

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 August 2016

UK rail staff vote to strike

Members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) working for Govia Thameslink Railways (GTR) have voted by a 70 percent majority for strike action, although on a less than 50 percent turnout.

GTR runs services in the London and south east of England.

The strike threat is in response to GTR's plans to close 34 station ticket offices and to staff 49 others at peak times only. The RMT says the proposals would lead to the loss of 130 jobs. Ticket office staff would be replaced by station "hosts" operating on the platforms.

The result of the vote is currently being considered by the RMT National Executive Committee.

UK rail union suspends planned strike at Virgin East Coast

The RMT has suspended a series of 24-hour strikes due to begin today. RMT members working for the Virgin East Coast train service had voted by a large majority for a series of 24-hour strikes on August 19, 26 and 29 and for a 48-hour overtime ban to begin August 27.

Virgin East Coast trains provide services between London, Leeds, York and Edinburgh.

The strike was called in response to the company's plans to push through changes in work practices that the RMT says will lead to the loss of around 200 jobs. Among the proposals is one to get rid of the guard role on trains that is performed by conductors.

An RMT notice to its members noted that talks between itself and Virgin East Coast had meant "significant progress has been made with the company" and that members were instructed to work normally until further notice.

In the last weeks, the RMT has called off a strike by conductors on GTR's Southern rail franchise and on August 12 cancelled three days of strikes begun that day by members employed by Eurostar.

Irish ambulance staff to vote on conciliation body proposals

Irish ambulance staff working for the National Ambulance Service (NAS) are to be balloted over proposals by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to end the current dispute.

The proposals are reported as promising increased funding for the ambulance service to recruit an additional 461 paramedics.

The workers are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

In July, paramedics voted overwhelmingly to strike in pursuit of additional funding for the NAS and for better pay and working conditions. The strike was due to begin on August 10 but was called off after a promise of talks brokered by the WRC.

According to a SIPTU Health Division Organiser Paul Bell, the proposals address increased funding for the service and are supported by the union, but not pay and conditions.

Maltese court workers give notice of dispute

An official dispute has been registered after around 60 Maltese court staff raised health and safety issues at work, including the official court uniforms they have to wear.

They complain the material is inferior and causes skin irritation. They also say that they do not have appropriate clothing for carrying out tasks outside the court buildings.

The dispute has been ongoing for some time, with the court staff initially signing a petition in December last year, raising their concerns.

An official of the UHM trade union confirmed the dispute had been registered and proposals for industrial action drawn up. However, the official stated, these proposals had been put on hold to allow for further discussion.

Strike threat by baggage handlers at Spanish airport

The CCOO union (Comisiones Obreras—Workers Commission), which is aligned with the Socialist Party, is threatening strike action by baggage handlers at the Lanzarote airport of Arrecife. The baggage handlers are employed by the Swiss cargo company Swissport. The strike is set to go ahead on Monday.

At issue are longstanding disputes over pay and conditions but also safety issues. The CCOO accuses the company of repeated breaches of operational rules putting staff in danger.

Wildcat action by Ukrainian miners

Miners working for the state-owned Ukrainian company Krasnarmiiskvuhillia Stahanova refused to go down the mine August 11. The walkout was to protest the non-payment of three months of wages. Instead, the miners held a mass meeting in an assembly hall at which they

elected represented delegates to go to Kiev to meet with state authorities.

Israeli medics hold 24-hour strike

Doctors in public hospitals throughout Israel held a 24-hour strike August 11. Walking out at 8 a.m., they provided an emergency only service during the strike.

The doctors struck for a salary increase and improved working conditions and the demand that the government increase funding for the Israeli health service.

Following the strike, it was reported that the dispute had been settled with the Finance Ministry releasing more funds to increase the number of beds in the hospital system and for an additional 150 medics to be recruited. However, no details of any salary increase or improved working conditions, if agreed, were reported.

Ghana civil servants demand equal pay

Ghana's civil and public service workers have been out on strike since July 27, demanding the government honour the payment of their Interim Premium Market Allowance (IPMA). It was agreed that civil and public service workers, as a part of the 2010 Single Spine Salary Structure, should be paid the IPMA.

The union said it had "discovered" that the government had exempted some workers in civil and local government from the agreement, as they were not regarded as priority workers.

A government spokesman said the exempted workers could not now be included in IPMA payments, as they were not included in the 2016 budget. The union is demanding that a memorandum of understanding recently promised by Ghana's president, but which has not materialised, be included in the 2017 budget.

South African refinery workers union ends dispute

The strike by petrol refinery workers in South Africa was called off Wednesday in a climb-down by the union.

The Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ceppwawu) accepted the National Petroleum Employers' Association's (NPEA) initial pay offer of 7 percent, giving way on their 9 percent pay claim.

Over 15,000 workers were involved in the strike that lasted two weeks and was called to oppose the employers' offer of a 7 percent increase this year, followed by a inflation plus 1.5 percent raise next year.

During the strike, there were reports of shortages of fuel across the country, with Johannesburg suffering severe shortages at its petrol stations. The Ceppwawu collaborated with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) to end the strike.

Other outstanding issues still to be resolved are the union's claim for an 18 percent shift allowance as against NPEA's 6 percent offer.

Telecom workers oppose retrenchments and outsourcing in South

Africa

Four thousand Telkom workers are continuing a strike that started August 11 in pursuit of an 11 percent pay increase and a halt to job cutbacks.

Another 1,000 jobs are under threat and work carried out by the company staff is to be outsourced. Telkom arbitrarily introduced a performance pay scheme August 1, while the Communications Workers Union (CWU) advised its members to reject it.

The company went to court to obtain a restraining order on workers picketing its premises around the country. The CWU claims the company is falsely accusing its members of disturbances on the picket lines, and insists their members abide by the laws governing strikes.

The union went so far as to invite management to a meeting to discuss picketing arrangements, but they refused to attend. Telkom has not put a counter offer to the union's pay claim, instead offering a 6 percent "one-off" payment.

Nationwide strikes over late pay and conditions in Kenyan health sector

Kenyan nurses in Bungoma County have given the local government 14 days to implement an outstanding Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

The agreement pledged recognition and promotion to nurses who had advanced their studies in their field of work. A strike was called off in September 2015 when the CBA was concluded with the nurses, but this was directly followed by a doctor's strike over the same issues. Under the CBA, 490 staff were up for promotion from March last year to date, but only 103 have been promoted.

The nurses union say that unless 300 promotions are made within the next 14 days (starting August 16) the strike will go ahead.

Health workers are also striking in Tharaka-Nithi County. The staff initially came out over the late payment of their July salaries. Even after some wages were paid, the nurses refused to return.

Although the union, the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN), called the staff back to work, some workers remained on strike. They called on the union to activate another strike, demanding immediate action over the remittance of all pending statutory deductions. The county governor threatened to sack all those still on strike.

A strike was narrowly averted in Migori County Hospital as health employees prepared to take action over promotions. KNUN shelved the strike for two weeks when the county governor responded by promoting 300 staff and the promise of others to follow. Another 78 staff have been placed in positions they are trained for. The union said they are using the two weeks to consult their members on the governor's proposals.

Other medical staff are taking various forms of industrial action across the country in response to late wages, lack of medical staff in hospitals, lack of medicines and issues around appropriate positions for appropriately trained staff with corresponding pay.

A doctor at another hospital in Nakuru county revealed that most public hospitals did not have drugs, including antibiotics and painkillers.



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