

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

21 October 2016

Demonstration in France in support of jailed Goodyear workers

On Wednesday, around 5,000 workers and supporters demonstrated outside the court building in Amiens in northeastern France. They gathered in support of eight former Goodyear workers who were in court to appeal prison sentences handed down to them.

The eight were charged with taking two managers hostage at the Goodyear factory in 2014, after the company announced the factory was being closed down, losing 1,173 jobs. While on strike, the angry workers had prevented the managers leaving the premises after they had announced the closure.

The trade unions later cut a deal with management to end the strike and accept the plant closure.

Air crew at London City airport strike

Air cabin crew working for CityJet, operating out of London City airport, began a five-day strike Thursday.

The Unite union members voted by more than 80 percent for the action. They are opposing cost-cutting measures by CityJet, affecting roster agreements, pay and allowances that, according to the union, would lead to some of their members losing up to 50 percent of their income.

Cityjet mainly carries business passengers.

Irish secondary teachers set to strike

Secondary school teachers belonging to the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) are due to hold a series of seven one-day strikes over the next three months, with the first taking place on October 27.

They voted by an 80 percent majority to strike in opposition to newly qualified teachers being taken on at a lower pay rate, and the deterioration of terms and conditions for all teachers.

The dispute will hit the nearly 400 voluntary secondary schools hardest as they are staffed almost exclusively by ASTI members. Other schools will also be affected.

In addition to the seven days of strikes, from November 7 teachers will refuse to carry out supervision duties during breaks and dinner periods. This could be utilised as a means to break any strike. Using health and safety considerations, it is reported that schools may draft other staff to carry out the supervisory roles.

Maltese court workers protest

Last week, Maltese court workers began limited protest action, such as refusing to send or read emails, answer phones and other administrative duties.

Clerks and registrars are seeking a collective agreement over working conditions and against pay discrimination relating to education levels. Court marshals and messengers are protesting staff shortages and the resulting overwork, as well as other issues. The action was called by the UHM union.

Industrial action planned by Romanian subway staff

Staff employed by the Bucharest subway operator, Metrorex, are threatening to strike after the latest round of talks between the USLM union and the company broke down.

The workers are seeking a new collective work agreement after their current one expires October 23.

In August, around 500 staff working for Alstom, the company that maintains the subway system, threatened to strike if they were not given a renewed collective work agreement—including an 8 percent pay increase.

Action by London journalists continues

Journalists working for Newsquest, which publishes a series of local newspapers and online journals covering the south London area, have taken further strike action.

The journalists came out on strike at the beginning of the week and planned to return to work yesterday. They subsequently voted, however, to continue their strike until Wednesday of next week.

Newsquest has put 27 of its 29 staff on notice of redundancy and plans to get rid of 11 posts, leaving remaining staff to cover the roles. The company is seeking to slash production costs. The journalists are members of the National Union of Journalists.

UK conductors at Southern Rail extend strike

Conductors working for Southern GTR (Gavia Thameslink Railways) came out on a three-day strike Tuesday. This was the latest strike to

protest the company's plans to extend the use of Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains, which is aimed at cutting out the safety role of conductors.

They have been fighting the proposals since April and have held several strikes since. The company has now issued three-month job termination notices, which will be enacted if they do not sign up to the new contracts by the end of the year.

The conductors are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union.

24-hour walkout by postal staff in southern English towns

Around 250 postal workers in Luton and Leagrave in southern England held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. They are protesting the suspension of colleagues and an excessive workload.

The members of the Communications Workers Union took the action following a 90 percent vote in favour.

Refuse collectors in Sheffield, England hold second 24-hour strike

Refuse collection staff employed by multi-national company Veolia, which has a contract with Sheffield City Council, held a further 24-hour strike Monday in an ongoing pay dispute.

According to the refuse collectors union, GMB, Veolia brought in scabs from its operation in Haringey, London to break the strike.

Staff at UK Equality and Human Rights Commission vote to oppose job cuts

Staff working for the Equality and Human Rights Commission have voted by an 80 percent majority to strike, along with other forms of action. The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members are opposed to plans by the commission to push through compulsory redundancies, as a result of budget cuts. The PCS has not yet set a strike date and is seeking further talks with the commission.

Israeli bus drivers postpone threatened strike

A threat to strike by drivers working for the Egged Israel Transport Cooperative Society has been postponed until after upcoming national holidays.

Egged, a cooperative, is Israel's largest coach company and covers most of the inter-city routes throughout the country.

Drivers are protesting a delay by the Ministries of Finance and Transport in signing a subsidy agreement. Egged says it requires an additional 18 years of subsidy, above other bus companies, in order to finance the retirement income of its drivers.

National strike in Algeria

Workers in Algeria struck on Monday in a nationwide stoppage. According to the Arab Trade Union Confederation, 17 trade unions called the strike last month, with two of the unions later withdrawing. The Confederation claimed the strike would be one of the largest in 25 years.

Workers taking part in the strike included those in the health and education sectors. They are demanding decent pension provision and the protection of low-paid workers against price rises.

Swaziland environmental workers threaten walkout

Staff working for the Environment Health Service are threatening to strike in pursuit of a pay increase and overtime payments. The country's 20 health officers want their pay reviewed and overtime paid at 25 percent extra.

They demand an increase in staff numbers, saying that currently they have to cover work normally done by support assistants. They would also like a review of housing and transport allowances.

The health officers union, the Swaziland Environmental Health Association, said its members will strike if the government does not respond within the next week.

South African winery workers seek arbitration

South African wine producing workers at Robertson Winery are taking their nearly two-month-long strike to arbitration. The workers are striking for a minimum wage of R8500 (\$611) a month, as opposed to the Winery offer of around R4000 (\$288).

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration is now negotiating with the Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural and Allied Workers union and management.

South African motor industry employers challenge union

The South African Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMIO) has stopped negotiations with the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA). The union is calling for a 9 percent pay increase, while the employer's organisation is offering seven.

The RMIO has presented a non-resolution notice, which gives the union the opportunity to call a strike. A strike could involve 300,000 workers in the industry.

In September, NUMSA settled with the other employer's organisation, the Automobile Manufacturers Employers' Organisation, on a 10 percent wage increase for the first year, in a three-year deal.

A strike by RMIO workers would affect the delivery of components to the car manufacturers, close filling stations and have a widespread impact.

Striking Nigeria teachers and staff face being replaced

Striking teachers and non-academic staff in Bayelsa state, Nigeria are to be declared "ghost workers"—meaning they are registered but do not work

for the employer.

Although the teachers have not been paid for several months, and have been on strike since the education year started, the Nigerian Union of Teachers is demanding they return to work.

The union, in league with the state's Ministry of Education, is overseeing the termination of its members' jobs and their replacement by scabs.

The union called for strikers to return to work on Monday and the Ministry of Education inaugurated its victimisation programme Tuesday.

The registration of ghost workers is a widely used method in Nigeria by officials to claim non-existent workers' wages.

Kenyan county medical centre workers strike

Strikes are underway at medical centers across Busia County, Kenya. Medical staff are taking action in response to broken agreements, particularly over promotions of staff.

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses called the strike last Wednesday over promises of promotion to medical officers with between 10 and 15 years' service. Promotions should have been activated in June as per agreement in May. Other issues of contention are poor conditions of work, including lack of facilities, i.e., maternity beds, and inadequate staffing levels.

Nurses walkout in Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya

A strike was held Thursday by nurses belonging to the Kenyan National Union of Nurses in Tharaka-Nithi County. The strike was over unpaid salaries, lack of promotions and other issues.

Some of the other issues include the return of unpaid dues like National Health Insurance payments and loan repayments, and a halt to staff being illegally transferred.

Kenyan airline pilots call off planned action

Kenyan Airline pilots have suspended a strike planned for Tuesday.

Cabin crew workers unhappy at their pay and conditions, called in sick on Sunday, effectively withdrawing their labour and grounding several planned flights.

The Minister of Transport claimed the action of the Kenya Airlines Pilots Association was sabotage and applied to the courts for an injunction to make the strike illegal. Although the union said it would ignore the injunction, the pilots were sent back to work.

The crews are demanding the same pay and conditions as their counterparts at the airline. The workers were employed by the national airline until 2012, when work was casualised and the staff became casual employees of a company called Career Directions.



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