Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

21 August 2015

Strike by UK delivery staff

Over 200 delivery and warehouse staff employed by white goods manufacturer and supplier Indesit UK are striking and holding a work to rule against a refusal to increase its 1.5 percent pay offer made in January.

They are members of the Unite union, which says the action will severely disrupt the delivery of fridges, freezers, cookers and washing machines.

The workforce will hold a 24-hour strike beginning at 6 a.m. August 21, a 48-hour strike beginning 6 a.m. August 27, and a further 24-hour strike on September 1. They will undertake a work to rule between August 19 and August 21 and from August 25 to August 27.

Unite regional officer, Mark Plumb, said, "Our members are tired of being fobbed off year-on-year with one-off bonuses … Our members are seeking a substantial increase in their basic pay after years of below inflation pay rises."

"Strike" of Polish workers in UK

Poles who have moved to the UK to find work held a protest outside the Houses of Parliament in London on Thursday. The protest was against anti-immigrant rhetoric, especially against Poles, spouted by politicians and others. There are currently around two thirds of a million Poles working in the UK.

The protest was originally billed as a UK-wide strike by Polish workers in Britain, but was later downgraded to a London-wide strike. The proposed strike was taken up by the *Polish Express* newspaper, which is targeted at ex-pat Poles living in the UK. It produced T-shirts with the slogan "Enough! Stop Blaming Us."

The protest was endorsed by rich businessman John (Jan/Janek) Zylinski. Born in London but of Polish descent, he is a right-wing Polish aristocrat. He has built in London an exact replica of this grandmother's former palace in Poland. Earlier this year he challenged UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage to a dual by sword over Farage's anti-immigrant language.

Strike of baggage handlers at Spanish airport

Baggage handlers at Malaga-Costa del Sol airport are due to hold a one-day strike today followed by one in a week's time on August 28. They work for Iberia Airlines and are members of the UGT trade union. Their action could affect flights operated by Iberia Airlines, British Airway and Turkish Airlines.

The dispute is over staff absences due to sickness currently running at more than 10 percent, while the company refuses to take on extra staff to cover shortages during one of the airport's busiest periods.

A union spokesman explained that temperatures on the runways can be in excess of 55 degrees Celsius. This, combined with the increased workload, could lead to accidents.

Further strike threats by Spanish rail staff

Following announcements last week by the CCOO trade union body that they will call rail strikes in September in opposition to privatization plans, the union of Spanish train drivers and workers, SEMAF, has announced four 24-hour strikes on September 4, 11, 14 and 15.

The union cites lack of progress in discussions with network operator Renfe. Failure to agree on a new collective bargaining agreement and staff levels led to the collapse of the talks.

Irish train drivers push for strike ballot

Train drivers employed by Irish Rail are pushing the National Bus and Rail Union and SIPTU to ballot for strike action in the autumn. If the ballots go ahead, 550 train drivers who operate intercity, commuter and the Dart (Dublin Bay train service) trains will be involved.

The drivers are angry at a pay cut that is due to last another year. Often they are driving sole operator trains, in which the driver has to cope with any issue that may arise on the train.

Drivers have also been saddled with extra responsibilities relating to safety issues and logging information data. The extra responsibilities taken on have led to big productivity gains, for which the drivers are getting no compensation.

Union protests Turkish bank layoffs

The union representing banking and finance workers, Pak Finans-Is, has filed a complaint against the layoff of workers by the Bank Asya. Asya is the sixth largest finance company in Turkey, with over 180 branches.

Since February, the bank has laid off nine regional managers, 13 branch managers, two directors and 264 bank workers. The Turkish Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) handed control of the bank

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over to the Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) in February, after concerns were raised over transparency issues of the ownership of the bank.

The union denounced this decision as politically motivated. The bank was founded in 1996 by sympathisers of the Gulen movement, an Islamic faith body at odds with the Turkish government.

Israeli Histadrut union body announces dispute over post job losses

On August 16 the Israeli trade union federation, Histadrut, gave 14 days' notice of a strike over plans by the Postal Company to sack 1,000 employees.

Israeli foreign ministry staff step up dispute

The union representing Israeli foreign ministry staff is to step up action in its dispute with management. It is presently taking action short of a strike to demand the living allowance is increased.

The union has said it will not process documents relating to the appointments of three new ambassadors recently selected by Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu to act as ambassadors to the United Nations, Italy and Brazil.

They will refuse to register the ambassadors' children for schools and handle their luggage and belongings relating to their relocation.

Histadrut declares dispute over rundown of Israeli Broadcasting Authority

The Histadrut trade union federation has declared a dispute over the treatment of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) service and staff. The IBA is in the process of liquidation, with the service due to be closed down in March 2016. The declaration of a dispute could lead to strikes at the end of the month.

Staff at the IBA are concerned at the way they are being treated by the government and in particular its withholding of funds, making it difficult for the service to continue operating and put on new productions.

Lebanese port staff strike over waste hazard

Port workers in Beirut came out on indefinite strike on August 13 protesting the dumping of rubbish in the streets adjacent to the port facility. The president of the port workers union told the press, "We will not accept our port becoming the capital's dumping ground. The health of all who enter the port is at risk—workers, visitors and customers."

The dumping of rubbish in the streets and open spaces in Beirut follows a dispute between Sukleen, the company contracted to clear household and commercial rubbish in Beirut, and the government. The current Sukleen contract ended July 17 and has not been renewed. Around 20 tonnes of rubbish has accumulated in the streets and extreme heat is causing it to become a health hazard.

South African water employees strike

Four thousand South African water workers went on strike at Rand Water on Wednesday across the Gauteng and Mpumalanga area for a pay increase of 10 percent, 9 percent and 8 percent for lowest, middle and supervisory staff respectively. They also want a 12 percent incentive bonus and R2150 ($170) housing allowance across the board. Rand Water, which serves 11 million households, has offered a 6 percent wage increase across the board. Management feel confident the strike will not impact on water supply owing to an emergency provision agreement.

South African local government staff settle dispute

South African local government have settled their dispute with a 7 percent wage increase for the first year, with following years based on the consumer price index plus 1 percent. The deal runs from July this year to June 2018. Although the South African Municipal Workers Union leadership agreed the deal, some branches rejected it. Coercion was necessary to avoid a strike.

South African bus drivers strike

Metro bus drivers in the South African city of Tshwane went on strike Monday to oppose shift changes. They are members of the South African Municipal Workers Union.

South African miners declare dispute

A dispute has been lodged with the Commission for Consolidation Mediation and Arbitration between the South Africa's Chamber of Mines and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU). The third miners union, Solidarity, mainly composed of skilled workers and supervisors, accepted a wage offer of up to 6 percent, but this had to be withdrawn on the basis that all the unions have to agree. Arbitration is compulsory before strike action can be taken, but the NUM and AMCU both demanded big increases to close the "apartheid wage gap".

Kenyan health staff strike continues

Kenyan medical staff in the county of Nikau are continuing their strike over delayed promotions and non-payment of allowances. The 150 members of the Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentist Union have been on strike since August 10. The county government's chief health officer issued a back to work order to be implemented Monday otherwise they would lose their jobs.

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Thousands of nurses in Nyeri and Nandi counties followed Nikaru county health workers out on strike action over non-payment of their July salary and demands for promotions, better working conditions and statuary deductions to be paid into the appropriate institutions. They are calling for the reversal of the health care devolution program, implemented in 2013, which they say has left hospitals ill-equipped.

Health staff in Uasin Gishu and Meru counties and other states and medical facilities are lining up to strike at the end of the month if their demands are not settled.

Strike by Nigerian health staff at Gombe teaching hospital

Members of the Joint Health Sector Union at the Gombe teaching hospital Nigeria have gone on indefinite strike over unpaid allowances. The union had established an agreement with management July 10 for them to be paid their allowances and implementation of promotions, but management reneged on the agreement. Allowances have not been paid for 13 months.

Strike threat by Zambian media staff

Workers at the Zambian National Broadcasting Company (ZNBC) are threatening to strike if a fellow worker is not reinstated. The victimized worker was suspended last week for vulgar language when he exclaimed “rubbish” to a comment made by a member of parliament. Although he was reinstated on Friday August 14, he was re-suspended over the weekend.

The media workers have demanded the dismissal of the entire management staff, accusing them of mismanagement of pensions.

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