

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 July 2015

## Construction staff at UK housing association to strike

Members of the construction union UCATT working for the housing association Aspire in Newcastle under Lyme are set to strike Monday, July 20, followed by further action on July 24, 27 and 31. With a more than 80 percent majority, they voted against plans by Aspire to cut sick pay entitlement from six months to three and slash pay and holiday entitlement for new starters. They are also protesting plans by Aspire to remove tool allowances, among other changes.

Aspire has told the 100 or so affected staff that if they do not accept the changes, they will be sacked and rehired on the inferior terms. Members of the Unite and GMB unions also working for Aspire are in the process of balloting their members.

## UK benefit staff in two-day walkout

Around 1,500 civil servants working for the government's flagship Universal Credit (welfare benefit) service at Bolton, England, and Glasgow, Scotland, are due to strike next Monday and Tuesday. This is to be followed by industrial action short of strikes over the next four weeks.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (CPS) at other sites in Bangor, Basildon, Dundee, Makerfield and Middlesbrough may also ballot.

A CPS press release explained the dispute was over "lack of resources, an oppressive management culture, inadequate training, hard to reach targets and staff shortages...(as well as)...imposition of new conditions, including predetermined start and finish times and severe restrictions of flexible working."

## Airport staff at Bologna take action

A strike by airport and ground handling workers at Bologna airport, Italy, on Tuesday led to the cancellation of flights from the airport while inbound flights had to be diverted to Milan.

## Two-hour protest by Romanian air traffic controllers

Air traffic control staff held a two-hour strike Wednesday between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. local time. Around 40 flights from Henri Coanda airport in Bucharest were affected by the two-hour walkout. The union representing Romania's 1,500 air traffic control staff called the strike after talks between the union and the transportation ministry broke down on Monday. Air traffic control staff are pushing for a pay increase and to be able to retire at age 55.

## Warning action by social workers in Bulgarian city

Bulgarian social workers in the country's second city of Plovdiv held a one-hour warning strike on July 9. Among their demands are a substantial pay increase, improved working conditions and more up-to-date equipment in their offices, citing the fact that they are still using dot-matrix printers from the 1980s. A Confederation of Labour spokesman announced, "Social workers in Bulgaria will launch a series of national symbolical protests as of July 17."

## Ryanair threatens to relocate its Danish base in response to planned strike

Irish low-cost airline Ryanair announced on July 10 that it intends to close its recently opened base in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, and is threatening to close down operations in the Danish town of Billund. Ryanair has said it will relocate its Copenhagen base to Kaunas in the Baltic state of Lithuania.

Ryanair faces a strike against its Danish operation after the Labour Court ruled in favour of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions' (LO's) claim that Ryanair should abide by labour regulations at its Copenhagen operation rather than through its practice of enforcing Irish ones.

The ruling in favour of LO cleared the way for a proposed strike against Ryanair's Danish operation on July 18 to go ahead. Ryanair had previously announced its intention to relocate its Copenhagen operation should it fail to reach an agreement with the union.

## Ryanair takes legal action against Spanish air baggage handlers

Ryanair has begun legal proceedings against striking baggage handlers at Madrid airport. Initially, four unions began strike action over a month ago. They were protesting plans to cut wages by up to nearly a third and changes to annual leave and shift patterns, and were expressing concern over safety equipment.

Three unions have now returned to work, leaving only the CTA union continuing its indefinite strike.

### **Cypriot port workers' overtime ban continues**

The overtime ban by port workers at Limassol is beginning to have repercussions. According to the port head, George Poulos, it is having a financial impact and is leading to serious delays in turning around ships. A 24-hour strike is scheduled for today.

The port workers are angry over proposed job losses that would follow the privatisation of the port. The privatisation of the Limassol port, along with that at Larnaca, is an obligation resulting from the bailout of Cyprus by international creditors.

### **Algerian tram staff strike**

A strike by workers working for the tramway company Cetram in the capital Algiers on July 5 spread to the cities of Oran and Constantine by the end of last week.

Among the workers' demands are an annual bonus derived from individual productivity targets and a collective bargaining agreement. They are seeking removal of some of Cetram's board members.

### **South African farmworkers' dispute continues**

Farm workers employed at the Wood at Heart project in Eastern Free State are continuing their strike, which began on July 4. The project is funded by the National Department of Environmental Affairs.

The strike was in response to the unfair dismissal of 60 workers, against alleged harassment of workers and the lack of training and having to use unsafe equipment. The workers claim that although their contracts state they should receive R3,500 (US\$280) a month, they are only paid R1,500 (US\$129).

### **Nigerian local government workers end strike**

After seven weeks on strike, local government workers in Osun state have returned to work on the basis of a promise by the state government that salary arrears will be paid. Staff have received their January wages and expect February's to have been paid by Thursday of this week. Some workers speaking to the News Agency of Nigeria

(NAN) were skeptical, however. The remaining arrears are expected to be paid when a federal government bailout fund is released.

Lecturers in Osun state polytechnics and colleges are continuing their strike, as they have not been part of the negotiated settlement.

### **Nigerian health workers in Rivers State suspend action**

The strike by primary health care workers in Rivers State, which began a year ago, has been suspended. The suspension followed the intervention by state deputy governor Dr. Ipalibo Harry Banigo. He met with representatives of the several health unions involved in the dispute together with ministry of health officials.

A communiqué issued at the end of the meeting agreed only to look into the issues raised by the unions.

### **Botswana revenue staff prepare to walk out**

The Botswana Public Employees Union (BOPEU) is preparing to walk out following the breakdown of talks with the Botswana Unified Revenue Services (BURS).

BOPEU was pushing for a 15 percent pay increase, as well as other benefit increases such as payment by BURS of 50 percent of tuition fees for the children of staff and 100 percent for staff members. They were seeking other allowances for housing and for installing Wi-Fi. If the strike goes ahead, BOPEU expects it to last up to two months.

### **Namibian food product company wins court order to ban strike**

The Namibian food producer Namib Mills won a court order Tuesday to prevent a proposed strike by some 550 of its staff. The terms of the court order prevent the Namib employees at its sites in Windhoek, Walvis Bay and Otavi from staging a strike that was set to begin Wednesday. It is in operation until August 17. The order instructs Namib Mills operatives that they must leave the company's premises when not working.

The dispute has arisen over Namib Mills's refusal to recognise the Namibia National Labour Organisation (Nanlo) as the body having exclusive rights to represent employees in bargaining negotiations.

According to the company, Nanlo is a trade union federation, not a trade union, and as such does not have the legal right to act as a trade union under the Labour Act. Namib Mills is claiming that two days of "illegal" strike action in June cost the company around N\$0.5 million (US\$40,270) a day.



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