

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 June 2016

Lecturers take action at two UK universities

Lecturers at the University of Kent in England held a one-day strike Tuesday, disrupting the process of awarding marks for exam papers taken by students about to graduate. On Wednesday, lecturers held a similar strike at the University of Sussex, also disrupting exam marking award sessions.

The lecturers are members of the University and College Union (UCU), and are protesting a pay offer of 1.1 percent. Lecturers are seeking a substantial rise. According to the UCU, university lecturers have suffered around a 15 percent pay cut in real terms since 2009.

Further strikes by Greek train and airline staff planned

Rail staff working for the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) are due to strike for 24 hours on June 22.

The strike follows an ongoing series of shorter stoppages in opposition to plans to privatize Trainose, the operating arm of OSE. If it goes ahead, the action will result in the cancellation of rail services connecting to Athens International Airport. June 22 is the date by which bids from companies wishing to run Trainose must be in.

Civil airline staff, members of the OSYPA union are due to begin a five-day strike on June 20. They are protesting against the pseudo-left Syriza government leasing 14 regional airports to the German operator Fraport, with plans to lease a further 23 regional airports.

The Syriza government, at the behest of the European Union and International Monetary Fund, is carrying out the privatisations.

UK train guards in dispute

Train conductors employed by the Abellio/ScotRail franchise are set to hold a series of strikes beginning with a one-day strike on June 21 followed by a one-day strike June 23, a two-day strike on June 25 and further one-day strikes on July 3, 10 and 17.

They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union RMT and voted in a 75 percent turnout to strike. The workers are opposing plans by the rail company to start operating Driver Only Operation (DOO) trains, abolishing the position of conductors.

The union accused the private company of bypassing normal negotiations over the issue but is prepared to negotiate with them prior

to the strike.

Train guards working for Southern railways in the south east of England are striking over the same issue. They plan a one-day strike on June 21 and have taken part in similar actions in recent weeks. Govia, the company running Southern railways, intends to impose the new working conditions on August 21.

Portuguese airport handling staff announce three-day walkout

Ground handling staff at civil airports in Portugal are to strike for three days on July 1. They are members of the SITAVA trade union. The strike will disrupt the operations of airport handling companies Groundforce and Portway. It also involves staff working for temping agencies supplying staff for airport handling services.

The strike is over the increasingly precarious nature of employment for airport ground handling staff.

Spanish tram drivers on Costa Blanca to strike

Tram drivers working on the tram route that serves the Costa Blanca coastline in Alicante province are to launch a series of indefinite strikes, which will hit night services. The strikes, scheduled to begin on June 20, are to protest the decision of FGV, who operate the service, not to allow up to 30 tram drivers to reduce their working hours. Previously it had done so.

Swedish airline pilots union ends action

Swedish pilots working for the Scandinavian airline SAS have ended their strike after five days. The action began last Friday and resulted in the cancellation of hundreds of flights, affecting around 100,000 passengers.

The pilots were seeking a 3.5 percent pay rise but went back to work following a deal agreed by the SPF union under which they will receive just 2.2 percent.

Norwegian oil and gas workers ready to walk out

Members of the Safe union along with those of two other unions representing Norwegian oil and gas workers are set to strike in a pay dispute. A final round of negotiation between the oil companies and unions and brokered by the state mediator are due June 30 and July 1.

If talks fail a strike could begin July 2. The companies insist that the steep fall in oil prices means they must cut costs and increase flexibility.

Israeli staff in diplomatic offices strike

Israeli civil service and non-diplomatic staff based in Israeli missions in London, Paris and New York held a three-hour strike Wednesday.

The staff provide financial, IT and public relations services at the missions. They are seeking parity of working conditions in line with diplomatic staff. Diplomats get 23 days leave a year compared to non-diplomatic staff that receives 15. The strikers also demand expenses for moving, flights, etc., in line with diplomatic staff.

South African fire fighters strike in Canada

Around 300 South African fire service staff, sent to help fight fires in the Fort McMurray area of Alberta, Canada, took industrial action June 8 shortly after arriving.

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They were sent there as the result of a deal struck between the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) and Kinshu Holdings (KH), a private company. KH a private company has a contract to train South African fire fighters.

The workers walked off the job after discovering they were receiving well below the Canadian minimum wage. The CIFFC contract was paying KH C\$170 a day for each man while the South African fire fighters got C\$4 an hour for working 12-hour days. The Canadian minimum pay rate is C\$11.20 an hour and to get around that, the firm classified the pay for the South African fire fighters as a stipend.

Canadian fire fighters are paid between C\$20 and C\$30 an hour. Although KH claimed they had high operational costs, CIFFC paid the living expenses for the South African fire fighters. KH sent the strikers back to South Africa against their wishes before a resolution of the dispute.

Nigerian state workers protest

Public-sector workers in several of Nigeria's 36 states are striking to demand the payment of outstanding wages and allowances.

In Ondo state, civil servants confronted the state governor, stopping his car at his residency, where he was forced to address workers. He claimed the state did not have the means to pay workers their wage arrears. The governor's plea for them to return to work was met with chants of "No salary, No work".

The Ekiti state governor's response to five months of unpaid wages was no different. Workers have been on strike for two weeks, insisting they would continue indefinitely until they were paid.

The central reason of the strike in this case was the privatization of schools, but Oyo state employees also have a backlog of unpaid wages. The governor threatened to implement a "no work no pay" rule on the striking teachers.

Nigerian petrol and gas workers close down operations

The National Union of Petroleum and National Gas Workers (NUPENG) are calling on garages to close down their operations in Nigeria's Bayelsa and Rivers states.

The garage owners are being called on to bring pressure, alongside other enterprises and trade unions, on four companies. The unions are demanding that the companies recognize NUPENG's bargaining rights among their staff.

Liberian rubber plantation workers fight job losses

Liberian rubber plantation workers have gone on strike over job losses, redundancy payments and pay arrears.

The rubber tappers at Nimba Rubber Incorporated were told by management they would be paid US\$5.50 a day if they achieved the quotas set for them. After government intervention, the 450 laid off staff received redundancy payments.



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