

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 September 2014

Europe

Air France pilots begin strike

The Air France pilots began a strike Monday in protest against the airlines' plans to transfer jobs to its low-cost subsidiary Transavia, which is expected to result in deterioration in pay and working conditions.

The strike is expected to last for a week, making it the longest period of industrial action within the airline since 1998.

So far, Air France has managed to operate only about 40 percent of its scheduled flights. On Wednesday, the company had to cancel around 70 percent of its flights from France to Russia.

The airline's chief executive, Frederic Gagey, said last week, that the strike may cost the airline between \$12.9 million and \$19.4 million a day, depending on how many pilots participate.

Bloomberg News reported: "the strike threatens to undermine efforts by Air France executives to bring spending into line with discount rivals such as EasyJet Plc (EZJ), now the country's second biggest airline, and Ryanair."

Greek municipal and culture workers stage protest rally

Municipal and culture workers staged a protest rally September 11 outside the Ministry of Administrative Reform in protest at the government's evaluations scheme in the public sector as well as changes in the conversion of short-term contracts to permanent contracts.

The two unions involved were the municipal workers' union (POEOTA) and the Ministry of Culture workers' union (POEYPPPO).

Lisbon metro staff vote to hold 24-hour strike

Staff on the Metropolitan de Lisboa, in the Portuguese capital voted to hold a 24-hour strike on September 25, in opposition to the government tabling legislation to reimpose cuts in public-sector wages from next month.

Almost 1,500 subway staff on the metro struck September 10 in a protest against pay cuts and the possible privatisation of the subway system.

Lisbon's subway carries on average about 370,000 passengers a day.

Protest by pilots at Romanian state-owned airline

A spontaneous protest by pilots employed by Romanian state owned airline Tarom led to the cancellation of several flights this week. Tarom's internal flights were badly affected, according to an announcement from the company.

Cancelled flights included Bucharest to Cluj, Satu Mare, Baia Mare and Oradea; and to Bucharest from Târgu Mureş, Sofia, Iaşi, Chişinău, Baia Mare and Oradea.

Bulgarian miners launch three-day warning strike

Miners at Cherno More Mine in Bulgaria have launched a three-day warning strike to demand unpaid wages and higher pay. The miners intend to suspend their work for one hour in the beginning of each shift, press service of Podkrepa Confederation of Labours announced.

The reason the mine owners have given for not paying the miners their wages since July is the accumulated debts to the EVN electricity distributing company.

Despite the commitments of the Ministry of Energy and the National Electric Company (NEK) to take urgent measures for normalization payments in the coal production, the wage arrears have not been paid.

On September 18, the miners were to begin strike action underground if their demands were not fulfilled.

Cypriot public-sector employees strike

Public-sector workers across the country are to strike September 19 to protest recent statements made by Minister of Finance Harris Georgiades, regarding further cuts in wages and the taxation of a one-off bonus allocated to public-sector employees upon their retirement.

As well as the nominal public-sector employees (PASYDY) union, the Cyprus Workers Confederation (SEK), members of the Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) and the secondary education teachers union (OELMEK) are also expected to take part in the protest.

City of Helsinki employees' strike

A one day strike is slated for September 23 by employees for the City of

Helsinki in Finland against corporatisation of public services. Workers fear that a new collective agreement and terms and conditions of employment would allow for the introduction of a new wage structure.

A cessation of trams and underground metro trains in Helsinki for one day is expected.

Shipyard workers strike in Birkenhead, England called off

Scheduled industrial action at Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, Merseyside, England, has been called off.

As the result of a pay dispute, a ban on overtime and other action short of a strike began September 11. A 24-hour walkout is due to take place on September 22 if “meaningful talks” were not restarted, said the GMB trade union.

560 workers at the Birkenhead yard have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action.

Cammell Laird has been a major site of British shipbuilding for almost two centuries. The yard originated following the merger of Laird, Son & Co. of Birkenhead and Johnson Cammell & Co. of Sheffield at the turn of the twentieth century.

Middle East

Israeli postal workers strike

A postal workers’ strike over plans by the Israel Postal Company has entered its second week. From this week, post offices will no longer be able to facilitate the paying of fines issued by the police, the courts, or local authorities.

Post offices are also now refusing to handle mail for government offices.

A trade union representative, Shimon Farjun, cited in the *Times of Israel*, said the union had already agreed to measures attacking workers’ conditions as well as job losses. Farjun said, “As part of the negotiations, we agreed to painful efficiency measures, which also included extensive layoffs, out of a sense of responsibility for the fate of the company and concern for the livelihood of thousands of other workers; we agreed to pay a heavy price, and a very painful one”.

On September 18, staff at Ben-Gurion International Airport struck for three hours in solidarity with the postal workers. The strike resulted in 58 flights being delayed, affecting nearly 8,500 passengers.

Africa

Oil workers in Nigeria begin nationwide strike

Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) workers began a nationwide strike Tuesday in a dispute over pension arrangements. The strike went ahead following a breakdown in talks between management and the PENGASSAN trade union.

The union said, “Today, we have called our members out to begin an indefinite strike until management addresses our demand for a complete overhaul of the NNPC pension scheme, which in its present form is depriving our members of their full dues.”

The plats.com web site noted, “NNPC has had difficulty meeting its portion of cash call contributions to funding joint venture operations with

its foreign oil partners, a source said. For pension contributions, the company has fallen Naira 85 billion (\$531 million) short, according to the source.”

The strike by employees at the state-owned firm led to the closure of the country’s four state-operated refineries. As the strike began, many in the capital Abuja queued to buy petrol from service stations across the city.

As in previous strikes, PENGASSAN is ensuring that actual oil production is not affected. “It will not have any impact on production but it can have an impact on exports. All export terminals manned by our workers could shut down”, said PENGASSAN’s Babatunde Oke.

Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa, with its sale making up over 70 percent of government revenue and 95 percent of foreign-exchange income.

Teachers continue strike in East Darfur, Nigeria

Secondary school teachers in the Nigerian state of East Darfur continue to strike over unpaid wages. The Teachers Union is demanding the payment of half of their salary arrears, around SDG 3.3 million (US\$900,000), before they return to work.

This week, the strike in East Darfur entered its fourth week. The head of the Union for the Sheiria and Yassin localities said teachers in both localities are owed SDG 2 billion. The arrears of the retired teachers amount to SDG 55 million (\$9.6 million).

Medical laboratory staff strike in West Darfur, Nigeria

Medical laboratory staff in Nigeria’s West Darfur State began a nationwide strike last week. The workers are paid by health insurance schemes and are demanding a pay increase in line with the cost of living. The allAfrica web site reported that the lab employees walked out after the state authorities rejected a memorandum, signed by all medical personnel in the state.

Striking nurses protest at county offices in Uasin Gishu, Kenya

On September 15, nurses in Uasin-Gishu county, Kenya protested at local government offices for several hours in the town of Eldoret at the failure of the latter to address their grievances.

The nurses walked off the job 14 days previously to demand the payment of wage arrears and better working conditions. They are members of the Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN).

The union said that the nurses had not been paid in three months. A KNUN official alleged that nurses in Soy were given disciplinary letters for “not welcoming the governor” to their health institution. He added, “There is also rampant discrimination and tribalism where some health workers have been threatened with transfers for belonging to other counties”.

Workers in dispute with Zambian print company

Workers at Times Printpak (Z) Limited in Zambia planned to strike on September 17 to demand the payment of four-month salary arrears.

According to workers, the company had agreed to pay them, following talks with the Zambia Union of Journalists and the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions.

The union stated that the company is owed millions of dollars by various government institutions, which has not yet been paid.

SPAR workers in Lusaka, Nigeria demand pay rise, removal of chief executive

SPAR retail workers in Lusaka, Nigeria protested September 11 to demand a 100 percent salary increase and the removal of chief executive officer Roselt Van-Essen. According to one media report, “workers accused Van-Essen of employing family members in the company.”

A worker told the media, “We want our salaries to be increased from K820, which we are getting, to K1,640. We have held meetings with our union but it is like they have also been bought for they have suddenly gone silent and when we ask them, they don’t give us any response.”

The worker said that the pay gap between workers and company executives was huge, with managers also giving themselves housing allowances of K10,000. “These people don’t even give us housing allowances and medical schemes even when they know they underpay us,” said the worker.



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