

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 August 2015

London Underground strike called off

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), Unite and Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) representing rail workers on London's underground rail system (the Tube) called off two 24-hour strikes this week. The strikes, set to begin on Tuesday and Thursday evening, were originally called to protest plans by London Underground Limited (LUL) to introduce a 24-hour service beginning September 12.

The unions called off their action after the train drivers' union, ASLEF, had already abandoned the planned stoppage.

Following talks brokered by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the unions agreed to postpone the strike citing indications of "progress". On Thursday, London Underground announced it was suspending its plan to impose the 24-hour service.

The three unions have announced new dates for two strikes, September 8 and 10.

UK Great Western rail staff to strike

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, working for the First Great Western (FGW) train company, are due to begin a three-day strike on Saturday. They are protesting plans by the company to introduce new Hitachi driver-only trains and to get rid of buffet services.

FGW runs services from London to South Wales and to South West England. The proposed action will follow a recent 24-hour strike and a 48-hour strike in July.

Scottish museum staff begin seven-day strike

The 120 museum staff employed at the National Museum of Scotland and the National War Museum in Scotland began a seven-day strike on Monday.

They are members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union. The action is part of a long-running dispute over the creation of a two-tier workforce in January 2011. Staff employed prior to that date continue to receive enhanced rates for working weekends, whereas staff employed after that get nothing extra. According to the PCS, the payment of the enhanced rate adds between £2,000 and £3,000 a year to staff salaries.

The dispute has now lasted 18 months. Staff at the two museums took two days of strike action in April of this year. The National Museum of Scotland, based in Edinburgh, attracted 1.6 million visitors last year.

Greek gold miners protest threatened pit closure

Some 200 miners working for the Canadian firm Eldorado at a gold mine in the historic Halkidiki region of north Greece held a demonstration against its threatened closure on Monday. The mine employs 2,000 workers.

Police arrested two trade union leaders, alleging they were blocking the highway. The threatened closure was announced following a decision by the Syriza government to withdraw approval of technical study on a \$1 billion project to extend the mine, citing violation of contractual terms.

The firm has sent out letters to 200 workers suspending their contracts, while employees of contractors at the site have already lost their jobs.

Strike threat by Polish miners

Miners employed by coal producer Kompania Weglowa in the Silesia area are threatening to strike in October. They are represented by the Solidarity union.

Polish miners held a determined two-week strike at the beginning of the year over the government's plans to restructure the industry and open more of it up to privatization. Kompania Weglowa currently employs some 49,000 workers.

The strike was settled with the government temporarily abandoning its restructuring programme, fearing mass protests in an election year. However, under the agreement signed by the unions miners had to work a six-day week for only five days' pay and had existing bonuses cut.

The government had hoped to be able to find private investors to take over the state-run Kompania Weglowa-owned mines, giving September as the deadline. To date they have not been able to find any investor willing to take on the company's mines.

Portuguese airport baggage staff to strike

Airport baggage handling staff working for Groundforce in Portugal have announced their intention to strike on August 29 and 30.

The company provides baggage handling services to more than 150 airlines throughout Portugal—in Lisbon, Porto Funchal and Porto Santo. According to their union, the dispute centres on the use of temporary staff and long hours. They are also pushing for a pay increase.

Finnish protest against austerity

Workers and youth held a demonstration in Hakaniemi Square in the Finnish capital Helsinki last Saturday. It was called to protest against the programme of austerity being pursued by the Finnish government.

The cuts, which include big reductions in public services, are being pushed through by a right-wing coalition put together in May following the general election in April.

Egyptian teachers announce support for protest

On Sunday, several independent teachers unions announced they would be taking part in a protest planned for September 12. The protest is due to be held at the al-Fostat Gardens in Cairo against the new Civil Service Law that was enacted in March of this year.

The law limits bonuses paid out to workers and has led to their monthly incomes diminishing. Managers have been given more powers to determine pay rates and promotion prospects, leading to discrimination against militants.

Strike by public employees in Gaza

Workers in all public institutions in Gaza struck on Thursday. The strike included school teachers protesting against cuts imposed by the United Nations at its schools. The public employees union called on the Ministry of Finance to restore full salaries to staff, stop imposing pay cuts and provide transport for employees to get to their workplaces.

South African water workers settle pay dispute

The South African Rand Water Company has reached an agreement with the South African Municipal Workers Union and avoided a strike.

The union put in a claim for a 10 percent wage increase for the lowest paid workers, 9 percent for middle income workers and 8 percent for supervisors. It demanded a 12 percent incentive bonus and R2,150 (\$164) housing allowance across the board. Originally, the company offered a 6 percent wage increase but raised it to 7 percent, which the union has now accepted.

The strike was due to have begun on Thursday and would have had an impact on water distribution and sewage treatment to the 11 million inhabitants in Gauteng and parts of Mpumalanga.

Nigeria: Owerri pensioners and workers protest nonpayment of wages and pensions

Pensioners and workers demonstrated in Owerri, the capital of Imo state, Nigeria, demanding payment of more than 10 months outstanding pensions and wages. The Nigerian Labour Congress said workers were owed between four and 12 months wages, and that many pensioners were

dying due to nonpayment of their pensions and gratuities.

The Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE) admonished the state for sacking 300 public transport workers who had not been paid for 10 months. AUPCTRE said workers had been forced out of their houses, while their children now hawk goods to make ends meet.

A state representative said Imo was expecting a bailout fund coming from central government to pay workers and pensioners all outstanding arrears.

Nigerian university staff strike

Lecturers at the Federal University of Education, Kano, have gone on a one-week warning strike in opposition to the university reverting to college status.

The Academic Staffs University Union is protesting at the lack of consultation over the plan. Kano is among four universities facing status reversal. The others are Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri; Adeyemi University of Education, Ondo; and Federal University of Education, Zaria. The institutions were upgraded under the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan.

Ugandan University staff end strike

Striking Ugandan university staff called off their three-week-old strike after enforced discussions with Uganda's police chief, Gen. Edward Kale Kayihura, last Thursday.

Just over a week ago, the staff at Makerere University Business School, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, and Makerere, Busitema, Gulu and Kyambogo universities turned down an offer by the government to pay arrears.

The government proposed the payment of arrears be forwarded to the 2016-17 and 2017-18 budgets. A meeting scheduled to take place between the prime minister and the Public Universities Non-Teaching Staff Executive Forum (Puntsef) was ignored by the prime minister's office.

The higher education minister went on to instruct the university councils to direct non-teaching staff to return to work.

Negotiations broke down after this ultimatum and Puntsef resolved to continue the strike. The university staff representatives were summoned to police headquarters and told that students were getting uneasy at the delay in starting the semester, and they should get back to work.

Students threatened the government that if they did not resolve the issue they would join with non-teaching staff in their action. Unions say the strike has been suspended for one month.

Striking Zimbabwean broadcast staff sacked

The strike at state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), has escalated after all its employees were sacked.

Some of the staff are expected to be reinstated, but under new temporary contracts. ZBC is taking advantage of a law introduced a month ago allowing all employers, public or private, to sack its workers with three months' notice and without compensation.

The strike began after several employees complained about mismanagement of the pension fund and other issues. The state broadcaster has closed down its radio station, Voice of Zimbabwe, and shut down its second television channel in the process of sacking 400 employees last week.



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