

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 September 2015

## French sailors blockade port ahead of talks on job losses

On Monday, a protest by sailors left several thousand passengers stranded at sea or blocked from leaving the French port of Calais. The blockade lasted eight hours.

The sailors, from the bankrupt firm Scop SeaFrance, (formerly MyFerryLink), used lifeboats to block the busy northern port ahead of talks with company bosses over job losses.

The industrial action disrupted ferry services from P&O and DFDS for several hours, before the blockade was lifted.

One ship was stuck in port with 2,000 passengers aboard. Two others, carrying 3,200 passengers between them, were prevented from entering the harbour. A fourth vessel remained at the English port of Dover. Other ferry services were diverted to nearby French ports.

In a tweet, Calais Mayor Natacha Bouchart complained that the port had been taken “hostage.”

The delays were compounded due to extra traffic because of a long, public holiday weekend in the UK.

After the blockade ended, union official Eric Vercoutre said his organisation would hold talks with government officials.

## Maltese electronics workers hold second pay strike

Workers at ST Microelectronics held their second two-hour stoppage August 28 to press for a resolution of pay talks.

ST employs 1,600 workers and is Malta’s biggest exporter.

## Ukrainian coal miners strike

Starting from August 26, the coal miners of Selidivvugillia have been on strike, according to the web site of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine.

It reported, “The miners and their families took to the streets of Selidiv town and blocked the roads, requesting their salaries’ payment”, adding the “Independent Trade Union of Coal Miners of Ukraine (NPGU) supported the protests”.

The miners also demand the improvement of working conditions, an increase in tariff rates, and better health care.

According to Mikhailo Volynets, the head of the NPGU, some of the workers at the mines of the enterprise have not received their wages for the last three to five months.

## Pay strike disrupts UK vehicle licensing agency

Almost 700 staff at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) contact centre in Swansea, Wales began three days of industrial action from August 29 in a dispute over Saturday working pay.

The strike involved over 95 percent of staff and hit DVLA services, with massive backlogs for users of the service.

The DVLA attempted to keep open the financially lucrative commercial service by using managers and non-members.

Further strikes have been mooted throughout September and October.

## Five hundred UK energy workers walk out over pay cut

Around 500 EDF Energy staff in London, southern and western England struck in a 24-hour work stoppage Wednesday, following a breakdown in talks.

Workers voted by a margin of 85 percent for a strike and 92 percent voted in favour of industrial action short of a strike.

The workers involved include meter readers and fixers, office staff and managers.

The dispute is over proposed pay cuts, job losses and extended working hours. Under the plans, some staff could lose up to £6,000 a year in pay.

The move follows the suspension of two 24-hour stoppages earlier in August by the Unite trade union.

## UK: Cardiff bus drivers strike after rejecting pay offer

The first in a series of planned strikes by bus drivers in Cardiff took place September 2, after they rejected a 5 percent pay offer.

Some members of the Unison trade union have accepted a 3 percent pay offer, backdated to April, and followed by a 2 percent increase in 2016. But the deal has been rejected by members of the Unite union, who comprise 70 percent of the workforce. They voted 83 percent in favour of industrial action in a recent ballot.

Cardiff Bus—which normally carries 100,000 passengers a day on 3,000 journeys—ran a limited service. Ten strike days have been planned, coinciding with forthcoming rugby international and World Cup matches. Some 250 workers joined a march and rally Wednesday in Cardiff city centre.

## **Airport handlers set to strike at Spanish airport**

Handlers at Madrid airport have called four stoppages for September 4, 11, 18 and 25.

The three unions involved blamed the strike on handling firm Menzies Aviation Iberica's decision to postpone a collective bargaining agreement after long-running negotiations.

The Workers' Commission Union, one of the three unions involved, said Easyjet and Vueling would be the airlines most affected. The proposed strikes are expected to disrupt holidays for hundreds of thousands of travellers during a particularly busy holiday period.

Strikes were also called at Barcelona, Alicante, Malaga and Majorca's Palma airport.

## **Dublin firefighters vote to strike**

Dublin Fire Brigade staff voted in favour of industrial action over staff levels, which they insist are hampering their ability to deliver adequate service.

A ballot of SIPTU union members was held after the chief executive of Dublin City Council reneged on an agreement reached in May to recruit new firefighters. In the ballot, 96 percent of workers voted for industrial action, and 87 percent voted to strike.

## **UK rail union suspends London Underground strikes again**

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has suspended London Underground strikes planned for September 8 and 10. The workers are in dispute over pay and working conditions, ahead of a planned all-night Tube service.

The RMT called off the strikes after the main tube drivers' trade union, Aslef, did the same just days earlier.

Plans had been in place to introduce the 24-hour service this month. However, London Underground "deferred" the launch in order to allow talks with the trade unions.

An RMT representative said further strikes could be planned if negotiations with London Underground were not resolved. The spokesman told the BBC, "all industrial action called to not co-operate with night Tube at local level, including modelling and trains, remains in place."

The business site *cityam.com* said, "Tube workers have slammed their own union for poor communication over the Night Tube strikes," asserting that workers discovered the RMT had suspended the strikes "via rumour and the BBC."

Two strikes were announced for August 25 and 27 but were also called off at the last minute and rescheduled for September 8 and 10.

## **Israeli border control officials in wildcat strike**

Border control officials at Israel's main international airport called a two-hour wildcat strike August 30.

This took place "hours after a court ruled that airport workers would

have to shorten a sit-down planned to protest against mass layoffs to employees working for Israel's state broadcaster," according to the *Times of Israel*.

The strike took place on one of the busiest travelling days of the year, as around 70,000 passengers were expected to pass through Ben Gurion airport.

Several flights were delayed.

An hour before the strike, a labour court ruled that a two-hour strike by airport workers would have to be cut to half an hour for ground and logistics staff. It ruled that office and management staff could proceed with the two-hour strike.

## **Israel Broadcaster Authority protest layoff plans**

On August 30, around 150 Israel Broadcaster Authority (IBA) workers and their families, gathered outside the Knesset, to oppose an amendment to the law governing public broadcasting, which includes massive layoffs to the IBA.

IBA workers also held a weekend sit-in at the organization's headquarters in Jerusalem to protest the proposed cutbacks.

Port workers in Ashdod and Haifa were also set to hold a solidarity strike on the same morning, along with workers at the Allenby Bridge Border Crossing, Israel Radio reported.

## **Workers at Oman Mining Company return to work**

According to the *Muscat Daily* on August 27, 150 striking workers of the Oman Mining Company returned to work after a meeting on Sunday.

The workers returned after a deal was reached with the Ministry of Manpower regarding an increase in the payment of annual increment and maintaining health and safety standards in the company.

The company was paying 5 to 10 percent of the basic salary as an annual increment since 2011. The dispute began in January this year when the company reduced it to just 3 percent.

## **Kenyan nurses in Nyeri State strike**

Kenyan nurses in Nyeri State are continuing their two-week-old strike after talks with the health authorities collapsed.

The strike of the 2,000 medical staff is over pay rises, promotions, delayed salaries and a shortage of health workers. The Health Executive threatened the nurses with the sack if they do not obey a court order to go back to work.

A representative for the nurses union said, "We are signatories to the Abuja declaration that demanded the health sector gets a minimum of 15 percent of the national budget. Currently we are getting 2.8 percent of this budget".

## **Kenyan teachers strike to demand pay increase**

Teachers are on strike in several Kenyan states demanding the implementation of a 60 to 60 percent pay rise. The increase has already been awarded by the government but not implemented.

The two teachers unions, the Kenyan National Union of Teachers and Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers took the issue to the Supreme Court. The government was ordered to pay up, which they still refuse to do.

The Kenyan Trade Union Congress instructed teachers to stay at home if the increase is not paid into their bank accounts. The government announced that it is taking the court ruling to appeal later this month, while the governments' Teachers Service Commission followed up by ordering the teachers back to work.

### **Street cleaners in Taraba state, Nigeria demand payment of wages**

Nigerian casual street cleaners, working for the Taraba state Ministry for Urban Planning, carried out a protest in Jalingo on September 3 over the non-payment of wages for nine month.

A spokesman for over 370 workers involved in the demonstration said the workers started work as "early as 4 a.m. daily to sweep the streets but the government has refused to do its part".

The government said the cleaners have been employed for four months and admits owing them N16 million (US\$80,301). The permanent secretary in the Ministry for Urban Planning declared that the lack of running cost in the ministry was responsible for non-payment of salary to the casual staff.

### **Council workers in Zimbabwe demand two years of unpaid wages**

A hundred employees working for the Chitungwiza council, Zimbabwe, demonstrated outside the council meeting last week, demanding 24 months of unpaid wages.

The demonstrators were also incensed at the town clerk sacking them, using the new law of removing workers without compensation, under conditions of an enormous \$2.1 million backlog of wages.

The council members locked themselves in their chambers and called the police. A riot squad armed with teargas and batons reinforced the police.

The town clerk offered a three-month redundancy notice, saying the council could not afford to pay the outstanding wages. In response, a Zimbabwe National Army escort was brought in to enable the council clerk to leave the building.



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