

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 August 2012

Bus drivers strike in southern England

Bus drivers in Surrey, England staged a 24-hour strike August 13, and further action is possible until the end of September in pursuance of an adequate pay increase.

The 120 drivers work for Abellio at the Byfleet depot, and run services in the areas of Guildford, Kingston, Staines, West Byfleet and Woking. Management are only offering an increase in basic pay of 1.5 percent, deferred until 2013. The cost of living in Surrey is just as expensive as in London, but wages lag behind the rates paid to London bus drivers.

The Unite union said that it was “calling for the company to have serious talks under the auspices of the conciliation service Acas.” Only if this fails will the workforce “be taking 48-hour strike action every Monday and Tuesday until the end of September.”

Byfleet drivers are contracted to work a basic 47.5 hours a week, but many regularly have to work in excess of 60 hours a week in order to pay household bills. Abellio Surrey is part of an international division of Nederlandse Spoorwegen, a private company solely owned by the Dutch government and the principal passenger railway operator in the Netherlands.

UK Capita IT Services workers vote to strike over outsourcing

Staff at Capita IT Services voted overwhelmingly for industrial action over work being outsourced to India and a wider compulsory redundancy plan.

The dispute immediately concerns four sites in Reading, Craigforth, Birmingham and Bournemouth, where 220 staff are employed. The affected sites serve Prudential Phoenix and Abbey Life customers.

London Underground cleaning workers go on strike for Olympic bonus pay

Cleaning workers on London’s Underground Tube network went on a 48-hour strike last week in a dispute over bonus payments for working during the London 2012 Olympic Games.

The workers, employed by private contractors, walked out at 5:30 a.m. and mounted picket lines outside Tube stations, including Stratford, close to the Olympic Park.

The London Olympics has meant an incredible extra stress being placed on an already largely antiquated transport system and its low-paid workforce. In May, London Underground staff secured a deal that would see them receive up to £850 for working during the Olympics, with drivers set to receive payments of up to £1,000. In June, London bus drivers staged a protest over the same issues and eventually secured bonuses of at least £500 for working during the Games.

Thousands of UK Jobcentre staff strike

Thousands of Jobcentre staff took industrial action on Monday in a long-running dispute over working conditions and unrealistic targets.

The workers, who staff 32 call centres in England, Scotland and Wales, took action last year over the same issues.

A shortage of staff is an important contributing factor to the dispute.

The staff deal with calls from people entitled to benefits and crisis loans.

Portuguese hotel workers strike

Staff at the Navegadores hotel in Monte Gordo announced their intention of going on strike from August 13 against poorly paid overtime and unspecified hours of working on public holidays.

According to a statement issued by the Algarve Hotels Union, the employees at the hotel have not yet received their salaries for the months of June or July.

“With this strike, staff at the hotel aim to contest the recently revised labour legislation, as they say it represents ‘violence and brutality’ by reducing the amount paid for overtime and allowing for free labour during public holidays,” reported the *Portugal News*.

The new legislation facilitates sacking employees, eliminating public holidays, reducing paid holidays and deregulating workers’ timetables by annulling or suspending previous agreements.

The staff have called for all workers on contract to be awarded a permanent contract and for qualified personnel to be hired to fill in the gaps in departments with shortages.

Egyptian journalists in partial strike over press freedom

Journalists called for a partial strike last week, demanding that the upper house of parliament relinquish ownership of newspapers.

Egypt named 50 new editors for state-owned newspapers on August 8, raising concerns among journalists of Islamizing the press.

Among the editors named was Abdel-Nasser Salama, appointed chief editor of *Al Ahrām*, Egypt's oldest paper. Salama was suspended from writing a column in 2010 for what were deemed inflammatory articles against Christians.

Iranian pre-school teachers and temporary college instructors protest

Over 500 pre-school teachers and temporary instructors at vocational and technical colleges held a protest, gathering by the parliamentary gates.

The instructors and preschool teachers have 10 years of teaching experience. They are demanding to be employed directly by the Ministry of Education.

Workers at Metal Work Industries march, block freeway to Tehran

On August 13, 600 workers at Metal Work Industries marched to Fath Freeway, closing down the freeway to Tehran. They are demanding eight months of back pay and 11 months of unemployment insurance payments from management.

Special Guard Units ended the workers' blockade after two hours.

The following day, the workers gathered outside the Ministry of Industries main building, and workers representatives were eventually allowed in for talks.

Ministry officials apparently provided a guaranteed check from management for payments for the months of February, March, and April to be deposited into the workers' accounts by this week.

Kenyan hospital workers' strike ends, medics stay out

Employees at the Moi teaching and referral hospital returned to work following a strike over allowances. However, around 200 staff represented by the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists union (KMPDU) refused to return to work. KMPDU official Mogeni Mogaka said that doctors' allowances and salaries had not been harmonised as had been agreed by the government. KMPDU did not sign the agreement drawn up by the hospital management and signed by representatives of the other hospital workers.

Nigerian research workers launch countrywide strike

Several unions representing research workers under the umbrella organisation of the Joint Research and Allied Institutions Sector Unions (JORAISU) began a nationwide indefinite strike Monday.

JORAISU accuse the government of failing to implement past agreements, including the salaries and conditions agreement CONRAISS meant to have come into effect in July 2009. They are protesting the non-payment of other allowances and the underfunding of research institutions.

Nigeria's Shiroro dam workers strike over pension changes

Workers at the Shiroro hydroelectricity dam on the Kaduna River began a strike at the end of last week. They were protesting the federal government's plans to move their pension scheme from its current Power Holding Company of Nigeria superannuation fund to an inferior contributory pension scheme supervised by the National Pension Commission.

Nigerian power workers strike

Workers employed by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) in Umuahia, the capital of Abia state, went on strike, closing the Umuahia PHCN offices. They are represented by the Nigeria Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE).

The strike action comes in the wake of the federal government's plans to privatise PHCN. The NUEE state chairman, Kalu O Kalu, told the press: "The government said it wants to privatise PHCN. We are not against that. All we are saying is that all labour-related matters must be properly resolved before the privatisation."

PHCN staff at the headquarters building in Calabar in Cross River State also went on strike. According to journalists, they had been forced to sign pension and severance documents at gunpoint. Their action led to half the state having no power supply and having to rely on generators.



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