

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 September 2016

Lufthansa cabin crew vote on new pay deal

Cabin crew voted in favour of a new three-year contract, ending one of the longest disputes with German airline Lufthansa.

Flight attendants who are members of the Independent Flight Attendants Organization (UFO) trade union and pilots, have held a series of strikes in the last two years as disputes over pay, benefits and retirement were aggravated by concerns over Lufthansa's plans to convert its Eurowings unit into a low-cost, cheap labour division.

The contract raises cabin-crew pay by one percent as of October and two percent effective from January 2018, on top of a 2.2 percent increase this year.

The retirement plan is to shift to a defined-contribution programme, which specifies how much is put into an employee's pension, from a defined-benefit system, which specifies how much a retiree is paid.

Lufthansa formally agreed through 2021 not to fire flight attendants should it intend to reduce the workforce.

The agreement between the airline and UFO was originally reached in July. Lufthansa's talks with the pilots ended without result on August 12, with the company saying it still saw scope for agreement with the pilots union.

Reuters noted at the time, "An agreement with around 19,000 cabin crew would mean that Lufthansa could now focus on a deal with its pilots on pay and conditions as it battles to reduce its labour costs."

UK university staff to be balloted in pay dispute

Nine thousand staff working in universities across the UK are being balloted for industrial action over their employers' 1.1 percent pay offer.

The ballot of members of the Unite trade union in the sector opened Tuesday and closes September 21. Among those being balloted are technicians, laboratory assistants, administrators and facilities management staff.

Successive years of below-inflation pay deals have seen the pay of university staff shrink by up to 16 percent since 2012, while, according to Unite: "university heads and senior managers have enjoyed bumper pay hikes of around 5.1 per cent on average." The average pay package for vice chancellors stands at £274,000.

The union is urging the employers to negotiate a pay offer to avert potential industrial action that would result in disruption at the start of the autumn academic term.

England's junior doctors plan week of all-out strikes

Junior doctors in England are set to take part in five consecutive strike days this month in opposition to a new contract. The all-out strikes will take place between September 12 and September 16, with more dates to follow.

The British Medical Association (BMA) announced the strikes Wednesday after its members rejected the deal brokered between the union and government earlier this year.

While forced to call the latest strikes due to hostility to the inferior contract by its membership, Ellen McCourt, the BMA junior doctors' committee chair, stated they would be called off if the government agrees not to impose the contract. The government is to impose the contract beginning in October.

In a long-running and bitter dispute, junior doctors have already staged six strike days this year, including two all-out stoppages.

Industrial action was put on hold in May when the union and Conservative government went through the conciliation service Acas. This resulted in an inferior new contract in which the government made no concessions. None-the-less BMA leaders encouraged members to accept it.

Put to the vote, 58 percent of junior doctors rejected the contract, prompting the resignation of the BMA junior doctor leader Johann Malawana.

The treachery of the BMA leadership enabled a Department of Health spokesman to respond to this week's announcement by stating, "the BMA must be the first union in history to call for strike action against a deal they themselves negotiated and said was a good one."

Strike ballot called off by UK rail unions

A ballot for industrial action by more than 1,000 train drivers working for Southern and Gatwick Express—which threatened to bring services to a standstill across the network—was called off this week by the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF).

Drivers are protesting the parent company of Southern—Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR)—who last month introduced driver-only operated (DOO) trains on the service, attacking the role of guards on trains and burdening drivers with additional workload and safety responsibilities.

ASLEF, the train drivers' union, planned to announce the ballot result on Wednesday. On Tuesday, just 24 hours before the ballot result was due to be announced, Aslef confirmed its ballot had been "suspended." Media reports said that four out of five drivers backed strikes before the voting was halted, with nine out of ten supporting other forms of industrial action.

The right-wing London-based *Evening Standard* pointed out: "By law, a union must give seven days' notice of industrial action—meaning Aslef

could have timed a strike to coincide with the action planned by guards for Wednesday and Thursday next week.

“This would have brought the vast majority of the Southern network to a standstill.”

The Transport Network web site reported it understood “that GTR had contacted the union to challenge the legality of the ballot. The company has already obtained two high court injunctions against ASLEF this year.”

A GTR spokesman said: “We welcome the decision by Aslef to suspend their ballot notice over a ‘breakdown in industrial relations’ and that it will not take any further action in relation to the ballot notice, or the ballot.

“We are continuing to work with Aslef to address their concerns that led to the dispute.”

In June, rail conductors on the busiest routes across Scotland and southern England held a 24-hour strike against plans to remove all safety duties from train conductors and impose driver-only operation (DOO). Britain’s private rail companies plan to eliminate the remaining 5,700 train conductors’ jobs across the UK and impose DOO on all train drivers.

A 48-hour walkout over DOO imposition by hundreds of Southern guards who are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union, is scheduled to proceed on September 7 and 8.

London courier, delivery drivers plan protests at restaurants in pay dispute

Delivery drivers employed by UberEATS are planning protests outside popular London restaurants in pursuit of an hourly pay rate to match the “London Living Wage” (LLW).

UberEATS is proposing a base rate of £6.60 to £7.60 per delivery rather than an hourly wage. The LLW is currently £9.40 per hour.

Drivers argue that current working conditions mean some are logged-in all day and make themselves “available” for work, but get no shifts.

UberEATS has been accused of firing of one of the main campaigners opposing the proposed contract.

On August 6, the drivers took to major London streets to campaign for higher pay. The protest, organised by United Voices of the World union, saw moped drivers and cyclists congregate outside Uber’s London HQ in Grosvenor Gardens.

Dublin Bus workers plan six strike days

Drivers and other bus workers at the partially state owned Dublin Bus Company are to strike in three separate 48-hour work stoppages this month.

The bus workers are to take action on September 8-9, 15-16 and 23-24, announced the Siptu unions and the National Bus and Railway Union (NBRU).

The strikes are expected to affect up to 334,000 Dublin Bus passengers every day.

In July, Dublin Bus staff overwhelmingly rejected proposals from the Labour Court for a cost-of-living pay increase for each employee of 2.75 percent a year for a three-year term, back-dated to January 2016.

The unions said members were seeking a 15 percent pay increase over a three-year period and a payment in lieu of a six percent pay increase, which was deferred in 2008.

The NBRU said this would represent “a building block towards our

claim for parity” between bus and tram drivers.

Dublin cinema ushers protest pay cut

Staff at the Savoy cinema on O’Connell Street, Dublin held a protest outside the building last week to oppose plans to cut the pay of ushers from €12 an hour to €9 an hour.

SIPTU union industrial organiser Graham Macken said, “Staff have refused to accept this cut in pay and the company has now contracted security workers to carry out the duties previously performed by directly employed staff.”

In July, ushers at the cinema were told that they would be subject to a compulsory redundancy process, but affected staff, represented by Siptu, said that they were unwilling to comply.

The Savoy is among the capital’s most recognisable cinemas. It opened in 1929 and regularly hosts the Irish premieres of box office films.

Dutch court upholds strike ban on KLM ground staff

KLM ground crew will not be allowed to strike at Schiphol airport until September 5, the Amsterdam court ruled August 26. They were responding to an appeal filed by the FNV trade union.

The court upheld the strike ban implemented by the Haarlem court two weeks ago.

The *Netherland Times* said of the case, “The Amsterdam court ruled that the interests of KLM outweigh those of the union in this case. According to the court, the planned strikes could ‘very seriously disrupt’ air traffic at Schiphol during the summer vacation rush. The likely consequences of a strike for KLM, Schiphol and thousands of travellers are so large that it is unacceptable.”

The union is calling for a wage increase of one percent with a minimum of €75 a month, no fewer vacation or senior days and more permanent contracts for temporary workers.

Slovak teachers unions calls “graded strike”

Teachers across Slovakia are to take industrial action over the amount of funds allocated to the education sector in the draft state budget for next year.

The strike was called by the Initiative of Slovak Teachers (ISU). What the union described as a “graded strike” would begin on September 13.

According to the daily *Pravda*, the ISU “insists on a 25-percent raise, which should mean €150-300 more on a monthly basis for teachers. The ministries of education and finance, however, are currently in talks regarding only about a six-percent hike, which would bring teachers only €36-70 a month.

“ISU demands a €140 increase in yearly salaries for all educators this year and an additional €400 million in funding to cover the basic needs of the education sector.”

Slovakia has witnessed a series of protests and a general strike this year.

Israeli port strike looms

On September 8, industrial action is to take place at the Haifa and Ashdod ports (which combined handle 90 percent of Israel's imports and exports). The strike is over the non-implementation of a new labour agreement for port workers.

A series of strikes have already been conducted over the issue. If this strike proceeds, 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.

This week, Shraga Brosh, head of the Manufacturers' Association of Israel, sent an urgent letter to Finance Minister Moshe Kachlon asking him to intervene to stop the planned strike. The letter said that without intervention or a last-minute settlement, the strike will cause hundreds of millions of shekels worth of damage to Israel's economy.

Brosh wrote, "Such a strike, whose length is anyone's guess, will bring about untold damage to Israel's economy and its ability to compete, further deteriorating the country's growth rate. It will also make it harder for Israel to compete in international markets, in an era when it is getting more difficult to compete altogether."

Iranian former factory workers protest dismissal

A group of former factory workers and their families gathered to protest at the entrance gate to the city of Dehloran August 21, reported the government-affiliated *Nassim Dehloran* news agency.

The workers were protesting their dismissal from Dehloran Cement Factory last year, which has left many unemployed and unable to find work.

The dismissals came after 15 months of unpaid wages, with many families faced with financial hardship, and forced to sell their belongings to survive.

Many of the former workers had at least seven years' experience within the company.

The Dehloran Cement Factory said that they would only accept workers back on a temporary three-month contract.

Angolan port workers strike to demand four months wages

On August 23, more than 2,000 port workers struck at Angola's largest port, Lobito. The strike was instigated by the non-payment of wages for the last four months by the states port authority.

Lobito, a state-run port, is about 400km south of capital Luanda and handles mainly crude oil.

The port authority reneged on a promise to pay workers wages for July. As the strike began Port company spokesperson Domingo Isata said, "The company is aware of this situation and we are going to quickly pay them at least one month's salary."

The port claims it is suffering financial restrictions, although the country has overtaken Nigeria and become the largest oil producer in Africa, at 1.78 million barrels per day.

Power workers in Ghana oppose privatisation

Ghanaian's power supply workers began strike August 24 to over the privatization of the country's electricity provision. Power workers stopped work between 8am and 11am in an attempt to forestall the shift the utility to a private provider.

Employees of the utility are concerned over threats to their jobs. The privatisation is taking place under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US sponsored project with their aid of half a billion dollars.

The Ghana government is contributing around \$37.5 million with an expectation of drawing in over \$4.5 billion of private investment. The ministry responsible for power threatened its employees with punitive action while proclaiming the strike illegal.

The strike was called by the Public Utilities Workers Union, with the Trades Union Congress also backing it.

TUC Secretary General, Dr. Yaw Baah said the union was not opposed in principle to MCC and called for the PUWC to be allowed a greater role in collaborating with the government. Baah stated, "The [PUWU] union is saying they are not against the MCC. The union is saying that let us change the form and that they are ready to take the challenge. Give them three years to turn round and give them the same playing field. Why is that we are not giving them that opportunity?"

Nurses strike over reneged deal in Kenya

Nurses at Migori county hospital Kenya are carrying through a threat to strike over promotions. Health workers at the referral hospital issued a notice to strike August 15, before calling it off in response to management's agreement to implement promised promotions.

The strike is set to go ahead as management has recorded workers' promotions but not increased pay accordingly. A civil service union spokesman stated that they would call a countywide strike if their demands were not resolved by Friday.

Togo phosphates miners strike

Phosphate miners in Togo began a two-day strike last week to demand better pay and conditions. A raft of grievances with the New Phosphate Company of Togo brought the miners out on August 10, without any response from management.

The 1,500 workers want their pay grades aligned with the national system, as well as bonuses, housing and transport benefits. Negotiations over the demands, including better industrial workwear, date back to 2013. Contracts for mining phosphates were awarded to a Chinese/Israeli company in 2015 to mine 5 million tons a year.

Phosphates are Togo's major currency earner, bringing in 40 percent of foreign income.

Zimbabwe bank workers protest inadequate termination payments

A protest took place outside BancABC offices in Harare, Zimbabwe on Tuesday, over redundancy packages. Employees at the bank demonstrated in support of fellow workers who were dismissed when the bank took advantage of a labour law introduced in 2015.

The law allowed employers to dismiss employees without termination

pay. In the case of BancABC workers, the law was used against 71 of its staff, leaving them in debt to their employer. Court action was taken against them by the bank for recovery.

The 200 protesting workers demanded a change in the way compensation is paid. The bank employees union is looking to negotiate retrenchment packages rather than them being imposed as at present.

Wine producers in South Africa strike over wage demand

A strike and boycott is underway at Robertson Winery, South Africa in demand of a wage increase.

The strike commenced after discussion broke down on August 25 over a demand by the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union for a pay increase of 57 percent. Robertson Wines offered eight percent.

The winery employs around 300 workers with most of them responding to the stay away. The company claimed production is continuing at 30 percent of capacity with shops being supplied from stock. The union has initiated a boycott at stores leafleting such outlets as Pick-n-Pay, Shoprite and the like.

Coal miners strike for wage increase in South Africa

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members downed tools last week at Sasol coal mining operation. Sasol is located in Secunda, Mpumalanga in South Africa.

Negotiations broke down August 25 and 1,600 miners walked out demanding a wage increase and improved allowances. AMCU is campaigning for a wage of R12.500, (\$852) a month, a target set several years ago, whereas the minimum wage stands at R7.300 (\$497).

AMCU said it will continue the strike until the company puts forward a revised proposal. Sasol is the largest converter of coal into fuel oil in the world and regarded as a major component of the South African economy.



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