

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

13 November 2015

Germany: Cabin crew at Lufthansa strike

Cabin crew employed at the national German airline Lufthansa have gone on strike in a dispute over changes to the pension scheme being imposed by the company in its bid to restructure and compete with European budget airlines such as Ryanair and EasyJet.

The dispute has now been going on for two years. Corporate head Carsten Spohr wants to cut Lufthansa ground and air personnel. The company is also increasingly coming into conflict with pilots.

Lufthansa was forced to cancel 930 flights scheduled for Wednesday at its three main German hubs. It is estimated this affected up to 100,000 passengers. The company cancelled the flights even though a labour court ruled Tuesday in the airline's favour regarding the legality of a strike in Dusseldorf, and another court was preparing to issue a decision on whether walkouts in Munich and Frankfurt could go ahead.

Lufthansa has cancelled 1,900 flights since the strikes began on November 6.

The airline is aiming to develop its Eurowings division as a low-cost subsidiary. Lufthansa's latest offer to the Independent Flight Attendants Organisation (UFO) union included a one-time payment of €3,000 (US\$3,220) per employee and acceptance of the union's demands on early retirements, but only for current workers. This was rejected.

Walkouts by pilots ended when a German court ruled in September that the stoppages by the Vereinigung Cockpit union were illegal.

Local authority workers at Irish Water ballot for industrial action

Local authority workers, employed by Irish Water, are being balloted for industrial action in a dispute over proposed cuts to staffing levels that could result in up to 1,500 job losses.

The job cuts are believed to be in preparation for an expansion in the number of private contractors working for the company in a process of gradual privatisation of the nominally public utility.

The ballot is to close November 20.

UK: Lecturers and college staff strike over pay freeze

Around 150 staff, mostly lecturers, at South Tyneside College launched a strike Tuesday in response to an annual pay freeze.

According to the *Shields Gazette*, "The row was sparked after bosses at the college implemented the wage freeze—which covers a 12-month period from August of this year—on the back of a recommendation for a

nationwide freeze for staff at further education colleges across the country."

The University and College Union (UCU) said staff are angry that pay levels are standing still while the general cost of living continues to rise.

The UCU had called for its members to be given a pay rise of £1 an hour.

A South Tyneside College spokesperson said, "The UCU's industrial action locally is based on the union's national dispute with the Association of Colleges. It is the Association of Colleges that has recommended a pay freeze and South Tyneside College, like many colleges across the country, is following that recommendation.

"We have consulted closely with the UCU locally over the issue of funding challenges and this pay freeze was part of an agreement established this summer of which the UCU was in accordance.

"The union in South Tyneside was aware of the 0 percent offer from detailed discussions we held with it during the summer and which formed part of an overall package of terms that it agreed to. The UCU is also fully aware of the financial restrictions we are operating under."

College staff have endured a real-terms pay cut of 17.1 percent in the last five years. About 74 percent of UCU members who voted backed industrial action.

Rail workers at Arriva Trains Wales strike

Rail workers at Arriva Trains Wales are to conclude a 48-hour strike at midnight today after talks failed to reach an agreement on a pay and conditions deal.

Union officials at the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) and Aslef unions accused the company of being unwilling to table an adequate agreement.

The rail operator said negotiations are continuing.

The RMT said talks aimed at ending the dispute had "broken down without agreement."

Dockworkers strikes at Spanish and Portuguese ports

According to Inchcape Shipping Services, an indefinite towage strike by dockworkers was launched November 6 at the Port of Barcelona.

The action has been announced by the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT) union and will be followed by Tug Barcelona SAR.

According to *World Maritime News*, "The strike will comprise three shifts of three hour stoppages, creating in total nine hours of stoppages per day, varying in rotation over a five day cycle, then repeating from the start

for an indefinite period.

“Tug Barcelona SAR has advised that it will provide two crewed tugs at all times to ensure the entry and exit of all authorised vessels. A tugboat will also be available for emergencies.”

Also, according to *World Maritime News*, the “neighbouring Portuguese ports of Lisbon, Setubal and Figueira da Foz are facing a 10-day strike organised by dockworkers as of November 14.”

The dockworkers’ dispute stems from the end of collective bargaining agreements and the sale of the ports to the Turkish company Yildirim.

Workers at Icelandic aluminium smelter vote to strike

The vast majority of workers at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminium smelter in Straumsvík, Iceland, have voted in favour of going on strike over issues related to privatisation and the introduction of contract labour.

If the strike scheduled to begin December 2 goes ahead, it is expected to involve up to 400 workers and shut down all smelting operations.

Six unions are currently in negotiations with the smelter’s management, but most smelter workers are in the unions Verkalýðsfélagið Hlíf and the Icelandic Union of Marine Engineers and Metal Technicians (VM).

“There have been a great deal of scare tactics coming from management in what they’ve offered,” Gylfi Ingvarsson, one of the main negotiators for the unions, told reporters. “They’ve contended that there’s some kind of misunderstanding going on regarding their offer, and that we haven’t been informing our workers on what the situation actually is. This has gone so far that I seriously doubt that they’re legally allowed to employ these scare tactics at the same time there are meetings with workers and voting going on over a matter as important as a strike.”

Rio Tinto Alcan is one of the biggest industrial companies in Iceland. According to the company’s own website, it supplies around 23 percent of all the goods exported from Iceland.

Striking Namibian fishermen threatened with job losses

A two-week-old strike by Namibian fisherman is continuing over rights and working conditions. The Confederation of Namibian Fishing Associations (CNFA), the employers’ organisation, is refusing to negotiate with the employees’ selected union.

Seafarers’ unions, the Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union, the Namibia Fishing Industries and Fishermen Workers Union, and the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union have been negotiating for the 14,000 labour force since last June, with no results. The fishermen have turned to the Metal Mining, Maritime and Construction (MMM) union to take on its case, which accuses the employers of illegal working conditions (in some cases the cause of death), and non-payment of overtime and other outstanding issues.

The employer’s representatives are refusing to negotiate with the preferred union, claiming it is not registered with them. A spokesman for the CNFA said, “If some workers lose their jobs because of their illegal action it would be very unfortunate.”

South African parliament workers strike

Members of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union went on strike Friday in the National Assembly, South Africa’s parliament. An 11 a.m. sitting had to be postponed until 2 p.m. as Committee secretaries, researchers, language translators and content advisers walked out. Strikers went on to block the entrance to parliament while protesting outsourcing of their work, the conditions of service, security vetting and performance bonuses.

It is the first time in South Africa’s history that a labour dispute has stopped a scheduled sitting in the National Assembly. A parliamentary representative disputes the union’s claim that the issues behind the strike were part of a settlement with parliament in March. South African police attacked the 200 strikers with stun grenades and tear gas. The union’s branch chairman said the protest would continue until their demands are met.

Protesting Sudan port workers teargassed

Port workers in Sudan were arrested while protesting outside their union congress.

The 40 cargo dock workers were attacked with batons and teargas, and were then incarcerated for a period of three hours, until the union congress came to an end.

They are demanding the removal of the leadership of the Cargo and Dockworkers Association. The union chairman has been in office for 40 years, and, other than his removal, workers wanted a review of the union’s budget and improvement of its services.

Sudan medics strike for bonuses

Medics in Central Darfur, Sudan went on strike November 8 demanding payment of their bonuses outstanding for four months. Doctors employed in Zalingei, Garsila, and Nierteti in Central Darfur are owed SDG350,000 (US\$57,330). The doctors have the support of their patient’s relatives, insofar as they are calling on the health ministry in the state to improve health services, hire more medical staff and provide more affordable medicines.



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