

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 September 2016

French nationwide strike against labour reforms

The Stalinist-aligned CGT union carried out a nationwide strike Thursday over the labour reforms imposed by the French Socialist Party government. They are calling for the law to be withdrawn.

The strike was joined by port workers, leading to the disruption of fuel supplies. Air traffic control staff supported the strike with a 24-hour action leading to flights being disrupted.

French nurses protest workloads

The CNI nurses union called a strike Wednesday to highlight work pressures that it claims contributed to the suicide of five nurses across France this summer. They demonstrated outside their union's annual conference in Marseille and urged other nurses to wear black armbands.

The French health system is faced with a €3 billion cut in spending over the next year. This is leading to staff not being replaced, increasing pressures on those remaining. As well as the five suicides, many nurses have signed off sick. CNI President Nathalie Depoire described the current situation as a pressure cooker about to explode.

UK insurance staff fight outsourcing

Staff working for the British multinational insurance and financial services company Prudential at its headquarters in Reading, southern England are holding a 24-hour strike today, with plans to hold a further 24-hour strike on September 23.

The members of the Unite trade union began an indefinite work-to-rule on August 31 to protest plans by the company to outsource around 80 back office jobs dealing with annuities to Mumbai, India.

Scottish ship builders in wildcat strike

Over 300 electricians working on the flagship aircraft carriers HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Queen Elizabeth walked off the job at Babcock's dockyard in Rosyth on Monday. The wildcat took place after a 67-year-old was allegedly banned from the site.

One of the strikers, who work as contractors for Balfour Beatty, told the *Courier* newspaper that Babcock had blacklisted the man following an

altercation with a manager at another site two years ago. He subsequently got a job with Balfour Beatty at the Rosyth site, but was prevented from accessing the site when Babcock realised who he was.

The striking workers had planned to hold a demonstration outside the dock gates on Tuesday. However, following negotiations with the unions, Babcock, and workers' representatives, it did not go ahead. The strikers returned to work on the basis that an investigation of the allegations against the barred worker would take place, with the findings to be reported next week.

Strike by bus drivers in UK capital

More than 1,000 bus drivers, engineers and controllers at their depots employed by Tower Transit in London held a 24-hour strike Monday. It was the third such strike in a dispute over changes to work rosters. Tower Transit is responsible for services on 25 of the 700 routes in London, which includes the route from Ilford to Oxford Street, said to be London's busiest. The employees are members of the Unite union.

UK post office staff in dispute

Several thousand workers employed by the Crown Post Office service that runs the main post offices on UK high streets held a 24-hour strike on Thursday. They are members of Unite and the Communication Workers' Union (CWU). The strike led to the closure of around 300 post offices.

The dispute is over job losses and the ongoing privatisation of the (still currently) state-run service. The employers also want to close its current pension scheme, which would lead to the loss of thousands of pounds for members in spite of the fact that the current pension scheme has a £100 million-plus surplus. According to the CWU, the Post Office has threatened to make trade union representatives redundant.

UK teaching assistants oppose effective pay cut

Teaching assistants employed by Durham and Derbyshire councils held a one-day strike on Wednesday. They also held a lobby of Parliament. The members of the Unison union are protesting plans by their respective councils to only pay them during the school term. This is a massive pay cut that will leave them with no income during the school holidays period.

Second 48-hour strike of bus drivers in Irish capital

Over 3,300 bus drivers employed by Dublin Bus, which provides bus transport in the Irish capital, began a second 48-hour strike on Thursday. Services came to a standstill at 9 p.m. local time on Wednesday. The members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) are seeking a 15 percent pay increase in line with drivers on the Dublin light rail system (LUAS) who secured an 18 percent pay rise over four years.

The drivers rejected by a 98 percent majority the offer of an 8.25 percent rise recommended by the Labour Court seven weeks ago. Along with other Irish workers, they have had no pay rise since the financial crisis in 2008 and the impact of the pay freeze is becoming more acute.

Further 48-hour strikes are planned for the end of next week and the following week. On Wednesday, NBRU General Secretary Dermot O'Leary said an all-out strike could not be ruled out.

Irish care staff give notice of dispute

Staff working for the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC), which provides support to children and adults with disabilities, have given notice they will begin a strike on September 21. The CRC is a charitable body that provides non-residential services to disabled people, mainly in the Dublin area.

The strike is against the CRC board's unilateral decision to stop making contributions to the pension scheme, which has a €2.3 million deficit. Although the Irish government has now allowed CRC staff to access the state-sponsored Single Public Service Pension Scheme, they are in dispute with the CRC because of their refusal to negotiate, leaving many issues unsettled.

Greek workers march to protest ongoing austerity

Around 15,000 Greek workers organised by private and public sector unions marched through the streets of Thessaloniki on Saturday. They were protesting the ongoing imposition of austerity measures carried out by the Syriza-led government at the behest of the International banks.

Prime Minister and Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras was addressing a business fair being held in the city that day.

Strike by Cypriot water staff

Twenty-two workers employed by the Limassol Water Co. at the Episkopi desalination plant began an indefinite strike on Monday. The members of the SEK and PEO unions are mounting a round-the-clock picket of the plant.

Workers have been seeking a collective bargaining agreement over the last 10 months and warned the company on August 29 of their intention to strike if there was no response. The desalination plant is normally staffed on a 24-hour basis and provides water to Limassol and the surrounding area.

March by Iraqi workers protesting wage arrears

At the end of last week Iraqi contract and daily hired workers marched through the city of Karbala protesting wages arrears amounting to as much as five months. Around 1,000 workers in the city are employed on an insecure basis.

Jordanian power workers walk out

Staff working for the Irbid District Electricity Company held a four-hour strike at the end of last week. They held a protest outside the company's offices, which was supported by the vast majority of employees. They are demanding a pay increase, higher allowances for technical expertise and an end of contract remuneration of a month's wages.

South African bus workers strike over routes

Bus workers in the town of George in South Africa's Western Cape came out on strike September 8. The company, Go George/George Link, run services on the Garden Route, a popular tourist destination. Members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union went on strike in a dispute over allocation of routes.

The company got a court order making the unprotected strike illegal. Using scab labour the company has managed to run 16 of its fleet of 85 buses.

South Africa Sasol strike continues

The strike by workers at Sasol, the South African oil and gas processing company, continues. Some 1,600 workers in the coal mining section of the industry are involved in the strike, now in its third week. The company has offered a 7 percent wage increase, which was rejected by the workers.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) has accused the company of employing an apartheid-era pay structure, whereas the company claims it has been able to come to agreements with all the other trade unions.

Sasol claims entry-level workers are paid R15, 895 (US\$1,113), but this includes allowances in the calculation, while AMCU maintain the lowest paid wages for miners at R7, 300 (US\$511). The union said it expected the company to respond to its demands by yesterday.

The company employs over 30,400 workers in 36 countries.

Zimbabwe civil servants fight massive job losses

Zimbabwe civil servants are threatening to resume their strike unless President Mugabe lifts the threat to 25,000 of their jobs and their bonuses. The finance ministry claims 97 percent of its income for the first half of the year went to public sector wages.

The Teachers Union of Zimbabwe has called on Mugabe and the finance

minister to resign. The proposed sackings, abrogation of tax allowances and bonus payments for 2016-17 are directed by the International Monetary Fund readjustment programme.

George Mushipe, spokesman for Apex Council (a collection of public sector unions), complained that the agenda is being carried out without consultation. Public sector workers came out on strike for two days last July and demonstrations and riots are becoming commonplace.

Although Mugabe moved to ban demonstrations, the courts ruled against him, concerned that the police and army wages are either late or not paid. Mugabe went on to threaten his patience has “limits and will certainly run out” and that he will take “very strong action.”

Nigerian colleges education officers demand pay arrears

Colleges across Nigeria are threatened with closures unless several months of wage arrears are paid. The Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN) contends that the government is withholding their wages to test the ground prior to doing the same to other sections of workers.



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