

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 August 2016

## UK North Sea oil workers in 48-hour strike

Around 400 oil workers employed by the oil rig service company, Wood Group, began a 48-hour strike Thursday in an escalation of their dispute. It went ahead after talks between the company and the Unite and Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) unions broke down.

A 24-hour strike by the oil rig workers last month was the first such action in the North Sea for 28 years. The strike, which follows a previous overtime ban, is in response to plans by Wood Group to increase working hours and cut pay.

The company services seven Royal Dutch Shell oil platforms in the North Sea and says it has to reduce its costs as it is being squeezed by Shell which, in turn, is responding to falling prices of oil on the world market.

Wood Group says the drop in wages is around 3 percent but according to the unions when benefits are taken into account the drop in income could be up to 30 percent.

It is estimated that around 120,000 jobs in the North Sea oil industry and related sectors have been lost since 2014.

## Court halts Dutch airport ground staff strike

Baggage handlers and other ground crew working for the KLM airline at Schiphol airport were due to hold a 90-minute strike Wednesday evening over their campaign for a one percent pay increase. They are also seeking enhanced leave for staff over 50 and for workers on temporary contracts to be given permanent ones.

However, the strike was suspended by the FNV union after a court judge hearing an appeal by KLM wanting the strike to be ruled illegal, said he needed until August 11 to make a decision.

## Bus drivers in Irish capital hold strike vote

Bus drivers in Dublin who are seeking a 30 percent pay increase to bring them in line with staff on the Dublin light rail system, LUAS, are voting this week on possible strike action. They rejected an 8.25 percent pay offer recommended by the Labour Court. Both the National Bus and Rail Union and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members are being balloted.

A ballot is also being held of around 100 Dublin Bus staff working in clerical and supervisory roles, who are members of the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA). They have also rejected the 8.25 percent pay

offer.

## Planned strike of Portuguese border staff called off

A strike by staff working for the Portuguese immigration office (SEF) which was due to take place on August 10 and 11 has been called off. This was after SEF managers told the union representing the workers it would address their grievances.

## Russian 2018 World Cup stadium construction workers protest nonpayment of wages

Last week, more than 100 construction workers building the 2008 World Cup football stadium in Kaliningrad, Russia held a protest over nonpayment of their wages for the last two months.

The subcontractor who had employed them has disappeared. They directed their protests to the contractor who had employed the subcontractor, demanding the contractor pay their missing wages.

There have been four similar strikes this year over nonpayment of wages at World Cup stadiums being built in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov on Don and St. Petersburg.

## Union suspends Scottish railworkers strike

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, which represents rail workers has again suspended planned action against the introduction of driver only operated (DOO) trains and the elimination of conductors/guards.

Railworkers at Scotrail in Scotland have held a series of strikes over the proposals, but one beginning on Sunday has been halted. In an August 3 press release, RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said, "The union has made sufficient progress to enable us to suspend the current programme of industrial action on Scotrail to allow for further detailed discussions on the issue of platform train despatch procedures (the use of drivers to close carriage doors). Our colleagues from ASLEF will be involved in those discussions with the company."

The RMT has been instrumental in enabling several rail companies to impose DOO.

## **Railworkers in southern England set to strike**

Railworkers employed by Govia-Thameslink, which operates Southern Rail services in the south east of England, are due to begin a five-day strike on Monday. They are taking the action against proposals to extend the use of DOO trains, eliminating the conductor role.

## **UK university administration and clerical staff to be balloted for strikes**

University administrative and clerical staff belonging to the Unison union are to be balloted in September for possible strike action in protest of a 1.1 percent pay offer.

According to Unison, below cost of living wage settlements since 2009 means their members are between £1,600 and £8,500 a year worse off in real terms. At the same time, UK university vice chancellors are earning an average £272,000 a year and the number of senior staff earning more than £100,000 is increasing.

## **Protests by dismissed Egyptian journalists**

The news website Dotmsr laid off 85 of its reporters on July 20. Since then the journalists have been holding protests against their dismissal. The Press Syndicate has filed a report to the general prosecutor against the administrators of the Dotmsr website, alleging the journalists' dismissal was illegal as they were given no prior notice.

## **Strike of Iranian agro-industrial workers**

Hundreds of workers at the Mahabad agro-industrial complex in northwestern Iran have been on strike for over a week, protesting the nonpayment of wages. Some of them had not been paid for more than a year.

## **Strike of Iraqi truck drivers disrupts oil deliveries**

A one-day strike last week by Iraqi truck drivers protesting longstanding nonpayment of wages disrupted deliveries from the Shaikan oil fields in the Kurdistan area of Iraq.

## **Israeli court employees end strike**

After nearly six weeks of strike action over changes to work procedures that disrupted courts across Israel, court employees have returned to work following an agreement between the Histadrut Labour Federation, the Ministry of Finance and court officials.

## **South African oil refinery and pharmaceutical workers strike**

Some 15,000 oil refinery workers and 8,000 pharmaceutical industry workers in South Africa belonging to the CEPPWAW union have been on strike since July 29. It has impacted on fuel delivery and drug production.

The pharmaceutical workers are demanding a one-year, nine percent, wage increase. In response, the drug companies' negotiating body, including the pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline, are offering a two-year deal involving a 7.5 percent increase this year and 7 percent next year.

The oil refinery workers are also demanding a 9 percent pay increase plus an enhanced minimum wage of R8,000 (\$571), also applicable to casual workers. The oil company negotiating body has also upped its offer to 7 percent a year also over two years.

## **Shop workers strike against low wages in South Africa**

South African shop workers began a three-day strike on July 29 seeking a monthly increase of R600 per month (\$42). They are also demanding a monthly minimum wage of R4,500 (\$320) and a revised payment method for sales staff.

The employer, JD Group, has responded with an offer of R125 (\$9) for workers at the bottom of the income pile receiving just R2,000 (\$142) a month.

A union spokesman says the miserly offer comes on top of an assault on jobs and conditions since the company was taken over two years ago, which has led to the loss of 10,000 jobs and the casualisation of many of the remaining jobs.

## **Union thugs shoot dead South African Pikitup worker**

Security guards employed by the South African Municipal Workers union shot dead one worker and seriously injured another during protests outside the union's office on July 29. The protestors were trying to get information about progress since the union called off a month-long wildcat strike by 4,000 Pikitup refuse workers in Johannesburg in April.

The local union leadership is being investigated on corruption charges and has been dismissed from office by its central executive committee. However, they have reportedly "refused to go." In May, R700,000 (\$50,000) was spent hiring a security company to protect the union leaders—the same company that killed the protestor.

## **Workers strike at Nigerian university**

Non-academic workers at Ibadan University, Nigeria, came out on a warning strike July 29, protesting erratic wage payments since the beginning of the year.

Nigeria has been wracked by strikes at several universities this year as the Federal Government, facing the worst recession for a decade, cuts

funding for public services. Inflation stands at around 17 percent slashing the value of wages.

### **Doctors strike over shortages in Kenya**

Doctors in Embu county Kenya went on strike July 27 over staff shortages. The Kenya Medical Practice and Dental Union say they will not be returning to work until new doctors are employed.

The Embu Level 5 hospital serves over a million people but has only five doctors instead of the recommended 24 doctors. In Kenya, the number of doctors working in public health facilities is declining—to about 4,000. For the population of Kenya, about 40 million people, the World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 83,000 doctors.

### **Uber cab drivers strike in Kenya**

Uber cab drivers went on strike in Kenya's capital Nairobi Tuesday and protested outside the headquarters of the company after it slashed fares by 35 percent. The drivers are also calling on Uber to reduce its cut of fares from 25 to 15 per cent.

Nairobi has become one of Uber's biggest markets since the company began operating there at the beginning of 2015, but two other online operators have recently set up, increasing competition.



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