch:

http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/nieuwsarchief/2011/oktober/417424_hoeveel_uur_moet_je_werken/ ; <http://www.cnvendienstenbond.nl/branches-en-bedrijven/handel/supermarkten/supermarkt-cao/>

Action day called as welfare negotiations stall

October 28, 2011

After the last day of negotiations on 20 October and with no new offer from the employers in the welfare sector, the FNV Abvakabo public service union for Tuesday 1 November has called an action day with a central manifestation in Utrecht, implying for most participants a one-day strike. The unions have been looking for an increase to protect purchasing power, initiatives to make the sector more attractive to new workers and an agreement on employment levels. Yet, the employers want a below-inflation increase and no agreement on employment. In fact, FNV Abvakabo believes that the employers want to see more employees replaced by volunteers or self-employed. After on 27 October a final effort to carry on the negotiations broke down, the CNV Publieke Zaak union has also joined the action.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

Dutch: <http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/nieuws/nieuws/staking-hvw-1nov>

<http://www.mijnvakbond.nl/Actiebijeenkomst-Welzijn-gaat-door?referrer=838>

Unions negotiate deal for mental health workers

October 10, 2011

A new 22-month basic agreement covering 80,000 workers in the mental health sector (the so-called GGZ) will be put to members for approval. The three main unions in the sector have secured a 3.25% overall pay increase that includes a 0.75% rise in August 2011, with a 0.25% one-off payment (minimum €25) in November 2011 and an additional 0.5% on the end-of-year bonus in December 2011. In 2012 there will be a 1% increase in salaries in September, another 0.25% (minimum €25) payment and the end-of-year bonus will rise by another 0.5% taking it to 6.75%. While this keeps salaries rising in line with the rest of the health sector, unions are concerned that mental health will suffer disproportionately from planned cuts. The sector accounts for around 10% of total health expenditure but will account for 35% of the overall budget cuts.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>

Dutch : <http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/nieuws/archief/281576/372442/eindbod-ggz>; <http://www.mijnvakbond.nl/Eindbod-CAO-GGZ?referrer=272>

No progress in negotiations on state collective agreement

October 10, 2011

Talks between unions and the government on the collective agreement in the state sector have broken down. At one point it appeared that the Minister of Internal Affairs would consider a lower pay rise along with an agreement on job security but in the end the employer was insisting on a pay freeze with no commitment on jobs. FNV Abvakabo is planning action in November to put pressure on the employer while CNV Publieke Zaak is still considering its next move (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 June 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>

Dutch: <http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/nieuws/archief/281576/365207/overleg-cao-rijk-definitief-vastgelopen>; <http://www.mijnvakbond.nl/Geen-zicht-op-CAO-akkoord-Rijk?referrer=272>

Norway

Higher pay for weekend work as union priority

October 24, 2011

The Fagforbundet municipal union and the LO Confederation's local authority section have agreed that one of the priorities in the 2012 negotiations will be higher pay for weekend work. This is an important demand for many workers and the union believes it will make a difference to those on lower pay. Fagforbundet will also raise the question of when the weekend begins and whether Friday evening and night work should also be covered.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

Norwegian: http://www.fagforbundet.no/forsida/?article_id=67993

Portugal

Confederations unite in general strike plan

October 24, 2011

The two main trade union confederations, CGTP and UGT, have once again been united in their opposition to the government's austerity plans and they are planning a general strike on 24 November – exactly one year after the first joint general strike. If the budget goes through then public sector workers earning over €1,000 a month could see massive cuts in bonuses, some worth the equivalent of two months' pay. The public sector unions have decided to stage a major demonstration in Lisbon on 12 November, in preparation of the general strike (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 July-August 2011).

English: <http://www.portugaldailyview.com/01-whats-new/labour-trade-unions-hold-joint-general-strike-24-november>; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/17/us-portugal-strike-idUSTRE79G3IK20111017>

Portuguese: <http://www.sintap.pt/>

Romania

New labour laws strip away workers' protection

October 12, 2011

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) argues that major changes in Romania's labour laws, introduced at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB), have stripped away key protections for the country's workforce and are denying large numbers of workers the right to union representation. Recently, ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow stated, "The IMF prescription in Romania contradicts the positive signals about workers' rights from its Washington Headquarters, and the government has ignored the advice of the ILO despite promising to respect international labour standards." The new laws, which the country's union movement is trying to have amended, exclude workers in the "liberal professions" from the right to union membership, and introduce a series of legal and procedural obstacles to effectuate workers' collective bargaining rights (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 June 2011).

English: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/romania-s-imf-inspired-labour-laws.html>

Minimum wage decision postponed

October 11, 2011

According to Prime Minister Emil Boc in an interview with a financial magazine, the government will only give in on trade union claims as much as the available budget allows and when the consultation process with the employers' associations and with the trade unions has been finalized. This seemed a polite way to put notably union demands to increase the legal minimum wage in 2012, from RON 600 (€140) per month to RON 750 (€175), on hold and postpone decision-making.

English: <http://www.balkans.com/open-news.php?uniquenumber=74242>

Slovakia

Doctors maintain threat of mass resignation

October 10, 2011

The mass resignation of hospital doctors, co-ordinated by the LOZ trade union, is still possible following inconclusive talks with the government. The union has a number of key demands including

stopping the conversion of public hospitals into joint stock companies, the application of labour code rules on working time and working conditions, and pay increases for health staff. By 29 September as many as 2,411 doctors from hospitals across the country had submitted notices to their employers terminating their employment contracts. On 3 October, LOZ chairman Marián Kollár warned that if no agreement is reached with the ministry, medical treatment in hospitals could collapse in December after the two-month notice period has run its course.

English:

<http://www.epsu.org/cob/441>; http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/44060/3/doctors_are_ready_to_resign.html

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Slovenia

Public sector union threatens strike

October 7, 2011

Public sector unions have reacted angrily to a proposed pay cut of 4% for 160,000 public sector employees. The government's plans already included a ban on recruitment in the public sector until the end of 2012; not replacing recently retired workers; a cut in the 2011 public sector pay budget of 1% of the 2010 figure. Then, a parliamentary committee submitted an amendment calling for the 4% cut. The package, including the amendment, will now be discussed by the Finance Committee and then by the State Assembly. Branimir Štrukelj, President of the Confederation of the Public Sector Trade Unions (KSJS), has announced that if the Finance Committee backs the pay cuts, the whole public sector will go on strike. However, Prime Minister Pahor has said that the government has had nothing to do with this amendment and that he will respect the agreement with the trade unions.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2011/09/articles/si1109019i.htm>

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Spain

Mass protest against cuts to education budgets

October 24, 2011

On Saturday 22 October, a mass demonstration of teachers, parents and students from all over the country occupied the centre of Madrid sending a warning to the authorities : Don't slash our education budget! The demonstration, in which some 100,000 protesters took part, was organised by the seven national education unions, the parents' association and the national union of students, as to resist the severe austerity measures announced by the conservative party, expected to win the national elections in November. The organizers also strongly oppose plans to privatize parts of the school system. The demonstration was headed by the leaders of the national union confederations CCOO and UGT and of the education unions. Representatives of teachers' organizations from other European countries also took part (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 September 2011).

English: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1994/

Spanish: <http://www.europapress.tv/educacion/122748/1/internacional-educacion-apoya-manifestacion-contra-recortes.html>

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Sweden

Union challenges Mediation Office's narrow view on wages

October 10, 2011

The Kommunal municipal union has criticized the National Mediation Office for its narrow view of the scope for pay bargaining and failure to acknowledge the need for action to close the gender pay gap. The union agrees that wage developments should take into account the pressures facing the manufacturing and export industries, but emphasizes that there has to be scope for some flexibility: otherwise the lower paying sectors that are dominated by women workers will never catch up with

other sectors and the gender pay gap will never be closed.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/437>

Swedish: <http://www.kommunal.se/Kommunal/Nyheter/2011/Oktober/Svensk-lonebildning-och-Medlingsinstitutet-star-vid-ett-vagskal/>

Police officers march in low-wage protest

October 5, 2011

On Wednesday 5 October, hundreds of police officers marched into unemployment offices in major cities and looked for other jobs, in a demonstration against the profession's low wages. As a demonstrating police officer explained to a journalist, "This is primarily symbolic. Our main goal is to affect our current employers in a positive manner. But I know many, myself included, who are looking at the job market and read employment ads." In Stockholm around 250 officers entered a job centre run by the National Employment Agency and perused job vacancy listings. Similar actions took place in Gothenburg and Malmö. The Swedish Police Union expressed its support for the officers' protest.

English: <http://www.thelocal.se/36568/20111005/#> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Sweden

Switzerland

Victory for hospital workers after strike

October 24, 2011

Workers responsible for patient transport at Geneva University Hospital have won virtually all their demands after a two-day strike. They will be put on a higher pay grade and get four additional days off. There will also be an increase in staffing which will ensure a better service to patients.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>

German: http://www.vpod.ch/aktuell/nachrichten/ansicht/article/-369bb4c04a.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=34&cHash=f7fbc85162

New collective agreement in the watch industry

October 13, 2011

Representatives of the UNIA union and the watch-making industry association have signed a new collective agreement for the watch and micro-technology sector. It will apply to about 400 enterprises in the industry (mostly small and medium-sized enterprises) and 85% of workers or 48,500 employed. Thanks to grass-roots mobilization, major progress was made in the area of social benefits, the minimum starting wage and the creation of a flexible retirement scheme. In addition to an increase in the employers' contribution to the health insurance fund, a family and training benefit of CHF 30 (€24.60) will be added to the existing amounts. As regards the starting wage, the union obtained an increase of CHF 100 (€82.10) per month for those cantons where wages are lowest, and CHF 80 (€65.70) for the others. The employers' attempt to raise fluctuating weekly hours from 30-45 to 30-48 hours was rejected. Concerning flexible retirement, workers are now able to reduce their working time by 20% two years before the legal retirement age, with the assurance that the employer will cover half of the lost pay.

English: <http://www.imfmetal.org/index.cfm?c=27808&l=2>

French: <http://www.imfmetal.org/index.cfm?c=27808&ol=5>

United Kingdom

TUC calls for higher than inflation rise to minimum wage

October 28, 2011

The TUC calls for a higher than inflation rise of the adult national minimum wage (NMW) in 2012, the union confederation will argue when meeting the Low Pay Commission (LPC) on Tuesday 1 November. The LPC, which advises the government on the NMW, is currently considering the rates for the period from October 2012 to September 2013. The TUC argues that a rise by more than the retail prices index (RPI) or the growth in average earnings - depending on which is higher - is both necessary and affordable, and will help address the loss in the real value of the NMW caused by below-inflation increases in the rate in previous years. The TUC also recommends the rate for 18 to 21-year-olds to increase in 2012 by at least the same percentage as the adult rate. The TUC wants to see a much more significant boost to the three youth rates as the economy recovers. Further, extension of the NMW is recommended as to cover seafarers with a close link to the UK economy, such as those who work between two ports in the UK, or on the ships that support oil and gas exploration in the North Sea. Also, exemption for domestic workers who are said to live as part of the family employing them should be abolished, as according to the union confederation this has been subject to wide-spread abuse.

English: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-20215-fo.cfm?>

Railway cleaners on strike

October 28, 2011

On 28 October, over 330 cleaners employed by Carlisle Cleaning on the Virgin West Coast Mainline contract and members of the RMT (Railway Maritime & Transport Union) went on strike. RMT members voted by a massive 94% for action on pay and union recognition. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that Carlisle's owner, Impellam Group, has increased its profits by almost 30% in the past year, yet its low paid workforce has been offered a real-terms pay cut. He added: "Virgin should also recognise that it has a moral obligation not to allow poverty wages to be paid to people who play a key role in providing services to its 20 million passengers. "

English: http://www.rmt.org.uk/Shared_ASP_Files/UploadedFiles/rmt/4FDE21B9-2BCF-4437-A662-80D75634CE6A_11-10-18Carlislebulletin3strike.pdf ;
http://www.uniglobalunion.org/Apps/portal.nsf/pages/sec_20081016_gbg7En?OpenDocument&eURL=http://www.uniglobalunion.org/Apps/UNINews.nsf/vwLkpById/81C00F70A9BD5A36C125793700365347?OpenDocument

Unions step up pensions campaigning

October 26, 2011

Unions are working hard to build support for co-ordinated industrial action on 30 November in response to the government's failure to negotiate properly over changes to pensions and to carry on with their plans to cut pension schemes affecting millions of public sector workers. The main civil service union PCS and the largest teaching union, NUT, already have approval for another one-day strike, following their action in June. Other unions, including Unite, UNISON and GMB, are now pushing for a "yes" vote in what is thought to be the biggest ever industrial action ballot carried out in the UK. Around 3 million workers could be on strike on 30 November if all the strike ballots are positive (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 April, May, June , July-August and September 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>
http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=2497
<http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/30-november/index.cfm>
http://www.unitetheunion.org/news_events/latest_news/unite_announces_historic_mobil.aspx

BBC staff balloted on strikes

October 25, 2011

Thousands of BBC staff are to be balloted for strikes in a dispute over jobs, pay and conditions, raising the threat of disruption to flagship programmes including Strictly Come Dancing. Technicians, journalists and other employees will vote from 4 November on whether to take industrial action. Earlier in October, BBC management unveiled plans to cut 2,000 jobs and change

terms and conditions of employment as to make savings of 20%. Talks have since been held between the broadcast corporation and unions - Bectu, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Unite - on the changes, but no agreement has been reached. Bectu general secretary Gerry Morrissey said BBC wanted to introduce different terms and conditions for new staff from next April, adding: "We are not prepared to negotiate with a gun to our head."

English:

http://www.google.com/hostednews/ukpress/article/ALeqM5gr6WFPX3e5XcjTWFQqQ9qT_CmEQ?docId=No273511319559358576A

Council workers take further strike action

October 24, 2011

On 18 October, members of the UNISON working at Barnet Council in North East London organized a second day of strike action and a picket line in their campaign against outsourcing. The Council has plans for a radical externalisation that could see 70% of council employees transferred to the private sector over the next 15 months (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 May, June July-August and September 2011).

English:

<http://www.epsu.org/cob/443>; http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=7297; <http://www.barnetunison.me.uk/?q=node/704>

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