

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 July 2016

## One-day strike of Greek rail workers

Rail staff working for the Greek state railway operator Trainose held a one-day strike on Tuesday against the privatization of the rail service. The Italian Trenitalia rail company has made a bid to run Trainose. The strike hit national and suburban services and also hit the shuttle service between the city of Athens and the airport.

Strikers demonstrated their opposition to the privatization outside the offices of the Ministry of Transport. They are also pushing for the signing of a collective labour contract.

The rail workers, organized by the Panhellenic Federation of Rail Workers (POS) also held a one-day strike last week over the same issue.

## Greek phosphate workers protest layoffs

Employees working for a phosphate fertilizer company near Kavala in northern Greece held a demonstration in central Athens on Tuesday. They were protesting the mass layoffs of colleagues at the company. After protesting outside the Ministry of Labour they marched to the Greek parliament to hand in a petition.

## Scottish rail staff walk out

Rail staff working for the Scottish rail provider, ScotRail began a two-day walkout on Sunday, which led to a widespread disruption of services throughout Scotland. Members of the Rail Maritime Union (RMT) are taking the action in opposition to plans by ScotRail to increase the use of driver-only trains and dispensing with guards (the driver being responsible for closing the doors). Some suburban trains currently operate on a driver-only basis.

Further strikes were planned for Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. The two-day strike led to cancellation of some services, or bus replacements. The strike took place following the breakdown of talks between ScotRail management and the RMT on July 6.

## Glasgow city council staff oppose unsocial hours pay cut

Staff working for Community Safety Glasgow (CSG) face a pay review and cuts to unsocial hours payments. CSG is a Glasgow council arms-

length company. The 150 workers are currently being consulted by their unions, the GMB, Unite and Unison over possible strike action.

## Irish fuel staff to strike over pay cuts

Staff in the rail and road divisions of the Bord na Mona (BNM) are set to strike over management proposals to unilaterally impose a 12 percent pay cut. BNM is the partly state-owned company responsible for cutting and processing peat to be used as a fuel. The workers are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union.

## Irish airport staff protest cut in hours

Ground staff and firefighters at Waterford regional airport are due to come out on indefinite strike on July 20. The strike threat follows the unilateral imposition of a cut in hours from 39 to 21 a week. Airport management insist the cut is necessary after Belgian-based carrier VLM ceased operating its Waterford to Luton (UK) passenger service.

The twelve ground staff and firefighters are represented by the Unite union. Waterford airport also acts as a base for Irish Coast Guard search and rescue service.

## French airline stewards fight for improved conditions

Stewards and hostesses working for Air France-KLM have threatened strike action over seven days beginning July 27. They belong to two unions, SNPNC and Unsa-PNC, who between them represent nearly 50 percent of the onboard staff. They are seeking improved working conditions and a renegotiation of their contract.

## Migrant domestic workers in Oman trapped by abusive employers

A report issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Wednesday highlighted the abuse meted out to female migrant domestic workers in Oman. HRW, which interviewed 59 migrant domestic workers, found that in some instances they were subjected to abuses amounting to forced labour. Employers have to pay a fee to recruit domestic staff, and in some

instances they demand the domestic worker reimburses the fees in return for their “release.”

There are over 100,000 female migrant domestic staff working in Oman, coming mainly from the Philippines, Indonesia and south Asia.

Rothna Begum, an HRW researcher, explained: “Employers can force domestic workers to work without rest, pay or food, knowing they can be punished if they escape, while the employers rarely face penalties for abuse.”

### **Zimbabwe civil servants threaten further action**

Zimbabwe civil servants went out on strike last week over unpaid wages for June. Having shortly returned to work, the public employees are threatening to walk out again.

The three-day general strike involved millions of workers and brought Zimbabwe to a halt. The government under Robert Mugabe had to bring June’s postponed wages date forward to an “earlier date in July” than the Civil Service Commission (the public workers employer) had planned.

The Apex Council and the Health Apex Council are threatening further action against preparations by the government to victimise strikers and their leaders. Subsequently, one of the leading protesters and strike organisers has been arrested and accused of inciting public violence.

### **South African bus workers protest**

Bus services were cancelled in Johannesburg as Metro Bus employees walked off the job on Monday in protest against outside scrutiny. The bus company responded by closing all of its 229 routes.

The strike was called off after two days and workers were expected to return to work Wednesday morning. Although workers were instructed not to speak to the press, it was believed that an agreement had been made. Bus drivers would be promoted to inspectors over a period of time, bringing inspections in-house and removing the need for outside inspection.

### **Civil servants oppose wage cuts in Nigerian state**

Civil Servants in Nigeria’s Niger state have been called out on strike by the Trade Union Congress and the Nigerian Labour Congress over pay cuts. A two-week warning strike expired with no retraction from the employers. Public-sector workers were not expected to turn up for work from Monday until the full amount of wages was paid.

The labour bodies have called the strike in opposition to the state government’s arbitrary wage cuts. Niger state’s governor claimed attacks by militant groups on oil installations, lower oil prices and reduced federal allocations are the reasons for wages paid at 70 percent.

### **More Nigerian public workers fight wage cut**

Workers in the Nigerian state of Nasarawa are out on strike opposing a

reduction in their wages. The state governor has threatened to employ students to take over their jobs if they don’t return to work.

The state governor told workers the wage cut was in response to the fall in oil prices and the reduction in federal allocations. Responding to this the National Union of Government Employees, the National Union of Transport Workers and the Nigerian Youth Council abandoned the strike. The local government union said the strike is not in the best interest of the local government workers.

### **Fuel workers call off strike in Nigeria**

Ten thousand members of Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) have returned to work. The oil industry workers came out on strike last Thursday to protest the state run operation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporations’ (NNPC) joint venture.

The action was in response to concerns that the joint venture is responsible for the casualization of existing jobs. PENGASSAN says outstanding cash calls, (calls on government for investments into its private partners) are leading to layoffs and the casualizations, which are being implemented against labour law.

The union and government came to an agreement that “some” of the Indigenous Oil Companies (NPCC partners) would reverse the layoffs and that a collective bargaining agreement outstanding from 2015, another issue in dispute, would also be implemented.

### **Namibian building workers suspended**

Building workers working on Namibia’s Neckartal Dam for the Salini Spa Italian engineering company remain suspended. They went on a wildcat strike due to the lack of response from the company to their many grievances of poor working conditions and harassment by their managers.

After the company got a court injunction for them to return to work, the union stepped in and complied with the order, leaving 150 men effectively sacked for striking. Management are adamant that they will not be reinstated. The company said it lost N\$2million (US\$138,574) a day in production as a result of the strike.

### **Tea workers in Kenya continue strike**

The Kenyan Tea Growers Association (KTGA) continues to refuse to implement a collective bargaining agreement that has been in dispute since 2014. The agreement has been recently imposed by a court ruling, but the international companies in the KTGA say it cannot afford to abide by the ruling. Kenyan ministries are in discussion with the tea growers without much success. The association initially offered workers a 5 percent increase, upping it to between 7-8 percent in a “temporary” settlement while court action is taken against the ruling.



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