

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

27 April 2012

Workers at Ford UK balloted for first strikes since 1970s

Around 2,500 auto workers at Ford UK are to take part in a strike ballot, over company plans to close the final salary scheme and lower pay rates for starters.

Ford UK has not experienced the threat of industrial action since the 1970s. It employs 15,000 workers across the country.

The workforce last went on strike in 1978, in a dispute over pay that became the first in a wave of strikes dubbed the “winter of discontent.”

Among the sites being balloted are Dagenham, Southampton, Halewood in Merseyside and Ford’s UK headquarters in Basildon, Essex.

The Unite union’s national officer, Roger Maddison, urged Ford “to return to the negotiating table if it wants to avoid this dispute.”

Ford said it remained “willing and available” to hold talks with Unite.

UK drivers on regional trains to strike over pensions

Drivers on East Midlands Trains (EMT) have voted overwhelmingly in support of industrial action to protect their pensions.

According to the web site of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, EMT “is proposing to reduce its contributions into the scheme despite the turbulent economic climate which is likely to have reduced the fund’s assets since the last valuation. The Company’s short term cost cutting measures will have long term implications for all EMT staff and their pensions.”

Strikes are to take place on May 1, 3, 8, 10, 15 and 17.

Surrey refuse workers take strike action

Refuse workers employed by Biffa in Mole Valley, Surrey staged a 24-hour strike April 20 and have followed it with an overtime ban and work to rule in a pay dispute.

The workers are being offered a two-year pay deal for 2011 and 2012 of 1.25 percent and 1.75 percent respectively. The current rate of inflation is 3.6 percent (RPI).

Unite union regional officer Janet Henney said, “We urge Biffa to reopen negotiations with an improved offer and settle this dispute.

“We have learnt that Biffa might be attempting to break the strike.”

Pilots dispute costs Iberia subsidiary 122 cancellations

Spain’s national flagship airline Iberia was forced to cancel 122 national and international flights April 20, following a strike by pilots protesting the creation of the low-cost subsidiary, Iberia Express. The action followed days after Iberia announced a series of measures to cut costs by 8 percent, including salary reductions of 12 percent, resulting in an even greater divide between the two parts of the company.

Media sources report that the company is aiming at increasing productivity by 26 percent, creating a savings of €52.4 million. Additional measures include increasing pilots’ working hours, restricting holiday leave time and suppressing previously-negotiated benefits. At least a quarter of all Iberia pilots take their holidays in the months of June, July and August. The airline has stated its intention to make pilots take their leave “according to the activity of the company.”

The pilots have voted to strike for a total of 30 days. They have been striking every Monday and Friday since last April 6 and will continue until July 20.

Thousands protest, strike in Rome against labour law reform

Thousands took to the streets of Rome April 21 to protest plans to make it easier to sack employees being brought in by the unelected government of Mario Monti.

Work stoppages by bus and metro workers forced public transport in Rome to a standstill.

Prime Minister Monti is seeking to undermine Article 18 of the employment code, which requires firms with more than 15 employees to reinstate workers considered by a court to have been dismissed unlawfully.

Italy’s biggest union, the CGIL, has threatened a general strike if the government does not back down.

Irish Vodafone workers vote for strike over jobs

Customer service staff at Vodafone in the Republic of Ireland have voted to strike over the company’s decision to outsource 300 jobs to a company in Northern Ireland.

Workers at call centres in Dundalk and Leopardstown cast 262 votes in favour of strike action, with two votes against. The vote follows a

decision to move jobs to Newry-based Teleperformance.

Vodafone is currently engaged in negotiations with the Communications Workers' Union (CWU) on possible redundancy packages.

"Vodafone acknowledge that many roles affected may relocate to Newry, where Teleperformance is headquartered. The company also recognises that some employees may not be in a position to relocate in these circumstances", read a company statement.

Pilot strike threat looms at Norwegian Air over contracts

Norwegian Air is threatened by its first strike ever, after failing to resolve a conflict with the airline's 570 pilots for the right to full employment, not just short-term work contracts.

The pilots have won support from their counterparts at Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) and Widerøe.

Employers' organisation NHO Luftfart stated that the pilots' pay and employment demands are illegal and is filing suit in a special labour court. Management is seeking to secure new pilots through temporary employment agencies at bases in Finland and Spain, to keep costs down.

A strike date has not been set, but the pilots must give at least 14 days notice according to law.

Technical staff at Finnair in two-day strike over outsourcing

Up to 600 technical staff at Finnair took a two-day strike last week in protest at plans to outsource engine maintenance services. Around 280 jobs are expected to be lost.

Finnair announced recently that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with Switzerland's SR Technics for engine and component services.

German auto workers may strike over pay

Germany's IG Metall union is threatening industrial action over demands for a 6.5 percent wage increase and improvements in apprenticeship hiring.

IG Metall, which has between 700,000 and 800,000 members in the automotive sector, says it will take "short-time" industrial action on April 28 if the dispute is not settled.

The Federation of Metalworker Employers has offered a three percent rise for 14 months.

Nigerian judicial workers strike

Judicial workers in Ekiti state went on strike last Friday to press

their demand for the minimum wage to be increased from N16,000 (US\$102) to N25,000 (US\$159).

The strike began after workers held an impromptu meeting to discuss the lack of progress in their pay demand. They are represented by the Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), their chairman Michael Ibiyemi explained to reporters, "We feel slighted by the way the government rebuffed the two ultimatums earlier issued by the union. We will not suspend the strike until the government takes our demand seriously."

The strikers confronted police within Ado-Ekiti High Court and chased out judges and lawyers, bringing the court to a standstill.

Zimbabwe: Council staff stop work over non-payment of wages

Around 700 workers, members of the Zimbabwe Urban Council Workers' Union (ZUCWU), at Bulawayo council gathered on Monday at the revenue hall to demand payment of their last three months' outstanding salaries. The ZUCWU general secretary explained to the press, "We are not on strike. We have come for our pay because this is a pay point. Everywhere is closed today because we are here so now we should just wait for them to come and pay us?"

Their action brought to a standstill preparations for the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, due to begin Tuesday.

Zambia building society workers walk out

Workers represented by the Zambia Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers at the head office of the Zambia National Building Society in Lusaka went on strike last week.

They were demanding payment of a salary increase previously agreed following talks between the union and management. Management said the increase had not been paid because it had not yet been sanctioned by a board meeting.

The workers surrounded the headquarters building and vowed not to return to their jobs until the K1.2 million (US\$230) across-the-board salary increase was implemented.



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