

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

Strike threats against Budapest public transit, Algerian state-owned energy and the Ghanaian media

7 April 2017

Greek postal and bus workers strike

On Tuesday, Greek postal workers employed by the Hellenic Postal Service (ELTA) began a series of 24-hour strikes, to last the week. They are members of the ELTA union and are protesting the outsourcing of mail delivery services to private courier companies.

On Wednesday, trolley bus drivers in Athens held a five-hour strike, beginning at 11 a.m. The stoppage was over their collective bargaining agreement.

Cypriot port workers delay action

Stevedores in the Cypriot port of Limassol postponed their strike, due to begin Wednesday, to allow talks with the transport ministry.

The dispute with the port operator, Dubai Ports, is over the distribution of workloads, specifically who should carry out the onshore unloading of cargo. The stevedore's union argues that the 110 registered stackers should carry out this role.

Dockworkers had struck over the weekend. The company had agreed 50 percent of the work could be carried out by porters, which the dockers reject. Following intervention by the transport ministry the stevedores union agreed to postpone any action until April.

Transit workers in Hungarian capital set date for action

Unions representing staff working for the Budapest public transit authority (BKV) have announced they will begin an eight-day strike beginning at midnight on April 18. They are seeking a 30 percent pay increase to be paid over three years in line with increases given to public employees earlier this year. The unions announced the strike after negotiations broke down.

Low pay at BKV has meant growing shortages for drivers, engineers and other skilled staff. The unions plan to circumvent labour law, which requires 60 percent of vehicles to run during a strike, by only providing staffing during off peak times.

Walkout hits Italian airline

Unions at the Italian airline Alitalia took strike action Wednesday. Some unions took 24-hour action while others began their strike at 12 noon. They were protesting the airline's plans to cut staff numbers by around 2,000 out of total workforce of 12,500.

Etihad Airways has a 49 percent stake in the airline and has de facto control. The plans will hit office and ground-based staff, some of whom will be made redundant or their services outsourced. Around 300 maintenance staff are due to be transferred to Atitech, the airline servicing company.

The strike affected flights, with around 60 percent domestic and international flights cancelled. Talks between the unions and the company have been taking place under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development. The talks were expected to be resumed following the 24-hour strike.

Portuguese ferry service hit by industrial dispute

Workers operating the Tagus river ferry service took two days of strike action last week. The ferry service connects Lisbon, Seixal, Montijo, Cachilhas, Trafaria and Porto Brandao. The workers struck to protest the state of the boats and to push for a new collective bargaining agreement.

Second week of action by French museum staff

The strike by staff at the Centre Pompidou museum and art gallery in Paris is now in its second week. The staff began their strike on March 27 and voted on March 31 to continue their action following the breakdown of talks with the Ministry of Culture.

The staff, members of the FNEC-FP-FO union, are opposing the reclassification of the centre's salaried contract staff as civil servants, as a result of changes to employment law enacted last year. As a result of the transfer, the staff would lose gains they fought for and won over 40 years, resulting in a 20 to 30 percent cut in pay.

The union claims around a third of the staff are taking part in the strike. Staff were only informed of the implications of the transfer on March 7

and held an initial strike on March 9.

UK train drivers reject deal over driver-only operated trains for second time

Members of the train drivers' union ASLEF have again rejected a deal to end the dispute at Southern Rail, operated by Govia Thameslink Railway, over expanding the use of driver-only operated (DOO) trains.

The result of the second ballot was announced on Monday, with 51.8 percent of the drivers rejecting the deal that had been drawn up in secret talks, sponsored by the TUC, between the company and ASLEF. The company and the union have resumed talks on the dispute.

UK rail conductors to hold further strikes over DOO trains

Conductor/guards on three UK rail operators are due to hold a 24-hour strike on Saturday over the expanded use of DOO trains. The train operators are Southern Rail, Northern Rail and Mersey Rail. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT). Under DOO, the conductor/guards would lose their safety role in closing and opening the doors among other safety roles; they fear that their role could be ended altogether.

UK car workers to take series of strike over pension changes

On Wednesday, the Unite union announced it would hold a series of eight 24-hour strikes beginning on April 19 at BMW car production sites. The sites are Cowley, Hams Hall, Swindon and Goodwood.

The company plans to end its final salary pension scheme and put all workers on a less generous one than that signed up to by all new starters since 2014. The final salary pension scheme is scheduled to end on May 31. BMW staff voted by 93 percent majority to take strike action.

Teachers in UK capital protest budget cuts

Teachers at three schools in London held strikes last week over nationwide budget cuts that will total £3 billion by 2020 as a result of the Conservative government's "fair funding formula." The schools involved were Forest Hill in Lewisham, Parkwood Primary school and the Inclusion and Specialist Support Team based in Hackney.

Strike call by Algerian energy workers

Staff at Algerian state-owned Sonelgaz, which distributes electricity and natural gas, have voted to take three days strike action beginning April 11. They are organised by the Algerian electricity and gas workers union, SNATEGS.

They are protesting the attack by security forces on a strike held in March in pursuit of a pay rise, during which around 400 workers were arrested and abused. Among those arrested was Mellal Raouf, the union's president. The company employs over 87,000 workers. On March 31, police prevented some 200 trade unionists entering the SNATEGS headquarters in Bab Ezzouar for a meeting.

Soneglaz employs over 87,000. SNATEGS has more than 30,000 members at 27 of the company's sites.

Israeli union federation declares dispute over broadcasting changes

On Monday, the labour federation Histadrut declared a public sector-wide dispute, paving the way for a strike in the next few weeks.

At issue are the government's plans to change the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and set up a new broadcasting service known as Kan. Under a deal hammered out by the Israeli government, staff who had been hired for the Kan news division will lose their jobs, which will go to news staff at the IBA. The dispute has been called to protest the treatment of workers against another.

Protest by Kuwaiti public employees

Employees of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) held a sit-in protest at MEW headquarters in South Surra on Monday. The protest followed MEW's decision to suspend allowances to workers who have to travel to remote areas to perform their duties.

Ghanaian Media workers threaten action over victimisation

The Public Services Workers Union of Ghana (PSWU) has given notice to the TV3 Network Company of a strike to take place Tuesday, April 11. TV3 management are refusing to negotiate over the sacking of 32 employees.

They were sacked on the spot as they carried out a very limited protest over management refusal to conclude long, drawn-out negotiations over "end of service benefits."

The PSWU general secretary complained that the management took action without consulting the union, thus 'leaving it with no option' than to demand an immediate reinstatement of the affected staff.

The PSWU are calling on its national membership to wear red armbands in support of the strike and threatening a national strike, April 24, if the media workers are not reinstated.

Kenyan doctors and nurses threaten strike over unsanitary hospital conditions

In the aftermath of the Kenyan doctors' strike, doctors and nurses at the Busia County Referral Hospital have still not returned to work. They are boycotting the hospital because of dangerous unsanitary conditions on the

wards.

Contract cleaning staff at the hospital have been on strike for three weeks demanding three months of unpaid wages. Although prisoners from Korinda prison had been brought in to undermine the strike and clean the wards, conditions remain deplorable.

Reporters visiting the hospital's maternity wards have said placentas and used gloves were heaped in one corner of a corridor, with food also strewn down the corridors.

Doctors from the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union (just recently returned to work after a 100-day strike) have already stopped working in fear of a cholera outbreak.

Nurses from the Kenya National Union of Nurses are also concerned over the possibility of the outbreak of disease and say they will again go on strike unless the hospital is cleaned up.

Nigerian tanker drivers strike for improved working conditions and security

A strike by Nigeria's oil tanker drivers that began on Monday was called off by the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) hours after it started.

Drivers were striking to protest pay, poor conditions of the roads, and security for drivers subject to attack and abuse by security forces.

The strike was utilised by NUPENG to bring government pressure on the National Association of Transport Owners to sign an overdue collective bargaining agreement with the union.

The union called off the strike when the government intervened with a promise "to look into the drivers' demands."

A state representative for the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation said he agreed that transportation charges should be increased.

Nigerian judicial workers strike for implementation of salary structure

Judicial workers in Enugu state, under the umbrella of the Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria, have gone on strike demanding the implementation of their Consolidated Salary Structure.

The indefinite strike has rendered the courts inoperable throughout the state, even though the General Commission for Justice declared the strike illegal.

A ruling by the federal court in 2010 granted all states' judiciary workers the Consolidated Judiciary Salary Structure (CONJUSS) except those in Enugu, while some other states won an appeal against the salary structure's implementation.

The federal ruling included a provision stating the implementation of CONJUSS was dependent on the health of the local state economy.

JUSUN rejected this provision, arguing no wage agreement should be dependent on what is called the Internally Generated Economy, the economic condition of the state.

South African council workers strike over missing insurance premiums

Public sector employees working for South Africa's Ugu district municipality have walked out on strike, demanding information from the courts about the recovery of life insurance payments they are owed.

A court case has been underway involving the insurance and banking company Sanlam and Ugu district council over payments. The workers accuse the district manager of renegeing on a promise to pay them back.

Ugu district council workers went on strike last December demanding what was owed to them, and part payments were made. They are concerned to know if Sanlam has paid Ugu council the rest of the funds still outstanding and where they are.

They have resumed their strike, complaining they have been kept in the dark over any progress in the case and that the district manager only responds to the withdrawal of labour.

Security guards strike at prestigious South African universities

Workers providing security at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) have begun what has been deemed an illegal strike on Monday and vowed to bring the institutions to a standstill if a promise to transform casual employment to permanent employment is not met.

Protesters at TUT university on Friday said they had given their management until April 30 to come back with their proposals, prior to renewal of contracts in June.

Their union, the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa, also want the doubling of the present wages from around R2, 500, (US\$180) to R5, 000 (US\$360) a month.

UNISA is the largest university on the African continent and draws a third of all higher education students in South Africa.

South African bakery workers forced back to work

Bakery workers supplying the Pick'n'Pay retail company have ended their five-week strike. They are subcontracted by Assist Bakeries, a black empowerment company, employing casual labour with no union representation.

The strike by the 52 bakers, which began on February 28, was led by a factory committee member who had worked at the bakery for seven years.

They are demanding R10, 000 (US\$725) a month pay, a 40-hour workweek, with no more than two hours paid overtime a day.

Assist Bakeries is offering R3600 (US\$250) and a "weekly work roster (that) does not include any shifts that exceed eight hours." Workers at present are only supposed to work a 40-hour week, but have been doing up to 12 hours unpaid overtime.

Workers already receive R3200 (US\$230) a month. A worker commented that he felt they were being driven back to work because of their isolation and desperate financial situation.

Harmony wildcat miners action continues in South Africa

Harmony Gold miners striking at the South African company's Kusasalethu mine have had their wildcat strike judged unprotected (illegal) by the labour courts. The two-week strike was over the

disciplining of 40 union officials accused of encouraging a previous strike.

Harmony management thanked the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union for calling off an unofficial strike on March 27, which had begun four days earlier.

However, the wildcat strike appears to be continuing as no workers had returned to work by Monday, April 3, and the company announced, "An ultimatum has now been issued to Kusasaletu employees to return to work tomorrow [Tuesday] night, failing which they may be subject to disciplinary action."

South African health sector workers strike continues

Health sector workers are continuing their one-month strike in South Africa's Polokwane district. The strike was deemed illegal from its outset and striking workers have been threatened with disciplinary action if they do not return to work.

The strikers are calling for an improvement in the working conditions of all Social Development department employees and the implementation of the 2015 Social Work resolutions, with the protection of the professional council for Social Service Professionals.



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