

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 August 2015

London Underground 24-hour strike

Around 20,000 London Underground (LU) staff held a 24-hour strike that began at 6:30 p.m. local time Wednesday. Four trade unions, representing drivers, platform staff, supervisors, management and administrative staff, called the action.

The stoppage followed a 24-hour strike that began July 8. LU workers are opposed to the terms and conditions being offered by management for working the proposed new 24-hour train services at weekends, due to be implemented in September. They are also protesting a derisory 1 percent pay increase proposed for 2016–17. In the run-up to the strike, unions appealed to management to have further discussions to avert the strike but were rebuffed as LU refused to offer any concessions.

UK train staff at First Great Western to strike again

Rail employees, working for the First Great Western (FGW) rail company, are due to hold further strikes over plans by the company to introduce new Hitachi Intercity trains on the services it operates.

The workers, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, are seeking reassurances over threats to jobs and safety issues surrounding the introduction of the new driver-only trains scheduled for 2017 that will affect engineers, guards and platform staff. They are also protesting plans by FGW to get rid of buffet facilities on the new trains.

The 24-hour strike on August 23 will include drivers, guards and platform staff. Another strike, set to last 72 hours, is planned for August 29, while FGW maintenance staff will hold 24-hour strikes on August 29 and August 31.

FGW staff previously held a 48-hour strike over the same issue on July 8-9.

Strike by Welsh museum staff

Museum staff working for the National Museum of Wales took strike action over the weekend of August 1-2. They are members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). They voted by over 80 percent in favour of striking against Museum of Wales' plans to end premium payments for weekend work.

The museums affected included the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea, the National Slate Museum in Llanberis and the Big Pit National Coal Museum in Blaenaton.

For already low paid workers, the abolition of premium payments would

mean a 15 percent pay cut. Many of them are reliant on working tax credits, already targeted for cutbacks by the Tory government.

The strikes are part of a long-running dispute over the proposed cuts to premium payments.

Strike of Italian fast food workers in Milan

Food workers in the city of Milan belonging to the FILCAMS-CGIL, FISASCAT-CISL and UILTuCS-UIL unions held a one-day strike July 31. It was in response to the sacking of four McDonald's restaurant employees in the city.

The four, along with 46 other staff, had worked at the US-owned fast food chain's flagship restaurant in Piazza San Babila in the city centre. The restaurant closed on July 19 with workers only being informed on the day. Unions were given no prior notice of the closure.

The next day, at a meeting held in a hotel, workers were told they would be transferred to other McDonald's restaurants in the city but only on a temporary basis or on a lower grade. Four staff were told they would not be offered alternative posts. The four sacked were union members, two of whom were shop stewards.

Greek medics stop work over unpaid wages

Greek medics represented by their union EOPYY announced they are to stop work over unpaid wages going back months. They will hold a meeting August 7 to consider the impact of their action and make plans for any future action.

Cypriot port workers union end dispute

SEK, the union representing port workers at the Cypriot port of Limassol, announced at the end of last week that they will end the series of strikes and other industrial action being carried out against privatisation at the port.

The union ended the action in response to an agreed increase in compensation for 62 employees. They will now receive €1.5 million, an extra €0.5 million over the previous offer, if this is agreed by parliament. The union is pushing for the company, which will run the privatised service, to hire some of the current staff.

Turkish civil servants push for wage increase

Ahead of talks between the unions and the government, Turkish civil servants are demanding a pay rise.

Among the trade unions due to meet with government representatives are the Turkish Public Worker' Labour Union (Turkiye Kamu-Sen), the Civil Servants Trades Union (Memur-Sen) and the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK).

However only Memur-Sen has the authority to reach agreements with the government's Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and it has a record of conceding to government demands.

Turkish workers protest against union victimisation

The Turkish electric power equipment maker Enpay has been conducting a campaign against union members employed at its factory in an industrial zone in Kullar, Izmit.

The factory employs 900 and the victimisation began after a large number of the employees joined a union. Those victimised are members of the small, independent Birlesik Metal-Is (United Metalworkers' Union) which has been recruiting members opposed to the company union, the Metal Workers Trade Union of Turkey (Türk-Metal).

Enpay sacked 11 union members on July 13 and a further 12 on July 20 after they had demonstrated against the previous sackings.

Employees have held work stoppages, sit-ins and pickets in opposition to management actions. A peaceful demonstration in front of the factory on July 26 resulted in workers and the local Birlesik Metal-Is president being arrested by police, although they were released later the same day.

Iranian builders restoring heritage site strike

Some 120 construction workers employed on the restoration of the Bam Citadel have held a protest outside the Bam Citadel Cultural Heritage Centre to oppose nonpayment of wages.

Bam Citadel, a world heritage site, was badly damaged in the 2003 earthquake. Heritage centre management have rubbed salt into the wounds by saying that some of those involved in the restoration work are to be laid off.

Light rail staff in Jerusalem forced to abandon strike

Staff employed on the Jerusalem light rail system held a strike last Sunday morning to protest plans by the CityPass light rail systems management to lower waiting times to six minutes. They say that it constitutes a change in their working conditions, does not allow them to take adequate breaks and poses safety risks to passengers and pedestrians.

Currently it is between eight and 11 minutes. However as soon as the light rail staff began their strike, which affected 140,000 passengers, they were forced to abandon it after an injunction was filed at the Jerusalem Labour Court, ordering them back to work.

The trade union federation, Histadrut, accused CityPass of bringing in the speedup measures without consultation. Conductors on the light rail

system have recently been calling for a substantial pay increase.

Kenyan sugar workers industrial action

Sugar workers occupied the Kenyan Sugar Company's compound in Nzoia, calling for the removal of the managing director and opposing a court order reinstating him.

The workers accuse the MD of running down the company and losing over \$30 million from 2012 to 2014, thereby denying them the possibility of a pay rise.

The union accused the MD of not forwarding workers bank loans and other social payments, causing their houses and furniture to be sequestered and sold.

In a separate dispute, casual workers at Kinyara Sugar Limited, Kenya went on strike to demand an increase in pay from Sh5500 (US\$54) to Sh10000 (US\$99) per task, a formal employment contract, an employment number giving them access to a sugar coupon, medical services at the health centre and other employment benefits.

They brought the production of sugar and molasses to a standstill on July 29. Heavily-armed police attacked the sugar cane workers with teargas, alleging the strikers had set the cane fields on fire near the factory.

Ugandan university support staff strike

Non-academic staff throughout the public universities of Uganda went on strike on Monday demanding a pay increase in line with academic staff.

The 4,000 support staff have not been offered a pay increase, with the government claiming it cannot afford it. The government said it would look at a claim by the staff in the 2016-17 budget.

The Public Universities non-teaching staff claim all their 4,000 members are supporting the strike. The new academic year starts this month but the union said if its demands are not met, their members will not return to work.

Police have been deployed at six of the public universities during the dispute.

Ghana medics' partial strike

Outpatient departments in Ghana's public hospitals have stopped taking new referrals because of a partial strike by members of the Ghana Medical Association (GMA). They began their strike August 1 to demand proper conditions of service.

The government has declared their strike illegal although GMA members continued services to their inpatients.

Deputy General Secretary of the Ghana Medical Association said the government has turned doctors into slaves, working at all times without the necessary compensation.

Doctors say that if the government does not respond to their demands after a week of not taking new patients, they would escalate their action by withdrawing emergency services. If this did not resolve the dispute, they said they would resign en masse.

New Zimbabwean labour law sparks mass sackings

A new court decision to allow Zimbabwean companies to get rid of workers without compensation has opened a floodgate of sackings.

In the last two weeks alone, 12,000 jobs have gone. The transnational Unilever made the most of the opportunity, sacking 186 employees. Other companies are following suit. Econet Wireless has sacked 400, Sino-Zim has sacked 300 whilst Zimbabwe Railway is sacking 1,000 staff who have not been paid for the last year.

The Regency Group of Hotels (RGH), owned by the family of the late Zanu PF politician and Minister, Eddison Zvogbo, has fired 251 workers.

When the RGH mass sacking took place, a spokesman for Zvogbo Holdings said, “We are following the law in whatever we are doing and the move that we took is part of a restructuring exercise aimed at removing pressure off our wage bill.” He added, “We need to take decisions that are in the interests of the company and that is why we are restructuring. The restructuring exercise is very necessary and normal and I do not know why people are making a lot of noise about it.”



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