

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 August 2016

Europe

Tower Transit bus workers vote for action in London

London bus workers employed by bus operator Tower Transit have voted by 9-1 to stage two consecutive 24-hour strikes over rosters.

The Unite union said around 1,000 drivers, engineers and other workers are involved in the dispute, affecting 28 routes across the capital. The transport workers face the imposition of changes to their rosters leaving them out of pocket as well as having a major impact on their family life. The workers have also found themselves short changed when doing overtime on a rest day.

One of the strike days will fall on the Bank Holiday Monday, August 29, when the Notting Hill Carnival (one of the world's largest street festivals) takes place.

Portuguese airport security workers refuse overtime

Security workers employed by the Prosegur and Securitas companies at Portugal's airports refused to do overtime beginning Wednesday. The ban on overtime will last until December 31, said the airport workers union Sitava.

Workers at the two companies, whose jobs include scanning passengers' luggage, are responsible for the security of around 40 million passengers who pass through Portuguese airports each year.

A 24-hour stoppage is planned on August 27.

Norwegian refuse workers in pay dispute

The Norwegian Transport Workers Union said 50 of its members would strike from Sunday morning if talks do not reach agreement by midnight Saturday with NHO Transport.

Among the issues involved are workers' demands for an increase in the minimum wage. Talks were held earlier this summer but broke down over the pay issue.

If the strike goes ahead, it will affect the collection and delivery of household waste in Sarpsborg, Bergen, Stord, Godvik, Stavanger and Stokke.

Transport strike in Greece called off

The Organisation of Urban Transport of Thessaloniki (OASTH) called off a strike of transportation workers in Thessaloniki due to begin on August 22.

The workers were set to strike as 2,300 employees are owed about €6.3 million in wages. OASTH President Dimitris Tsermenidis announced the strike after a union meeting on August 19, when the union was unable to arrange a meeting with Transport Minister Christos Sprintsizis.

The strike was called off after the Ministry of Labour's Andreas Nefeloudis and Ministry of Transport's Theopisti Perka agreed to negotiate with the union on August 25.

Miners in Rostov, Russia on hunger strike over pay

On Tuesday, more than 100 miners in the Rostov region in Russia began a hunger strike to demand the payment of 300 million rubles (US\$4.6 million) in wage arrears. Some of the miners have not been paid since May 2015.

Some 2,000 miners are involved in the dispute with the Kingcoal group of companies. The workers are employed at the Rostovskaya, Almaznaya, Zamchalovskaya and Gukovskaya mines, which are currently declared bankrupt.

It is reported that 156 workers are owed over 17 million roubles (US\$261,000) in unpaid wages dating from March to December 2015.

Kingcoal's General Director Vladimir Pozhidayev is involved in a criminal case over the nonpayment of wages and "abuse of authority for personal gain" and could face 13 years in prison.

UK: Conductors at Southern rail to walk out for 48 hours

Workers on the private rail franchise Southern trains are to stage a 48-hour strike on September 7 and 8 in an ongoing dispute over the role of guards.

Southern, owned by Govia Thameslink, is the largest of the UK's private franchises and runs many services in southern England, including routes into London.

On August 21, Southern GTR imposed a plan to remove train door control from conductors as part of its plan to impose Driver Only Operations (DOO). Conductors' jobs are threatened as the company begins the recruitment of "on-board supervisors," with drivers now tasked with opening and closing train carriage doors.

The workers are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, who have worked to sabotage opposition to workers to DOO nationally. Earlier this month, three days into the planned five-day Southern GTR conductors strike, the RMT national executive called off the action after management agreed to negotiations. The shutdown of the strike without the slightest retreat by management came after the RMT offered a three-month no-strike arrangement to enable negotiations “without preconditions.”

Just days before, the RMT called off conductor strikes over DOO at the ScotRail company in Scotland. The RMT called the strike only after it was unable to secure further talks over DOO.

Middle East

Iranian steel workers protest unpaid wages

Workers at the Alborz steel plant, in northern Iran, protested Monday, August 22, over 7 months of unpaid wages and bonuses from 2015.

After the workers gathered in front of the steel plant, they were told by their employer that they would be fired if they did not return to work and write a letter promising not to stage further protests.

Israeli port workers set to strike

Industrial action is to take place at the Haifa and Ashdod ports, which combined handle 90 percent of Israel’s imports and exports.

The Histadrut labour union, which declared the dispute, said it was dissatisfied with the pace of implementation of a new labour agreement for port workers.

A series of strikes have already been conducted over the issue. If this strike goes ahead, it will occur around three weeks before the beginning of the Tishrei Chagim, when increased cargo of imported food and other items for the holiday season are due to arrive.

Action by Iraqi oil workers cuts crude oil supplies

On August 17 and 18, hundreds of workers struck the Iraqi oilfield of Taq Taq in dispute over pay and staff cuts, iraqoilreport.com reported. The action resulted in the cutting of crude oil supplies to one of the region’s main refineries.

Algerian municipal workers in national strike

The National Federation for municipal workers organized a national strike Monday to pressure the government to respond to their demands and to review the general law of public employment.

Africa

Mozambique sugar workers pay demands denied

Workers employed by the Xinavane Sugar Company (XSC) in Mozambique ended their strike for a 26 percent wage increase.

The strike was settled through the offices of the Labour Ministry’s arbitration services and the sugar workers union. The 26 percent claim was reduced to a paltry 5 percent pay increase. The resolution covered 120 sugar cane transport-sector workers ending the strike August 18.

Around 460 workers, mainly casuals, were also given a 3 percent “sugar campaign allowance.” These workers are producing for small sugar cane employers under the umbrella of XSC. These companies are encouraged to produce more, with funding from the European Development Fund, to fill spare capacity of the largest sugar producer in Mozambique, Tongaat-Hulett, also the largest employer in the country. The Labour Ministry highlighted the success of the arbitration services, since they were established in 2009, in being responsible for reducing the number of strikes.

Namibian teachers prepare to strike over wage claim

A vote is being put to the Namibian National Teachers Union next week on whether to go on strike over an 8 percent wage claim.

The strike will include school staff from principals through to inspectors. Their demand is being countered by a government offer of 5 percent. The teachers union’s claim, which they say represents the rate of inflation, has been undermined by a settlement by the Namibian Public Service Union that accepted 5 percent.

The government is claiming it cannot afford the increase owing to the slowdown in the economy.

Nigerian workers demonstrate against unpaid and reduced wages

The Nigerian National Labour Congress (NLC) organised demonstrations of leading members in several states on August 23 over outstanding wages.

More than 20 of Nigeria’s 36 states owe wages to public sector workers and are currently paying wages at a reduced rate, in some cases by 50 percent.

Nigeria’s National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has banned a strike and protest over the killing of two workers in a wages dispute in the Nasawara State capital. The workers were killed when state police opened fire on a TUC and NLC delegation to the governor’s State House to discuss outstanding wages. The ban is being carried out on the pretext that the strike and demonstration will interfere with an investigation going on into the killings.

The executive secretary of the NHRC called on the law enforcement agencies to ensure their strike ban directive is heeded. The NLC has called the demonstrations, fearing the build-up of workers’ opposition to the wage cuts and unpaid wages, while they have been crucial in implementing them.

South African Telkom workers oppose no-work, no-pay demands

South Africa’s Telkom workers are threatening to increase the impact of their strike unless the company pays their wages on time. The

Communications Workers Union says Telkom has a contractual responsibility to pay the wages.

The company is set to implement a no-work no-pay diktat against 870 of its striking workers. (Some South African contracts cover pay while workers are on strike.) Telekom says it will not pay August pay until September, that is, after an audit of who is striking and who is off sick.

According to the company, those that are on strike will get paid "late." The communications workers came out on strike August 1 for an 11 percent pay increase and rejected a 6 percent bonus scheme put forward by the company.

Swaziland newspaper workers strike over zero-pay offer

Workers employed by the Swaziland newspaper *Swazi Observer* (SO) have spent several days protesting at a distance outside the company premises. A court ruling was passed to restrict picketing outside the paper's premises.

The paper, owned by the Swazi monarch, is resisting demands by its employees for a wage increase and improvement in conditions. The Media Workers Union of Swaziland (MWUS) has spent several months trying to negotiate an agreement that has had no impact.

The workers want the right to join a union of their choice, oppose nepotic appointments, reliable equipment to work with, appropriate medical aid, end of intimidation of union members and the removal of the managing director (MD). The paper has refused a pay increase and the MD sought to intimidate the staff by saying he will plant company spies in all departments.

Zimbabwe hospital workers protest against unpaid wages

Zimbabwe hospital staff went on strike August 19 at the West End hospital in Harare, the country's capital. Nursing staff and ancillary workers embarked on a strike and protested outside the hospital demanding unpaid wages.

The hospital is part of Premier Services Medical Investment (PSMI), a private consortium, employing around 1,700 staff, all of whom are affected by non-payment of wages. The West End staff was owed four months wages.



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