

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 June 2016

Europe

Strike by UK rail staff over safety

Members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) held 24-hour strikes against Southern rail company serving the southeast of England and against ScotRail, which operates Scotland-wide.

There have been stoppages on Southern previously during the ScotRail strike, which was the result of a breakdown in talks between management and the union under the auspices of the government mediation body, ACAS.

The strikes are the result of the rail companies' plans to introduce driver-only-operated (DOO) trains. This means getting rid of the guarding duty currently carried out by conductors who, as well as collecting fares and checking tickets, have responsibility for making sure the doors are closed and the train is safe prior to departure. Rail guards fear the diluting of their role is just a precursor to eliminating their role altogether.

Bus workers in UK towns fight for increased pay

Over 100 bus driver members of the Unite union employed by First Bus Company, First Hampshire and Dorset Ltd, in the southwest of England began a five-day strike Monday. The company serves the Weymouth and Bridport areas. They are seeking pay parity with drivers in nearby Yeovil, who also work for a First Bus company. The Weymouth and Bridport employees are paid £8.80 an hour while their colleagues in Yeovil earn £9.50 an hour. Drivers working for rival companies in nearby Bournemouth and Poole earn nearly £2 an hour more than the Weymouth and Bridport staff.

Meanwhile, bus workers in Leeds, employed by First Bus Leeds, held a second 24-hour strike Monday in their campaign for a modest pay rise of £0.36p an hour. Striking drivers at the Bramley and Hunslet Park depots mounted picket lines and as a result, only a few buses driven by scabs and managers were on the roads of Leeds.

The determined strikers face a management that has banned overtime to prevent drivers making up for lost wages due to the strike. It has also suspended 22 of the striking drivers on full pay, alleging they put defamatory remarks on a Facebook site about strikebreakers. Plans for further strikes have been put on hold by their union Unite.

Greek rail staff strike in opposition to sell-off

Greek national rail workers along with those on the Proastiakos suburban system walked off the job Tuesday for three hours between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. and again between 9 p.m. and midnight. Services to Athens airport were affected, leading to passengers having to take buses.

The walkouts were in opposition to plans by the Syriza-led government to sell off the rail company. A planned strike for Wednesday was called off after it was announced that plans to sell off the railways was temporarily being put on hold.

French airline strike called off

A strike by airline pilots working for Air France/KLM has been called off after the new CEO at the airline agreed to postpone the implementation of new contracts for a four-month period to allow for further negotiations. The four-day strike was due to begin on Thursday. Pilots fear the new contracts will mean around a five percent cut in their pay. A previous strike from June 11 to June 14 caused disruption to flights.

Walkout at Turkish food manufacturer's plant

Nearly 1,000 employees at the Karacabey factory in the northwestern province of Bursa came out on strike Tuesday. The strike at the factory, which produces coffee, chocolate and bottled water, was over a claim for increased pay and benefits. The factory is part of the huge multinational Nestle Company.

The workers who belong to the Tek Gıda-İs union held a demonstration outside the factory gates. The strike was called after months of negotiations produced no resolution.

Dispute by Norwegian offshore oil workers sold out

Following talks between oil and gas company representatives and the Norwegian Union of Industry and Energy concluded last week, there will be no strike by offshore oil workers over pay. The strike had been scheduled to begin July 2.

The Norwegian oil industry had said that because of the current low price of oil, it was seeking to lower costs and increase flexibility. According to press reports, the unions have agreed to extra flexibility and that there will be no pay rise. The oil industry conceded minor increases in

minimum pay and allowances.
Middle East

Strike by Egyptian food workers

Around 1,500 employees at the snacks company Egypt Foods went on strike on Sunday in support of 21 workers who had been suspended by the company. The 21 were suspended for holding a demonstration outside the factory on June 15 to demand a pay rise, an annual bonus and for some managers to be dismissed.

The company was founded in 2000. The company and factory are based in an industrial unit in the Quisna district of Menufiya.

Africa

Zimbabwean rail workers dismissed

Zimbabwean railway workers on strike for more than eight weeks have been sent back to work under a court order.

The court ruling stated the employees should not be paid for the time they were on strike. Many workers have been dismissed in the course of the dispute and there is no indication they will get their jobs back. They include the General Secretary of the Railway Association of Engineers (RAE) and two out of every three union executives.

The strike, which began on March 29, was to protest nonpayment of wages for the last 15 months. Overall, they are owed over \$80 million in unpaid wages.

Hospital workers in Durban fight for permanent employment

Workers in South Africa's Durban hospitals have gone on strike to be given permanent contracts. Security staff and cleaners are out on strike at many of Durban's hospitals with others expected to join them.

The union representing the casuals, the South African Public Services Union, say the strikers have a case in the amended Labour Relations Act and are in discussion with the Department of Health over workers employment rights.

Nigerian union strikes for bargaining rights

The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) are continuing their strike. NUPENG has brought its members out along with other unions and associations to pressure four companies.

The companies are resisting the union bargaining rights at their plants. The state governments of Rivers and Bayelsa have called on the union to end the strike as discussions are continuing with the four. The stoppages are causing severe shortages of petroleum products in the two states.

Public employees take action across Nigeria

The impact of strikes across Nigerian states continues to be felt as more public workers protest unpaid wages. Administrators in the Irepodun area of Kwara state have stayed away from work for three weeks.

The strike has paralysed the administration service in the local area, and brings them in line with 15 other councils on strike across the state over unpaid wages. The National Union of Local Government Employees said the strike would continue until their demands are met.

Nigerian doctors employment terminated after dispute

Nigerian resident doctors, who began a national strike Monday, have been informed by the Ministry of Health that their jobs have been terminated. The doctors, who work in public hospitals, came out on strike to protest not being paid for ten months as well as other grievances.

The federal government is holding junior doctors responsible for their own termination, accusing them of breaking their contracts and instructed the Medical Directors to replace them.

The National Association of Resident Doctors has responded by calling off the strike.

Miners victimised in Namibia

Ross Pinhar miners in Namibia are threatened with disciplinary action as a result of events that took place when they were on strike in February. Several miners are being hauled in front of disciplinary hearings, accused of harming a superintendent in the dispute.

The Namibian Union of Miners has complained this breaches an agreement with the company that no action would be taken against strikers.

Workers driven off farm by Kenyan politician

Some 314 workers with their families were driven from their place of work and forced to seek shelter in a school. The workers were employed at the Migotiyo Plantation in Baringo County, Kenya.

The lockout has been carried out against Kenyan law and instituted by Baringo county senator Gideon Moi, the farm's owner, who is the son of the second president of the country, Arap Moi. In 2007, the British *Guardian* reported Moi to be worth over \$500 million. He owns stakes in many companies and cooperatives and has allegedly looted from the state.

The Kenya Plantation and Agricultural workers Union, which has 400,000 members, has given food aid to the families stranded in the school on Moi's plantation and asked the government to intervene.

Ghana cement workers strike for pay increase

700 workers employed at the Dangote Cement Company, Ghana, have come out on strike and held demonstrations in pursuit of a pay increase and improved working conditions. They have not had a pay increase since 2010 from the company, which is owned by the richest man in Africa.

They initially went on hunger strike for a week to get the company to speak to them, but they were ignored.



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