

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 September 2014

## Air France pilots announce weeklong strike

Pilots working for Air France, the French arm of the Franco-Dutch Air France/KLM SA airline have said they will hold a one-week strike, September 15 to September 22. They are members of the SNLP France Alpa pilots union. If it goes ahead it will disrupt domestic and European flights.

The dispute is over the airline's reorganisation plans entitled "Perform 2020". The company says it must reorganize to be able to compete with low-cost airlines such as EasyJet. Air France has already set up two low-cost arms of its company, Hop and Transavia. The company plans to cut some routes and create a common pool of pilots to use across all arms of the company.

The union does not oppose the reorganisation; it just wants to be part of the process. The SNLP president explained, "The company urgently needs restructuring but we should have a say in all this."

## German rail staff walk out

Rail staff in the GDL union, employed by the rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB), held a three-hour strike Monday. GDL represents around 80 percent of DB drivers and a third of other staff. The strike followed the collapse of talks in August between management and the union.

GDL is seeking a five percent pay rise and a cut of two hours in the working week.

## Irish refuse workers' lockout continues

Nearly 80 employees of Greyhound Recycling Company were locked out by their employer in mid-June when they refused to sign new contracts that would have meant a 35 percent pay cut.

The company has a contract to empty the bins of domestic and commercial premises throughout the city of Dublin. Around 200 workers and supporters marched from Liberty Hall to Dublin City Council Hall Monday evening demanding the council intervene to resolve the dispute.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) agreed to ballot the locked-out staff on Tuesday this week with a proposal that SIPTU and Greyhound management hold talks under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission at the end of the week.

## Algarve nurses take action

Nurses in the Algarve area of Portugal held a 24-hour strike last Friday. It was in response to long working hours and a shortage of doctors and nurses in the summer holiday period when the area experiences a fourfold increase in its population.

The nurses union said the strike won total support from its members at the Lagos Hospital and that 90 percent of health workers at Portimão's Barlavento Hospital also struck. 80 percent of its members also supported the strike in Faro.

## Staff at London's Ritzy Cinema reject pay offer

Last week staff at the Ritzy Cinema in Brixton, London rejected the company's latest pay offer by a margin of 24 votes to 23.

The cinema, which professes a progressive ethos, has rejected the claims of its employees to be paid the "London living wage", currently set at just £8.80 (US\$14.50) an hour. To date the cinema employees have carried out 13 strikes in support of their claim.

The cinema is owned by the Picturehouse Company, which in turn is owned by multinational Cineworld. In the rejected offer, the company agree to raise the wage to £8 (US\$13) an hour immediately, to £8.20 (US\$13.50) an hour in September, £8.40 (US\$14) in January of 2015 and finally to £8.80 (US\$14.50) the following September. By then, due to inflation, it is estimated that the London living wage will need to be set above the current £8.80 figure.

## Staff at Victoria and Albert Museum in London hold protest over pay

Staff at the prestigious Victoria and Albert Museum in London held a protest August 29 against low pay. They are members of the civil service workers' Public and Commercial Services Union.

The protest began at 6 pm to coincide with a late evening opening of the museum's current exhibition.

The workforce has been subjected to a pay restraint resulting in a 10 percent loss in real earnings over the last three years.

## Strikes by ambulance workers in Yorkshire, UK

Around 400 ambulance workers employed by Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS), in the north of England held two six-hour strikes on August 29 and September 2.

They were the latest action in a 20-month dispute over YAS management's plans to bring in a new meal break system. This would result in staff working on a shift of up to 12 hours and only being able to take a 45-minute break between their fourth and seventh hour on duty. However, YAS trust director, David Whiting, has said a break could be refused altogether if the service is very busy.

The staff are members of the Unite union, which represents only a minority of YAS staff and is not recognised by the employer. The majority of YAS staff are represented by Unison, which did not take part in the action.

Earlier in the summer YAS imposed new working conditions whereby emergency care assistants, who receive only six weeks of training, can be asked to deal with more complex cases that in the past would have been attended by paramedics. Paramedics are highly trained, undergoing a two-year degree level course.

### **Refuse workers in eastern England set to walk out**

Refuse workers employed by Kier Refuse Services in Kings Lynn and West Norfolk were set to strike for half a day Thursday of this week and for a full day September 10. They are members of the GMB union.

The company has refused their pay claim of four percent over 12 months, with their final offer being for a rise of 1.75 percent over 15 months.

### **Further strikes by Irish Rail staff called off**

Proposed strikes by Irish Rail workers planned for September 7, 8 and 21 have been called off after talks between representatives of the National Bus & Rail Union (NBRU), the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and Irish Rail management.

NBRU and SIPTU held strikes in August over proposed pay cuts of between 1.7 and six percent by the company and had planned three more in September. The two unions stated that new proposals made by Irish Rail are comprehensive and addressed the concerns of the unions but to date no details are available.

NBRU and SIPTU members are to be balloted on the new proposals.

### **Israeli postal workers strike against job cuts and privatisation**

The Israeli Histadrut Labour Federation declared an official dispute Tuesday on behalf of staff employed by the state-owned postal service Israel Post. They had taken strike action covering peripheral areas of the country on Monday, extending it to Tel Aviv on Tuesday.

Israel Post is planning to privatise 20 percent of its operation and offer a further 20 percent to public subscription.

The company had sought concessions from the union, which had agreed to job losses through early retirement and extended opening times. However, the company is now seeking job losses and is pushing to replace permanent staff with temporary workers on minimum wage.

Striking employees held a protest outside the David Intercontinental Hotel in Tel Aviv on Tuesday, where the Finance Minister, Yair Lapid, was attending a conference hosted by the *Calcalist* business newspaper. The Finance Ministry has responsibility for Israel Post.

### **Miners continue strike at Iran's Bafgh Iron Ore Mine to protest privatisation, arrests**

Miners at the Bafgh Iron Ore Mine in the Yazd province of Iran remain on strike in an ongoing dispute. Since May, workers at Bafgh have been protesting and striking against low wages, deteriorating working conditions and plans to privatise the company.

Workers struck for two days on May 9 and 10 and then stepped up their action with a 40-day strike beginning May 17. The latest strike began on August 19, immediately following the arrest of nine miners, according to various sources.

In response to the strike, Yazd government officials sent riot police to Bafgh to break up a peaceful protest on August 20. A report Sunday on the Radio Zameneh web site stated that a "security-political delegation has been sent to Bafgh from Tehran in order to negotiate with the striking workers."

The Central Iron Ore Company of Iran, the holding company of the Bafgh mine, has now been fully transferred to the Khouzesan Steel Company.

### **Jordan Teachers Association ends strike**

On August 30, the Jordan Teachers Association (JTA) ended a two-week strike of public school teachers.

The main demand of the teachers had been a 50-percent rise to be implemented over three years. Other demands included changes to civil service bylaws regarding sick leave, promotions and leave without pay, an investigation into the Education Ministry's pension fund, implementing an improved medical insurance system, enacting legislation to protect teachers against assaults and awarding them more financial benefits.

The strike had a major impact as the new academic year began, with an estimated 140,000 teachers participating. Up to 1.4 million school children stayed at home as a result.

A JTA statement said the strike was called off after "understandings" were reached with the Ministry of Education. It was announced at a press conference by JTA president Mohammad Masheh.

Although no further details were given, the main demand of the teachers for a pay increase was not met.

According to the *Jordan Times*, "Masheh did not allow reporters to ask questions, while teachers dissatisfied with the JTA council's decision reacted furiously at the presser, accusing their leaders of betraying the teachers, especially since the key demand, a pay raise, was not met."

The report added, "The ministry had cited the difficult economic situation as the reason for rejecting the pay raise demand."

### **Kenyan health workers continue protest**

Health workers in Mombasa County, Kenya will continue their three-

week strike as they have not been paid their salaries for the last three months. The largest referral hospital, Coast General, remains empty due to the dispute.

Some 80 percent of workers have been paid but will not return to work until all staff receive their wages and incorrect deductions of between Sh10,000 (US\$113) and Sh20,000 (US\$225) are reimbursed.

### **Kenyan nurses in Uasin Gishu state strike**

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN) struck Wednesday in support of 100 contract nurses sacked by the Uasin Gishu State health officer.

The state governor has demanded apologies from the sacked nurses before they can be reinstated. KNUN said the nurses have nothing to apologise for. The union is taking Uasin Gishu State to court over not putting the nurses on permanent contracts and claims that the nurses were illegally sacked.

### **Walkout by Nigerian academics at Ekeowe polytechnic**

Academics at the Federal Polytechnic, Ekeowe in Bayelsa State, Nigeria walked out in a warning strike Monday over outstanding promotions. They are members of three unions, the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, (ASUP), the Senior Staff Association in Nigeria Polytechnics (SSANP) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU).

The employees complain that there have been no promotions since their 2013 suspensions. ASUP suspended strike action five weeks ago, but the polytechnics had not yet resumed their functions.

### **Strike of Nigerian Lagos airport staff**

Nigerian airline workers at Lagos International Airport, who have not had a salary increase for the last 10 years, disrupted an Air France KLM flight when they came out on strike on August 28.

Prior to the one-day stoppage the National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) had approached management three times seeking a wage review but were rebuffed each time.

The union called off the action on a promise that the Ministry of Labour would get involved, although the airline management has no fixed date for a meeting. Management said, "There were staff on strike but now everything is in order. The airline has resumed operation."

### **Nigerian oil workers resume dispute**

The Nigeria Union of Petrol and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) reinstated strike action, called off in July, after Chevron allegedly renegeed on the deal. NUPENG accused Chevron of improper retrenchment of its members and treating the sacked workers like slaves.

The strike was reinstated on August 28.

The union stated, "As a result of the refusal of the Chevron Nigeria

Limited management to honour the communiqué of July 10 issued at the instance of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Abuja, to resolve the industrial dispute between the union and Chevron management, the strike action that was earlier suspended is hereby resumed."

### **Sudanese teachers protest militia killings**

Basic schoolteachers in Kutum in North Darfur, Sudan went on strike Monday, demanding that the government provide security against attacks from militiamen. The militiamen have beheaded seven teachers since last year. Secondary school teacher Salah Ahmed Adam was the latest to lose his life in a government-backed militia beheading on Sunday.

### **Strike of Ebola health workers in Sierra Leone**

Health workers have gone on strike in Sierra Leone in response to nonpayment of allowances and a lack of equipment to combat Ebola. Chief Supervisor at the Kenema Clinic in the east of the country said clothing to protect health workers was inadequate and the clinic had only one broken stretcher to carry infected patients and corpses.

The World Health Organisation closed the only other Ebola health centre in Sierra Leone when one of its nurses caught the virus. Across West Africa, 1,550 have died from the Ebola virus, of which 120 were nurses. These include the 26 nurses who have died at Kenema Clinic.

### **South African metal workers begin strike**

Workers belonging to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) began a strike at the end of last week at Rand Refinery's Germiston plant.

Negotiations between the gold refiner and NUMSA and another union, the United Association of South Africa (UASA) had been ongoing. UASA settled with the company, but NUMSA took it to arbitration and when this failed called its members out from August 27.

Workers are demanding a 10 percent pay increase over the next two years and the banning of polygraph tests while the company is offering 9 percent in the first year and 7 percent in the second and third years. Rand said it hoped to maintain normal production through the strike, even though NUMSA represents 35 per cent of the workforce.



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