

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 January 2017

Europe

UK rail staff at Arriva North to be balloted

Members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union working for Arriva Rail North are to be balloted between January 10 and 25 for a strike or action short of a strike. Workers have already rejected Arriva North's low pay increase offer.

British Airways cabin crew announce 48-hour strike

Cabin crew working for British Airways (BA) mixed fleet are to hold a 48-hour strike starting January 10. The low-paid Unite union members have rejected BA's pay offer.

According to Unite, British Airways management is refusing to hold constructive talks with the union.

Prior to a planned strike by BA crews on December 25-26, Unite called off the action in order to recommend the pay deal the workers have now rejected.

Staff at Harrods store in London threaten strike over tips

Around 480 hospitality staff at the London Harrods store are in dispute over its policy of only passing on 25 percent of tips given by customers to the staff—with Harrods keeping 75 percent of the tip.

The workers are members of the United Voices of the World (UVW) union.

Following complaints, the store upped the amount given to staff but according to the UVW, the increase is insufficient. The UVW said it was considering balloting the staff for possible strike action.

UK: Planned six-day strike by Southern rail staff reduced to three by union

Train drivers working for Govia Thameslink Southern Rail were due to begin a six-day strike on January 9. This has now been reduced to a three-day strike on January 10, 11 and 13 by the Aslef train drivers' union.

Aslef said there will be a further three days of strikes on January 24, 25 and 27. The long-running dispute, which also involves members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) union that represents conductors, is over extending the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. The drivers are also imposing an on-going overtime ban.

More Irish health staff to be balloted for strike

Following the announcement that the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) would be balloting its health support members this month, Unite has announced it is likely to hold a ballot of its members.

The ballot will be among support staff including health care assistants, cleaners, porters, kitchen and catering staff.

At issue is the refusal of the employer, the Health Service Executive (HSE), to extend the concessions given to nurses and some health staff to all health support staff in line under the HSE National Evaluation process. This evaluation process was the subject of previous agreements with the unions—the Lansdowne Road and Haddington Road agreements.

Strike by refuse collectors in Portuguese capital

Refuse collectors employed by the Valorsul company came out on strike between Christmas and New Year on two separate occasions in Lisbon. The first was on December 26, with a further 32-hour strike beginning December 27.

Strikers demanded that the company respect their collective bargaining agreement and provide a pay increase. Workers are also opposed to the performance evaluation measures imposed by the company.

Valorsul is responsible for collecting domestic and commercial refuse in the Greater and Western Lisbon areas of the Portuguese capital.

Greek supermarket staff consider strike action

Staff working for the bankrupt Greek supermarket chain Marinopoulos are considering taking strike action over non-payment of December's wages.

Union representatives met with supermarket management Tuesday. The company told them it had run out of money and was awaiting the decision of a court as to whether it would allow the supermarket chain to be taken

over by rival chain Sklavenitis. If the takeover went ahead, it would lead to job losses.

Sklavenitis has expressed an interest but so far has not been prepared to put any money into the Marinopoulos chain. It has until February 14 to decide whether it will go ahead with its bid.

Middle East

Egyptian food processing workers arrested

Twelve employees of the IFFCO cooking oil producer, based in the industrial zone in the Gulf of Suez, were arrested while holding a sit-in at their work place.

Two of the workers had previously been arrested for calling the strike.

The sit-in was in response to a 20 percent pay rise for the manual workers and 15 percent for administration and management staff. The workers insist that a 20 percent pay increase on their measly pay represents only a small increase compared to the 15 percent increase for already better paid administrative and managerial staff. They are instead seeking a lump sum payment to bring their wages more in line with the administrative staff and managers.

One day strike by Israeli bus drivers

Drivers working for Egged, which provides bus services in Jerusalem, held a one-day strike Wednesday. Histadrut, the labour federation declared the strike after the company cut the premium paid to drivers in the capital by 6.5 percent. The company in turn blamed the Finance Ministry for delays in payment of subsidies to it.

Partial strike by Israeli school teachers

The Teachers Union, representing Israeli teachers in kindergartens, primary schools and middle schools, announced a partial strike for Tuesday in protest over teachers not receiving their full salary. The union said teachers would start work at 11 a.m. rather than the usual time of 8 a.m.

In October, hundreds of teachers protested outside the Education ministry after not receiving their full September wage.

The Education and Finance ministries petitioned the labour court against the partial strike. The court hearing took place on the day of the strike, beginning at 8 a.m. The court ruled that the strike should be cut short and end at 9 a.m. The late ruling led to chaos as many parents expected not to be able to take their children into school until 11 a.m.

The Education Ministry blames a computer problem for the underpayment of teachers' wages.

Strike by Palestinian hospital staff

Around 200 staff at the al-Mezan private hospital in the West Bank city of Hebron held a one-day strike Monday to protest salaries not being paid

for three months. Staff at the hospital have not been paid on regular basis for the last year. The hospital is owed around \$7 million from the Palestinian Authority.

Africa

Kenyan doctors continue strike

Striking doctors from seven Kenyan counties have not been paid their December salaries. The four-week strike is over a 2013 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that has been constantly reneged on.

The doctors, members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), in forty other counties that are also on strike, have received their salaries. The federal state has offered doctors who are prepared to scab on the strike government security against any reprisals from their colleagues.

Union Secretary General Ouma Oluga said many of the counties had not paid their doctors for six months.

The doctors union appealed to President Uhuru Kenyatta on the basis that he supported the phased implementation of the registered CBA. The president agreed to the doctors' union's request for negotiations, which are now under way. As public hospitals have stayed closed, private hospital have increased their charges beyond that affordable to most Kenyans.

Taita-Taveta Kenyan state nurses return to work

Kenyan nurses union KNUN has signed a return-to-work agreement with the county governor in Taita-Taveta state. The month-long strike was based on the demand to implement a 2013 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Although KNUN officials had claimed they would go to jail to get the CBA implemented in full, the union settled for much less.

The state governor has agreed to pay the nurses monthly allowances on time, some promotions are to go ahead and a further 36 nurses are to be appointed to hospitals. Union representatives and the governor's office will meet on a regular monthly basis, ostensibly to discuss issues facing nurses' working conditions. Nurses are to return to work immediately.

Kenyan construction workers strike over arbitrary sackings

Building workers employed by the Kenyan road construction company H-Young are protesting arbitrary sackings. Hundreds of construction workers, alongside several vehicle operators, protested at Meru county bypass, blocking the company entrance with bonfires to demand their reinstatement.

The protests started after workers, who were hired on two-year contracts, were fired after only eight months.

Arik Airlines Nigeria breaks wage payment agreement

Arik Airlines Nigeria continues to withhold airport employees' salaries and in so doing, is breaking a back-to-work agreement. Workers at the airline agreed to go back to work after a brief walkout paralysed the company's flights.

Workers went into the holiday period without pay and with no indication of when they would be paid.

An agreement was reached between the company, three airline unions and the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority on the basis that a month's pay would be paid on or before December 23.

Some workers were in arrears of up to seven months pay, with others owed two months. A second month's pay was supposed to be paid to the workers following December 31.

Nigerian National orthopaedic workers strike over unpaid wages

National orthopaedic hospital employees in Dala, Kano state, Nigeria went on indefinite strike December 28, demanding unpaid wages.

The strike came after a five-day warning strike, calling on the federal government to address three months' outstanding wages, was ignored.

Nigerian National Assembly cleaners strike

Cleaners at Nigeria's parliament annexes struck on December 29 after going several months without pay. The 22 workers have not received wages since August, although other employees in other parts of the National Assembly were being paid.

Although the workers had gone five months without pay, as the strike got underway, the contractor for cleaning annexes 1 and 2—the cleaner's employers—said wages had now been paid.

Cleaners continued with their strike, saying payment of N13,000 (\$41) a month for a new employee and N15,000 (\$47) for an employee with three years standing is not enough. Nigeria's minimum wage stands at N18,000 (\$57) a month.



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