

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 September 2012

Wildcat strike by French staff on Brittany Ferries over allowances and working hours

A wildcat strike by French staff on Brittany Ferries that began September 20 over proposals to withdraw workers' allowances and change their working hours, has brought sailings between southern England, France and Spain to a standstill.

The industrial action is ongoing despite what were described as "constructive" talks between the union and management.

"Brittany Ferries is trying to reduce costs following three years of losses caused by exchange rate fluctuations and rising fuel costs. The company said the action had cost it millions of pounds," said the BBC.

Sailing routes cancelled include those from Plymouth to Roscoff and Santander; between Cork and Roscoff; and Portsmouth to Caen, Cherbourg, St Malo and Bilbao.

Brittany Ferries carries 2.6 million passengers annually and 85 percent of these are from the UK.

Staff at Apple's French stores strike over working conditions

Staff at Apple Inc's French stores struck on September 21 after the breakdown of talks over working conditions. The workers' demands include the installation of water fountains, providing meal vouchers and paying a thirteenth month of salary as is common at French companies.

The strike, involving workers at Apple's stores in Paris and other cities across the country, aimed for maximum impact by coinciding with the launch of Apples' new iPhone 5. Apple employs around 1,000 workers across France.

Thousands of UK transport workers strike over planned cuts and closures

Around 8,500 transport workers took industrial action September 21 over cuts and closures which threaten vital public services. The staff—members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) at the Department of Transport—are protesting the planned closures to coast guard stations across the country and plans to close almost 40 local offices of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. The Department of Transport staff have held rolling strikes for the past two months.

Some 3,500 PCS members employed at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also struck the same day to protest job cuts and privatisation plans.

Workers at distribution centre strike in Wales strike over pensions

Staff at Bridgwater's Argos distribution centre in Wales staged a four-day strike last week in a dispute over pensions.

Argos is a catalogue merchant based in the United Kingdom and Ireland, with over 800 stores, and is closing its Group Final Salary Pension Scheme in favour of one linked to share prices and profits, potentially taking thousands of pounds from workers upon retirement.

Refuse workers in Doncaster, England on indefinite strike in pay dispute

Refuse collectors in Doncaster, England have voted to take indefinite industrial action following their rejection of a pay deal. The company Sita UK has refused to increase its national offer of a mere 1.7 percent pay rise—well below the rate of inflation.

Workers have also rejected the company's "self-financing bonus scheme", which it tied to increases in productivity, as they say this will lead to redundancies. Doncaster refuse collectors have already taken part in a number of days of industrial action in dispute with Sita UK over pay parity with other regions.

Union suspends strike at recycling centres in Sheffield, England

Workers at recycling centres in Sheffield, in South Yorkshire, England have had their industrial action suspended by the GMB trade union on the pretext of ensuring the waste disposal firm Sova Recycling secure new business.

There has been an ongoing dispute at the recycling depots throughout the year as Sova seeks to cut working hours and ultimately shut depots.

The company claims it is trying to secure new business which would allow it to increase the number of hours it could offer staff.

The GMB union said it was suspending industrial action until October. GMB regional organiser Peter Davies said that Sova had informed him that it would know if it had won a bid for new work in early October. Davies said, "It's a bid for more recycling for their operation and it will resolve our issues with dispute if they get it. I think carrying on with the industrial action would only jeopardise that bidding process. So we've decided to suspend that industrial action and support Sovas's efforts to win that tender."

Strike by private nursing home workers ended by Norwegian Labour Party minister

On September 19, Norwegian Labour Party minister Hanne Bjurstrøm intervened to end a month-long strike by 173 workers at privately-run nursing homes. The workers had been striking to demand pension benefits parity with staff employed in the public sector. The action was ended just as it had spread from Oslo and Bærum to Eidsvoll and Bergen.

Bjurstrøm ended the dispute by demanding that compulsory arbitration was undertaken to resolve the issue.

The Fagforbundet trade union involved in the dispute did nothing to oppose the directive, with a representative merely stating, “It’s too bad the government found it necessary to step in with compulsory arbitration”.

Estonian doctors and nurses to strike

Estonian doctors and nurses in the capital, Tallinn and the second-biggest city, Tartu are to strike October 1 to protest low pay and poor working conditions. Outpatient services will be halted, and according to the union, inpatient care may be halted a week later and additional major hospitals may join the strike in the second week.

The Health Insurance Fund recently said that doctors’ pay could be increased by 3 percent and that of nurses, by 6 percent. The doctors are demanding an increase of 20 percent and the nurses 40 percent.

According to the North Estonia Medical Centre, the country’s biggest hospital, doctors exceed nominal workloads by an average of 43 percent.

Welsh bus drivers and engineers vote to strike after rejecting pay offer **Bus drivers and engineers at the company First Cymru in Wales have voted for a 24-hour strike after rejecting a 5 percent pay rise over 15 months. First Cymru serves Bridgend, Maesteg, Port Talbot, Neath, Swansea, Llanelli, Carmarthen and south Pembrokeshire, including Haverford west. It also runs Excel services and the Swansea to Cardiff Greyhound coach service. Aer Lingus and Dublin Airport Authority staff to strike over changes to pension scheme**

Aer Lingus staff and employees at Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) in Ireland are to go on strike Monday over planned changes to their pension scheme.

Flights and services at Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports are expected to experience disruption.

The BBC reported that the industrial action committees of Aer Lingus and the DAA said that there was “anger and dismay” among members over the threats, legal and otherwise, that they claimed had been made by the employers.

On Tuesday, the DAA was granted leave by the High Court to seek an injunction against trade union SIPTU in relation to the planned action. A full hearing on the case has been set for September 28.

Egyptian doctors announce partial strike

Doctors announced a partial strike at the emergency general committee

for the Doctors’ Syndicate on Friday in protest at the deteriorating state of health care across the country.

Hundreds of medical professionals attended the assembly meeting on Friday according to *Bikya Masr*. In a statement, the Doctors’ Syndicate refused the last terms, saying it violates the regulations of the syndicate, that disciplinary measures can’t be taken without an investigation.

President Mohamed Mursi urged doctors’ representatives on Saturday not to go ahead with the strike, and promised to pump in millions of pounds to support doctors and hospitals.

Namibian Polytechnic staff strike

More than 300 non-academic staff at the Polytechnic of Namibia went on strike Monday. They are members of the Namibia Public Workers Union and are demanding a 10 percent pay increase. The Deputy Minister of Education met with the Polytechnic council and rector on Monday and told them there was no money to meet the striker’s demands.

Nigerian teachers strike for new salary structure

Teachers in primary and secondary schools, represented by the Nigeria Union of Teachers in nine states including Lagos, Niger and Delta are on strike demanding the state governments implement the federally agreed Teachers Salary Structure. The Lagos teachers began their action Monday whilst other states started their strike last week.

Kenyan teachers return to work

A deal signed between the government and the Kenya National Union of Teachers brought an end to the three week strike by 200,000 teachers. Under the deal, the lowest-paid teachers will receive a 40 percent pay rise taking their pay to about \$230 a month, whilst the highest-paid teachers’ salaries will rise by 20 percent taking them to \$1700 a month. Teachers in rural areas and in special needs schools will receive additional allowances.

Kenyan doctors’ strike continues

The strike by doctors represented by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union is now in its third week. Medical services minister Anyang Nyong’o has ruled out negotiations with the doctors’ representatives declaring the strike illegal.

On Monday government representatives failed to attend a court hearing on the strike’s legality and the court threw out the government’s submission.

South African truck drivers strike

More than 20,000 truck drivers represented by four unions including the SA Transport and Allied Workers' Union came out on strike Tuesday. The unions are seeking an inflation-related pay increase of twelve percent across-the-board for 2013 and 2014.

The strike will affect fuel deliveries to petrol stations and cross-country freight deliveries. The action began after talks with the employer's body the Road Freight Employers' Association broke down on Tuesday, when the employers refused to budge from their offer of 7.5 percent.



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