

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 July 2016

Air France strike goes ahead

A weeklong strike by Air France flight attendants began Wednesday. Air France-KLM announced it would cancel around a third of its domestic and medium-haul flights as a result of the strike.

The aircrew are fighting for improved working conditions and for the renewal of their five-year contract, due to end in October. Air France-KLM wants to bring in a 17-month contract when the current one expires.

The workers are members of the SNPNC and Unsa-PNC trade unions, which represent just under half of the flight attendants. A third union, Unac, is not taking part in the current action, saying it will consider action in October when the current contract expires.

A final round of talks between the unions and Air France-KLM management last Friday failed to reach any agreement.

Greek power employees break up meeting discussing privatisation

On Monday, staff employed by Greece's Public Power Corporation (PPC) disrupted a shareholder meeting convened to discuss selling a stake in ADMIE, the arm of the company dealing with power transmission.

Currently the Greek state has a 51 percent holding in PPC but wholly owns the ADMIE subsidiary. Under conditions related to the restructuring of its debts demanded by the European Union/International Monetary Fund, the Syriza-led government has to offer up a 24 percent stake in ADMIE.

The meeting taking place in a hotel in Athens had to be abandoned and reconvened in the Finance Ministry.

KLM airline ground staff strike in Netherlands

Ground crew employed by the KLM airline in the Netherlands came out on strike Thursday. The strike is part of a long-standing dispute over pay and working conditions. They are seeking a pay increase, for temporary staff to be offered permanent positions and for the retention of enhanced leave for older staff.

Strike by Russian building workers

Around 200 construction staff working on a project at the Vostochny

Cosmodrome rocket launching site in the far east of Russia walked off the job last Friday.

They work for the Spetsdorstroi company and were protesting the non-payment of wages for May and June. The workers pledged to stay out until they received the overdue wages.

Earlier this month construction staff employed by another company at the Cosmodrome also walked out over the non-payment of wages. They returned to work the next day following talks with management.

Strike by UK oilrig workers

A 24-hour strike by around 400 oil production employees on offshore Shell oilrigs in the North Sea went ahead Tuesday. They work for a contractor, Wood Group, which provides services to the Shell rigs in the Brent oilfield. The strike comes on top of an overtime ban and further action is planned.

The workers are members of the Unite union and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. Their action is in response to plans by the company to increase working hours and cut pay. Wood Group says it must cut costs in response to the recent fall in oil prices. The strike was the first incidence of industrial action in the North Sea oilfields for 28 years.

UK postal staff to be balloted

Around 3,500 staff working in dedicated post offices, known as Crown offices, are to be balloted by the Communication Workers Union (CWU). They are employed in around 300 Crown offices and related logistics and administrative centres run by Post Office Ltd. Mail delivery staff are employed by the privatised Royal Mail and are not part of the dispute.

They are being balloted in response to the company's plans to privatise parts of the service, cut jobs and close the current defined pension scheme.

According to the CWU, 2,000 jobs have already been cut this year. There are plans for 60 Crown offices to be franchised and a further 16 to be incorporated within another retail outlet. In 2013, a series of strikes hitting around 70 Crown offices took place over jobs and pay.

University staff at London Metropolitan University facing job cuts

Management at the Metropolitan University in London are seeking to impose nearly 400 redundancies including the compulsory redundancy of

two union leaders.

In response staff, members of the University and College Union, are being balloted to ascertain whether they would be prepared to strike in opposition to redundancies.

Campaigners in London protest library cuts

Last Saturday, campaigners opposed to cuts in library services surrounded three closed libraries in the south London borough of Lambeth to prevent the removal of books.

They were able to do so, but council authorities later carried out the planned removal in the early hours of Sunday morning. Library staff and supporters have been involved in an ongoing campaign to defend library services in the borough.

Last week library staff working for Lewisham council in London struck over plans by the council to close four libraries in the borough. They are members of the Unison union.

UK rail company staff to be balloted for strike

Rail staff working for the Virgin East Coast rail company are to be balloted next week to oppose plans to impose job-cutting measures. The ballot is being conducted by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, with the result expected on August 9.

The union representing office and administrative staff employed by Virgin, the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, warned about possible strikes in protest at proposed job cuts at 46 travel centres and in rail stations.

Strike by contract staff closes Lebanese power company offices

Contract staff employed by the Lebanese state-owned electric power company, Electricite du Liban (EDL), held a protest strike against working conditions at the firm's headquarters in Beirut July 22.

The strike closed the customer services department. EDL responded by calling on security forces to end the strike and allow access to the building.

Nigerian oil workers demand reinstatement of illegally sacked workers

The two Nigerian oil workers unions, PENGASSON and NUPENG, are in discussion with the government after suspending a fuel strike. Ten thousand trade union members went on strike July 6 over pay and conditions and a dispute with four oil-related companies over union recognition.

The government gave an assurance that the workers locked out and/or illegally dismissed would be reinstated. The assurance was based on the federal government's insistence that it had an agreement with the companies to retract the illegal dismissals.

The two unions called off their strike but are now threatening to resume it if the government does not take a stand against the oil companies.

Nigerian bus workers demand unpaid wages

Nigerian transport workers at the Abuja Urban Mass Transport Company held a two-day protest last week. Hundreds of bus workers protested over the non-payment of wages for the last five months.

An agreement made by the permanent secretary of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to pay one month's arrears did not result in payment. Previous agreements made by the FCT have been similarly ignored.

At the last meeting, FCT permanent secretary advised the union it should sort out the matter internally. The union said if the secretary of the FCT did not respond, they would begin an indefinite strike.

Nigerian public sector workers sent back to work

Public sector workers employed by Oyo state in Nigeria have been sent back to work by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), suspending their several months-long strike.

Workers returned to their jobs on a promise that two of their seven months of outstanding wages will be paid within the next two weeks.

In a Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the state and the union, the state will appeal to the banks to suspend debt repayments paid out of or recovered by the bank from workers' accounts.

Workers were hostile to the NLC settling for a fraction of their pay. The deal was carried without their consent. They were informed by the media, not the NLC, of the lifting of the strike.

South African building products workers oppose sackings

Employees at the South African Lafarge cement and building materials company have been sacked for striking. One hundred and fifty men were sacked for striking over the defence of a National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) shop steward.

The Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) said the NUM official was being forcefully relocated because he had requested the company implement a wage agreement and a deal on housing allowance. COSATU is demanding the reinstatement of the workers and the lifting of the suspension of the shop steward.

Workers strike against apartheid practises in South Africa

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is demanding the reinstatement of 109 workers, who were sacked for striking over working conditions.

The company, Qwa Qwa Wire Products (Pty) Ltd., is accused by the sacked workers of imposing differentials in wages, which is against labour law, and segregation over the use of toilets and many other aspects of company practice.

The correct rate of pay is reportedly paid to white workers while black workers are subjected to a government exemption allowing the company to pay under the minimum wage. NUMSA said it will dispute the dismissals and report the company to the Human Rights Commission.

Public sector workers strike in South African province

Local government workers struck in Sicelo, Meyerton town, in South Africa's Gauteng province last week in opposition to the refusal of the local authorities to regrade the municipality to a higher grade.

The strike was organised by the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU). Members went on a go-slow and held a march and protest at the municipality's offices.

Alongside the upgrade refusal, workers complained of management's nepotism towards the staff they employ. The local mayor retaliated by accusing the union of sabotaging water delivery to certain areas.

Kenyan plantation workers return to work

Unilever Tea Kenya plantation workers are to return to work pending a final settlement on their court-sanctioned pay award.

Twenty thousand workers are returning to work after two weeks strike on the basis of an interim pay award of 10 percent, commencing August 15.

Unilever Tea Kenya have acknowledged the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) from 2014-15. The increases awarded were 30 percent wage increase, retirement at 60, one rest day a week, medical allowance of sh.30,000 (US\$295) and baggage allowance of sh.30,000 on termination of employment.



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