

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 July 2016

Strikes by Greek rail staff

Rail workers organised by the Panhellenic Federation of Rail Workers working for Trainose held a series of rolling three-hour strikes Monday through Wednesday this week, disrupting passenger and freight train traffic. This follows a one-day strike held last week.

The action took place after the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund accepted a bid from Italian state railways, which would give it a 100 percent stake in Trainose. According to press reports, the Italian state railway company paid €45 million for its stake in the Greek rail company.

All-out strike by bus staff in northern England

Bus workers employed by First Bus in Leeds are set to begin an indefinite strike from next Tuesday, July 26. This follows two previous 24-hour strikes by the staff over a pay claim. They were seeking an additional 36p an hour. The company responded with a 38p an hour pay rise, but it would not be implemented until May, 2018. The Unite union, to allow for further discussion with management, suspended a strike scheduled for July 11.

Following the second 24-hour strike, however, First Bus Leeds management has taken an aggressive stance and has dismissed the Unite branch secretary along with two other union activists. An additional 11 workers have been suspended.

Phil Bown, Unite regional officer, told the BBC, “The management needs to stop ducking and diving and commit to holding genuine and meaningful talks, otherwise this strike could go on for some time with an adverse impact for bus users in Leeds—something we have desperately sought to avoid.”

Around 4,000 bus drivers across Yorkshire working for the First Group in Bradford, Doncaster, Halifax, Huddersfield, Rotherham, Sheffield and York are being balloted by the Unite union for a possible strike over pay, terms and conditions.

Ballot of Scottish bus drivers in Glasgow

Bus drivers working for First Glasgow, part of the First Bus international transport company, are being balloted over possible strike action. The Unite union is balloting its 1,700 members who work for First Glasgow for a strike over staff shortages. Unite says the company has problems recruiting and retaining staff as a result of low starting pay and lack of promotion opportunities. According to Unite, the company is short

of some 100 drivers. The union added that this shortage is being exacerbated by the company’s failure to recruit enough temporary staff to cover its one-month contract to provide a replacement bus service while the city’s underground rail system is upgraded.

Scottish rail staff to hold further strikes

Rail staff employed by Scotrail have announced a further two 24-hour strikes. They will be on Sunday July 24 and Sunday July 31. The members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) have held previous strikes over the issue of increasing the use of driver-only trains, dispensing with guards (the driver being responsible for closing the doors). Some suburban trains currently operate on a driver-only basis.

The strikes follow the breakdown of talks under the auspices of the government reconciliation service (ACAS).

UK oil rig workers to strike

Around 400 employees of the Wood Group, an engineering contractor for eight Shell oil and gas offshore platforms, are to strike on July 26 in response to the company’s proposals to cut pay by 30 percent and changes to allowances. The rig workers, members of the RMT and Unite unions, voted almost unanimously to strike.

Irish ambulance staff to strike

Irish ambulance staff, working for the National Ambulance Service (NAS), have voted by a 92 percent margin to strike.

They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). The all-out strike is due to begin at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, August 8. The union will provide emergency cover during the period of the strike.

There are a series of issues, which according to a SIPTU official, include “compensation due to them under the public service agreement, the implementation of a fully developed Intermediate Care Service as recommended by the Labour Court and the application of an annualised hours system.”

Another SIPTU official told the press, “In recent years, our members changed work practices and achieved significant cost savings so that the NAS could develop within the financial constraints place upon it by the

wider economic recession. Our members have not received any recognition for the sacrifices they made.”

Bus drivers in Dublin to be balloted

Bus drivers in the Irish capital of Dublin are seeking a 30 percent pay rise to bring them in line with drivers on the Dublin tram system LUAS. The Irish Labour Court has ruled they get a lower increase of 8.25 percent over the next three years. The members of the National Bus & Rail Union (NBRU) are to be balloted over the Labour Court’s ruling. Rejection could lead to a strike.

Spanish pilots set date for strike

Pilots belonging to the Spanish Union of Airline Pilots (SEPLA) have announced four days of strikes beginning July 30. They are opposed to plans by Air Europa to create a new low-cost airline, Air Europa Express, using 11 of its current fleet. The new airline will take over some of Air Europa’s current routes. Air Europa pilots fear the new service will employ pilots on lower pay and worse conditions.

Other issues raised include alleged discrimination against some pilots who have raised concerns over the plans and the arbitrary adjustment of work schedules.

Farmworkers in Namibia oppose harassment and poor wages

Namibian farmworkers are continuing their strike against Desert Fruit Namibia. Workers held a demonstration outside the company’s premises last Friday after walking out, demanding an N\$30 (US\$2) a day increase and an enhancement in their housing allowances.

Reports claim management treat workers like animals and pay them poorly. When they complain, they are told there are many other people seeking jobs. Management claimed the company was not making a profit and if employees achieved their demands they would have to reduce the workforce by 50 percent.

The company followed up by declaring the strike illegal and threatened that they would hold workers responsible for their loss of earnings. Strikers had proclaimed an indefinite strike while the union agreed to a return to work.

Parliamentary staff in South Africa denied bonuses

A strike in South Africa’s parliament that went to the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) has been ruled out of order. The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) went out on strike last year over bonus payments and threatened to return to the walkout if the denial of workers’ compensation continued.

The action was turned over to the CCMA, which ruled against the union. The ruling asserts that parliament was right to degrade the bonus payment

conditions in the light of the legislature’s failure to meet its spending targets.

The CCMA also assumed that as there were few complaints from union members over the change in bonus payments in 2015, the union did not have the support of its membership. The union plans to march on parliament each day until they change their position and implement the agreement that brought the 2015 strike to an end.

The African National Congress (the ruling party) has supported the decision of the CCMA against the parliamentary workers. NEHAWU says it will support the ANC in upcoming elections but their decision will make it “difficult.”

Ghanaian Pharmacists set to strike

Ghanaian pharmacists are threatening some industrial action if the Health Authority does not deal with their demands. The demands are for the fair implementation of the Interim Market Premium (IMP), a premium payment for retaining skilled labour, introduced in 2013.

One complaint is that pharmacists in the public universities have benefitted much more than those in the Ghana health service. The pharmacists feel they have been left out of the benefits of IMP, while other workers in the health service have been receiving the premium since the beginning of the year.

An inquiry looking into their situation should have reported in May but is constantly being delayed. A spokesman for the pharmacists insisted they are “essential service workers and we demand that we are treated as such.”

Ghana airline workers oppose government land grab

Airline workers employed by Ghana Aviation Authority have taken strike action to demand the proper use of encroached lands.

The land was taken into public ownership to install flight-monitoring technology to improve safety. In 2007, politicians and private developers acquired part of the land and a gated community was built. Aviation workers are insisting the whole 650 acres be used for the installation of the safety equipment. Currently, the equipment—worth over half a million euros—is stored in sheds. The government has offered just two acres.

Domestic airline operators are complaining that the strike is only affecting Ghanaian national airlines, but not international airlines. The strikers say they are prepared to extend their action to include international flights.



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