

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 August 2016

UK Eurostar rail staff announce vote to strike

The trade union representing UK staff working for Eurostar, which runs trains from London to France and Belgium via the channel tunnel, has announced a series of strikes. The members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) are set to strike August 12 to August 15 and August 27 to 29. Clerical and administrative staff represented by the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) plan to strike on August 14 and 15 as well as August 28 and 29.

The strike is over so-called work life balance issues, mainly unsocial hours and duty rosters. The RMT states Eurostar has failed to honour an agreement drawn up in 2008 in an attempt to address the issues.

UK rail staff working on East Coast service in dispute

Rail staff employed by Virgin Trains East Coast voted by an 84 percent majority to take strike action. The company runs express trains between London and the northern destinations of Leeds, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT). The union accuses the company of wanting to push through changes that would threaten 200 jobs, lead to changes in working practices including getting rid of the guard role on trains.

Rail industry insiders consider Virgin/Stagecoach won the franchise by putting in an over-the-top bid. They are now seeking to drastically cut costs to stop losses incurred on the service.

Scottish school janitors continue campaign

Over their ongoing dispute with their employer, Cordia, school janitors in Glasgow, Scotland are due to begin a weeklong strike on August 15. Cordia is a Glasgow council arm's-length company. The janitors have been in dispute with the company since March this year and have held 19 days of strike action.

The janitors are members of the union Unison. They are employed in primary and nursery schools. They are seeking additional payments for onerous/dirty duties in line with Glasgow council staff that receive such payments. The janitors lose between £500 and £1,000 as a result of not receiving the payments. As well as holding the strike, the janitors will protest outside Glasgow city council headquarters on Monday and Thursday.

Irish care staff hold 24-hour stoppages

Care workers at the St Aidan's Day Care Centre for people with learning difficulties held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday with another three 24-hour stoppages planned. The centre is in the County Wexford town of Gorey. The dispute is over the nonpayment of increments.

The conciliation service, the Workplaces Relations Commission, held talks on Thursday in an attempt to resolve the dispute.

Portuguese nurses stage strike for fewer working hours

Nurses in the Algarve region of Portugal began a four-day strike Monday. The striking nurses are demanding a cut in working hours to 35 a week to bring them in line with other public-sector workers.

Maltese pilots win court ruling

Last week, pilots working for Air Malta won a court ruling to go ahead with a strike. The court ruling followed talks between Air Malta management and the pilots' union, the Airline Pilots Association (APA), which failed to reach agreement. Both sides agreed the court should rule as to whether or not the strike went ahead. The dispute is over negotiations to reach a new collective bargaining agreement.

In spite of winning a court ruling to strike, the APA is hoping management will offer further talks to be able to reach a compromise solution. The APA president noted: "We will keep on waiting and hoping, as long as our members allow us to."

Strike by Turkish Coca Cola employees averted

A strike planned for Wednesday of this week by employees at of Coca Cola Icecek, which bottles the Coca Cola product in Turkey, was called off after the union Tekgida-Is claimed a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA) met the workers demands.

The new agreement covers the 1,300 staff at six sites across Turkey. The new CBA will now include around 200 forklift truck drivers previously excluded. The union says the new CBA allows for a wage increase and improved social benefits.

Bus drivers protest in Iran

Last week around 400 bus drivers employed by the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company protested outside the city hall to demand arrears of housing allowance. Their families also attended the demonstration. They also protested against the incompetence and massive salaries of their managers and for the removal of the bus company's managing director.

Planned action by Israeli airport staff called off

A planned strike by airport staff at Ben Gurion airport last Saturday was called off after the intervention of the Histadrut labour federation. They arranged talks at the Histadrut headquarters including the Finance Ministry to try to resolve issues.

The strike had been called to protest the Finance Ministry's plans to levy royalties on the Ben Gurion Airport Authority. Airport staff instead called for the money to be used to fund the taking on of 1,000 contract workers at the airport to ease staff shortages.

Nigerian college staff walk out over unpaid allowances

Academics and other employees at Yaba Technology College in the Nigerian state of Lagos have stayed away from work, striking against salary arrears. Three unions, involving around 100 academic and non-academic staff, walked out on August 4 in response to allowances deducted from their pay.

College employees' allowances are paid from Internally Generated Revenues (IGR), which are used to make up a proportion of their compensation. Management claimed the deductions came from a government directive to end the payment of IGR, but given there was no written proof, the unions suspected the validity of what they were told and walked out.

Other allowances under the university salary structure such as payment to heads of departments have similarly been withdrawn on previous occasions.

Nigerian university staff strike over reduced and unpaid salaries

As a result of reductions of government funding to the states throughout Nigeria the municipalities have reduced payments in their employees' pay. Alongside several months of unpaid wages, the states have reduced the percentage of agreed pay levels and allowances.

In response, university staff in Ibadan began an indefinite strike demanding the backlog in their wages from the beginning of the year be paid in full. The secretary general of Senior Staff of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) accused the state of breaking several promises over wage settlements and outstanding allowances.

Power workers strike in South Africa

The National Union of Miners (NUM) is threatening an all-out strike at Eskom, the South African power generating company, after four weeks of failed wage negotiations.

The essential-service workers walked out on Wednesday, demanding a 10 percent pay increase. The NUM accused the company of still paying wages based on the apartheid system. As well as a 10 percent increase for the lowest-paid workers, they want 8.5 percent for the highest-paid and a housing allowance of R3,000 (\$225). The company has offered a 7 percent wage increase. SA Broadcasting Corporation news reported that workers affiliated to the NUM had already come out on strike on Monday after arbitration had broken down over the weekend.

A spokesman for Eskom denied there was any industrial action at the company. He referred to absent workers as "those are fugitives who are not at work and should account to their managers when they return." Eskom made around R4.5 billion (\$342 million) and was able to maintain continuous power supply over the last year.

South African garage employees set to join striking refinery workers

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is to join the fuel workers strike in support its members. The metalworkers union is threatening to join the fuel workers strike in pursuit of their own demands for a pay increase from the garage owners.

NUMSA said there would also be retaliation to any sacking or depriving its members of their wages resulting from fuel shortages. The strike by the 15,000 fuel refinery workers for a 9 percent pay increase is now in its second week. The employers are refusing to increase their 7 percent offer.

Petrol stations around Pretoria in Gauteng province are running out of fuel but, according to reports, the rest of South Africa is maintaining supply.

Pharmaceutical workers, members of the same union as the refinery workers, Ceppwawu, are also still on strike, picketing some drug companies, demanding a 9 percent pay increase.

Fishermen demand pay increase in South Africa

Trawler men working for I&J out of Cape Town, South Africa are into their second week on strike for improved wages. The company attempted to abort the strike by going to court, but failed.

Around 500 workers at sea and in the processing plants are on strike. The workers' union is claiming that captains of the deep sea fishing vessels received a 23 percent pay increase two years ago.

The union is using the 23 percent as a benchmark for their negotiations, saying, if the company will discuss around that figure the union will confer with the members over a return to work. The strike is local to the Bay area of Cape Town but, the union warned, without progress in negotiations the strike could be extended nationally and include a further three unions.

Kenyan plantation workers take Unilever to court

Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union are taking Unilever Tea Kenya (UTK), the enormous and diverse global consumer products

company, to court in response to victimisation of striking workers.

The company's persecution follows a strike of 20,000 tea pickers and processors, ended within the last fortnight, over the refusal by the UTK to implement a court-ordered pay settlement. The strike has been suspended based on an interim pay increase of 10 percent, as opposed to the 30 percent court pay award plus allowances.

Kenyan nurses strike over late wages

Kenyan Nurses walked out of their hospital in Tharaka-Nithi County on Monday, protesting that their July wages had not been paid. The nurse's contract established in 2015 states that wages should be paid on the 30th of each month.

The public hospital was deserted and the county health authority spokesman suggested patients go to the private sector. A spokesman for the Kenyan National Union of Nurses said the nurses would return to work as soon as they are paid.



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