

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 September 2016

Strike of oil workers in Norway

Over 300 Norwegian oil service workers came out on strike Wednesday after talks over pay broke down. They are members of the Industri Energi union employed by the oil servicing companies Schlumberger, Halliburton, Baker Hughes, Oceaneering and Oceaneering Asset Integrity. The servicing companies are contracted by the oil production companies.

In total, the union has some 6,500 members working for around 30 oil servicing companies and has threatened to escalate the strike if the companies refuse to negotiate a new pay deal. The oil servicing companies say they are being squeezed by the big oil production companies as a result of the fall in the price of oil.

UK air pilots vote to strike

Pilots working for Easy Jet have voted by a 96 percent majority with an 88 percent turnout to strike. They are members of the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA).

The pilots are concerned that current working patterns are leading to fatigue and safety concerns. In spite of the overwhelming vote, BALPA is keen to reach a settlement with Easy Jet and reported it has been made a “last-minute” offer from the company to resolve the issue.

Strike by underground rail workers in UK capital

Rail staff working on the Hammersmith & City and the Circle lines held a one-day strike last Friday. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT). The strike was in response to management’s breaking of agreements on working practices and their heavy-handed attitude.

UK rail freight drivers strike

Train drivers employed by the heavy freight transport company Freightliner Heavy Haul (FLHH) came out on a 24-hour strike on Thursday. FLHH is one of the largest UK freight companies. The drivers, members of the RMT, voted by a 75 percent margin for the strike in pursuit of a pay rise in line with the cost of living.

FLHH reports that since last year it has seen a drop in its coal carrying

business and as a result has made some drivers and ground staff redundant.

Planned protest by Irish nurses

Irish nurses represented by the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) and the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) are to hold a protest outside the Irish Dail (parliament) in Dublin on September 27.

It is to oppose the renegeing on an agreement over the payment of incremental credit to graduating nurses. Incremental credit is paid in recognition for previous relevant work experience. Last December, the three unions reached an agreement with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health. The agreement was to restore incremental credit to nurses completing the 36-week Nursing Internship from 2011 onwards. However, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) then ruled it would only apply to nurses who graduated in 2016 onwards.

Striking Italian logistics worker killed on picket line

Abdelssalam Eldanf, an Egyptian-born 53-year-old, was killed while on the picket line at the GLS logistic plant in Piacenza last week. He was one of two pickets hit by a truck trying to leave the plant. He was picketing against the SEAM Company, which fired 37 temporary staff and some permanent staff after they raised issues at the plant. SEAM had been contracted to run the GLS plant. Initially, SEAM agreed to rehire 13 of the sacked employees, but then reneged on the agreement. The workers came out on strike in protest. Eldanf was a permanent worker at the plant for 14 years.

According to the pickets, the chief of staff at the plant instructed the truck driver to drive at the picket line at speed. Following the death, demonstrations were held in several cities including Naples and workers occupied the railway station in Piacenza.

Strike threat by Dutch rail staff

Railworkers employed by the Dutch passenger operator NS, members of the FNV union, have given the company an ultimatum due to expire today over the company’s plans to get rid of the second rail conductor on double-

decker trains. Single-conductor trains have been timetabled to begin operation next year.

Spanish orchestra members strike

Members of the Filarmonica de Gran Canarias walked out on strike last Friday following a 68 to 14 vote. The action is not supported by the CCOO union. The orchestra is under threat of closure by the local government.

Strike by Middle East UNRWA staff

The union representing United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff employed in the Gaza strip, occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan went on strike for several hours Monday. The strike affected the UNRWA main office in Gaza strip as well as health centres, environmental health offices and UNRWA-affiliated schools. They were protesting low wages and staff shortages.

Tunisian hotel staff strike

Hotel workers held a strike last week to demand a 6 percent pay increase in face of rises in the cost of living. The Tunisian Hotel Trade Federation representing hotel owners complained the strike would have a negative impact on the tourist industry, coming on top of a fall in tourists following the beach massacre at Sousse last year.

Ongoing strike at Saudi hospital

Hundreds of staff including surgeons, doctors, nurses and admin staff and comprising Saudi, Asian and Western employees at a prestigious private hospital in the Saudi Eastern province have been on strike since Sunday. Union activity is banned in Saudi Arabia, and the strike was organised using social media including Facebook and Twitter. On Monday, more than 100 staff picketed outside the hospital.

The staff have not been paid for more than three months. The hospital is part of the Saad group, whose main interests are in the construction business.

Ghanaian rail staff fight salary arrears

Rail workers organised by the Ghana Railway Workers Union (GRWU) are determined to fight for salary arrears they are owed.

They pledged to go on an indefinite strike from September 12 until the arrears were paid by the Ministry of Finance. The National Labour Commission (NLC) intervened and ordered the ministers of transport and finance and the chief of staff at the rail company to hold a meeting on

September 15 to resolve the issue. However, the minister of finance failed to turn up to the meeting. Rail workers are now resolved to defy the NLC and go ahead with the strike.

Strike by Kenyan water workers

Staff working for the Kilifi-Mariakani Water and Sewerage Company in the town of Kilifi walked out on strike Tuesday. More than 100 strikers blockaded the company's office in the town. The Kenya Food and Alliance Workers Union is calling for the company's board to be overhauled, accusing it of financial mismanagement and of harassing junior staff.

Strike of Kenyan medics

This week, nearly 500 doctors in the cities of Nairobi, Migori and Nakuru came out on strike. Their list of demands includes a salary increase, better working conditions, more scope for promotion and paying wage arrears. They are represented by the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union.

Around 250 of the doctors who went on strike in Nairobi are six months in arrears of wages. In addition, they have not been paid car and mortgage allowances due to them. They suspended their strike following a court order to return to work.

Strike of Nigerian academics

Academics at the Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, came out on indefinite strike Monday. Among their demands are the payment of five months' salary arrears and allowance, a retirement pension and a review of conditions of service

Iron ore miners in Sierra Leone walk out

Hundreds of miners employed at the Chinese-owned Shandong Steel iron ore mine in Tonkolili District walked off the job last Saturday. Among their grievances are the low level of severance packages offered by the company. According to the workers, social security benefit deductions had not been passed on to the authorities.

South African wine workers continue their strike

More than 200 workers at the Robertson Winery Company in Western Cape province have been on strike for a month. The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union is seeking a wage increase. They are currently paid between R2,400 (US\$180) and R3,000

(US\$220) a month but are seeking a R8,500 (US\$625)-a-month living wage and for the company to be more amenable to the union.

The striking workers are employed in the winery's production plant, not in the vineyards. The company has been able to maintain production using scab labour and drafting temporary employees.



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