

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 August 2008

Europe

UK Ambulance workers prepare for strike action

Ambulance staff in Gloucestershire are threatening industrial action unless employers scrap the contentious Emergency Care Assistants (ECAs) plan.

Each ECA receives eight weeks' training, including early patient contact, through clinical placements. However, unlike present ambulance staff, the new assistants cannot treat patients independently.

The union Unison says the new staff only have basic medical training, and are a poor substitute for paramedics and technicians. It claims lives are being put at risk and has pulled out of a pilot scheme to introduce them in the area. Unison has given the trust until the end of the month to improve training for ECAs, or members will be balloted on whether to take strike action.

Ian Whittern, Unison branch chairman and paramedic, said, "Unison's members, including many people who are working as ECAs in the trial, believe the ECA role on a front line emergency vehicle is untenable. The pilot was introduced to test whether ECAs could support higher qualified staff to allow them to concentrate on clinical treatment. However, it has become apparent that the ECAs are under-trained, and this is critical at multi-casualty accidents."

London Underground workers ballot on strike over pay

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union is balloting staff members working for the maintenance firm Tube Lines on the London Underground railway. The RMT claims the company's pay offer would leave workers worse off compared to those working in other parts of the network.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said Tube Lines had made enormous profits and could find the money for a similar deal already reached on other parts of the

Tube network. "Despite this, they have tabled an inferior pay offer this year, made no movement on improving annual leave and continue to keep the door closed to the pension fund and full travel facilities for newer employees," said Crow.

Strike by Inverclyde Council workers over pay

Council workers in Scotland, including refuse collectors, community wardens, social workers and home helps, are to take part in strike action—provisionally set for August 20—after their unions, Unison, Unite and the GMB, rejected a below-inflation wage offer.

According to *BBC* news, Dougie Black, Unison's lead negotiator for local council staff, said 70 percent of the union's ballots had been in favour of strike action. He added, "This result is a clear rejection of an inadequate offer. Our members are clear that they cannot afford another series of below inflation pay increases. Inflation is at 4.6 percent and key items on household bills like bread and milk are increasing even faster. Our members need a fair offer from their employers."

Workers employed in Spanish agribusiness strike over pay and conditions

Around 12,000 workers working in the vegetable preserves industry in the Murcia region of Spain are part of 35,000 people nationally who took part in strike action in demand for a minimum monthly wage of €1,000 as well as a decent break time. The strike was called in the Murcia region for July 28-31 following what unions say has been 'obstruction' from the employers in talks to reach a settlement.

UGT union spokesman Sebastián Serena said that 176 companies in the Murcia region are thought to have been affected by the strike. Serena also noted that 80 percent of the workers in the sector are women, including an increasing number of immigrant workers.

Russian truckers plan strike action

Seanews.info reported July 29 that the Russian Interregional Union of Professional Truck Drivers plans to take industrial action to protest against price increases in fuel costs as well as automotive parts and materials, and groceries.

Middle East

Migrant workers in Kuwait plan strike over pay and conditions

A Bangladeshi embassy official requesting anonymity told the *Arab Times* that migrant workers from Bangladesh working in at least three companies are planning to go on strike over better pay and living conditions.

“We are currently negotiating with the workers and their respective companies as we are trying to address their issues in a cordial manner. Our policy is very clear: we want to settle all grievances at the table. We are hopeful that we will be able to reach a solution soon,” the unnamed official added.

The official could not say whether all striking workers had returned to work and added that the embassy has asked all Bangladeshi workers to address their issues through official channels. To a question whether any more arrests have been made in relation to the violent protests, he said that the embassy has asked the authorities to provide it the exact number of Bangladeshis detained and reiterated that some 300 people arrested have been released by the authorities.

Africa

Botswana: Court workers set to take action

Court Workers employed by the Administration of Justice met July 24 and threatened national strike action. They are protesting wage cuts that were implemented in June.

Amongst their demands are to know why the cuts took place, that the cuts be reversed and that the deductions be paid back in full by the end of August this year. The workers gave employers four weeks to restore the cuts or they will take the strike action.

South African telecommunication workers still in dispute

Telecommunication workers took strike action, August 1-5, against the South African Telkom company over the erosion of wages by increasing inflation. The company has come back with a revised pay offer, but this has been rejected by union

negotiators for the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and South African Communications Union (SACU).

The unions are currently consulting their members and are due to meet the company for further negotiations August 7.



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