

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 November 2015

Europe

London's Docklands Light Railway closed

A 48-hour strike by staff on the Dockland Light Railway (DLR) system that serves London's financial district went ahead on Tuesday and led to the complete closure of the system. Although the DLR runs on an automatic system and its trains are driverless, each train has a captain on board and trains are not allowed to run without them.

The captains, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), voted by over 90 percent for the strike. It was the first closure of the DLR in its 28-year history. The dispute follows the transfer of the DLR franchise from Serco to KeolisAmey. Staff accuse the new owners of trying to worsen working conditions.

Welsh train drivers to walk out

Train drivers working for Arriva Trains Wales are due to hold a 48-hour strike next week beginning at midnight on Thursday. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF).

The dispute is in pursuit of a pay rise and improved working conditions for the current year. Strikes planned for last month were called off after "progress" in negotiations.

Two-day action by Greek ferry staff extended

Ferry workers organised by the Panhellenic Seamen's Organization who began a 48-hour strike on Monday subsequently extended the strike for a further two days, until Thursday 6 a.m.

It is in response to the punitive austerity cuts being pushed through by the Syriza-Independent Greeks coalition government in line with European Union bailout terms.

Under the proposals, ferry staff will see their employment rights and social security entitlements demolished. The strike has meant ferry boats remaining in harbour with services to the many Greek islands being seriously affected.

Further action planned by Irish train drivers

A further three-hour strike by train drivers working for the Irish rail company Iarnrod Eireann was due to take place today between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. local time. They are represented by the National Bus and Rail Union and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union.

The planned action follows a similar three-hour strike on October 23 that reportedly affected 40,000 passengers. This was to back a demand for a pay rise to compensate for past productivity gains imposed on rail staff.

Rail staff were angered by a letter sent to all rail staff individually by the rail company chief David Franks in which he said their demands were unaffordable. Further productivity increases are on the cards as the letter from Franks explained drivers would be eligible for a voluntary severance package.

On Wednesday, the government intervened to try to resolve the dispute with unions being invited to talks at the Workplace Relations Commission. Observers were not optimistic a solution could be found and that it was likely the strike would go ahead.

Italian museum and heritage staff protest

Staff employed in the heritage sector are threatening a national strike over the Italian Chamber of Deputies decision of October 22 to reclassify museums and archaeological sites as essential public services in line with schools and hospitals. This would have the effect of limiting their right to strike, meaning they would have to give 10 days' advance notice of action and be subjected to limits on the frequency of strikes.

Heritage staff have carried out a number of strikes this year over delays in paying due overtime. They also have concerns over job insecurity and staff shortages.

The issue came to a head September 18 when a strike closed the Colosseum, Italy's most visited site with 6 million tourists a year; other Rome archaeological sites were also closed. It prompted Italy's Council of Ministers to draft a decree that day to limit strikes. This was then passed by the Chamber of Deputies on October 22.

Swiss industries impose longer working hours

Around 70 Swiss companies in the machinery, electrical and metal industries have increased the hours worked by their employees up to the legal maximum of 45 hours without increased compensation. The average workweek is around 40 hours. The companies have done this in response

to the Swiss National Bank's decision in January to abandon the cap on the Swiss Franc of euro 1.20.

The measure especially affected exporting companies. While Swiss workers are opposed to the compulsory working hours increase, the highly corporate trade unions are pledged to police any unrest.

Strike at Turkey's largest copper mine

A strike by more than 300 miners at Turkey's largest copper mine in the Cayeli district on the shores of the Black Sea in northeastern Turkey that began last Friday has continued into this week. The mine, which is expected to produce around 25,000 tonnes of copper and zinc as well as 4,000 ounces of gold this year, is owned by Canadian-based First Quantum.

The strike, which has brought production to a complete standstill, is over the terms of a new three-year contract. The miners organised in the Mine Workers' Union are seeking a pay rise as part of the new contract. So far, the company has refused to consider a pay rise as part of the new contract.

Middle East

Egyptian textile workers return to work

Textile workers employed by the Holding Company for Spinning and Weaving in Mahalla in Gharbeya returned to work last Sunday after an 11-day strike. They came out on strike after the company failed to pay them an agreed 10 percent bonus.

They returned to work following a written agreement by the Egyptian investment minister guaranteeing they would receive the bonus back dated to July. The workers at the state-owned company have a long history of militant struggles. In 2008, the company employed 24,000; today that figure is 17,000. Staff fear the workforce is being slimmed down prior to privatization of the company.

Strike threat by Israeli foreign ministry staff

Foreign ministry staff have threatened to strike over the ministry's failure to implement a salary and compensation agreement agreed to 18 months ago. The union representing the ministry employees warned ministers it has the power to close down the ministry's activities in Israel as well as at its embassies and consulates worldwide. The union's chairman told press that the staff have had enough.

Lebanese workers in protests

Over the weekend, hospital staff at the Emile Bitar Hospital in Batroun held protests against the termination of funding by the National Social Security Fund.

On Tuesday, public schools in several regions were closed because of teachers striking to demand a new salary scale. The umbrella Union

Coordination Committee on Tuesday threatened to carry out acts of civil disobedience if the Lebanese parliament failed to vote through a pay increase for public sector workers in the upcoming parliamentary sessions.

Africa

South African miners threatened with dismissal

Striking South African miners at ASA Metals' Dilokong Chrome Mine near Burgersfort in Limpopo are being threatened with dismissal. Management at the mine are demanding that the 500 miners who carried out a sit-in inside the mine plead guilty at disciplinary hearings.

The National Union of Miners (NUM) called out its members demanding the removal of the Human Resources Manager and the dropping of charges against local NUM officials. The union accused the management of setting up traps to fire workers involved in the sit-in, saying its members would not return to work unless the guilty plea demand is lifted.

South African farm workers walk out

Farm workers at the Umbhaba Banana Estate farms in Komatipoort, Mpumalanga came out on strike October 29. Initially, the 863 workers, members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), walked off the farm and were then followed by the remaining 1,400 staff. They are demanding union recognition and bargaining rights. The union is calling for a boycott of the farm produce.

Nigerian judiciary staff in Anambra state continue strike

Judiciary staff in the Nigerian state of Anambra are continuing their two-month long strike. The staff members of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) are on strike over anomalies in their pay structure.

Pay increases for public sector workers is based on a rule based on Internally Generated Revenue. However, in the last pay round teachers and nurses were considered special cases and received a 20 percent increase. Judiciary staff are seeking a similar settlement.

Namibian fishermen in dispute

Seagoing workers in the fishing industry of Lüderitz, Namibia went on strike demanding better working conditions on October 29. This is just prior to the opening of the fishing season and the end of a month-long closedown of the fish processing factories on November 1.

Around 1,300 fishermen working for different companies stayed away from work at the Walvis Bay and Lüderitz fishing ports. Their union, the Metal, Mining, Maritime and Construction union (MMMC), claim the rates of pay and working conditions imposed by the companies are illegal. The union is organising a march to the capital Windhoek to present their demands to the president.

Zambian university staff strike

Staff at Zambia's second largest academic institution, Kitwe University, have continued their strike that began in June with the new academic year. They are calling on the government to respond to a "caretaker committee" report that criticised university management.

The University Academic Union is demanding the removal of the vice chancellor and all management staff and for salaries to be paid on time. The union accuses the university of failing to pay salaries for the last 16 months and of not providing lecturers with basic teaching materials.

The continued closure of the university has caused anger among students. Students held a protest at the university and called for a vote of no confidence in the country's president. The protest was attacked by police.



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