

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

Transport workers strike in UK, Italy and South Africa

28 April 2017

Strike by rail staff in northern England

Conductors employed by Arriva Rail North are set to hold a 24-hour strike today. The walkout by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) members is part of an ongoing fight by rail staff against the extension of driver only operated (DOO) trains by the company. DOO trains--being introduced by train companies all over the UK--are aimed at eliminating the role of train guards and would be a prelude to job cuts.

The RMT had been in talks with Arriva Rail North but the talks broke up after the company rejected the RMT's proposal that the talks include the input of Conservative government's Department of Transport officials. Any possibility of a joint offensive by rail workers has been consistently sabotaged by the RMT. A 48-hour strike over DOO by conductors at Virgin East Coast Trains--which was due to have taken place today--was suspended by the RMT this week. The RMT cites "progress in talks" with the company as the reason for suspending the strike.

Strike by Finnish metal workers

Around 1,500 metal and industrial workers in the city of Tampere in southern Finland held a 24-hour strike April 20. The strike was against proposals attacking workers' conditions. Under new legislation brought in last year with the agreement of the trade unions, workers have been subjected to a yearlong pay freeze, increased payments for pension and sickness benefits and a three-day extension to the working year. The strike affected 16 companies in the Tampere region.

Italian airline staff reject deal brokered by union

Staff at the Italian airline, Alitalia, have rejected a deal brokered by unions, including the Fit-Cisl union. Alitalia was privatized in 2009, and in 2014 Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways acquired a 49 percent share of the airline. It has continued to record losses. The latest plan rejected by workers would have meant a loss of 1,700 jobs and an eight percent pay cut. The cuts had been demanded by shareholders in return for pumping more money into the airline.

Alitalia is demanding even deeper cuts although it has among the lowest labour costs of any European airline. The company is debating whether to

go into administration, which would trigger intervention by the Italian government.

Russian construction workers hunger strike

Six construction workers in the Khakassia region in Siberia have been taking part in a hunger strike to demand the payment of two million rubles (\$35,000) owed to them. The six are on hunger strike on behalf of the 60 workers, who have been employed to rebuild houses that were lost in a disastrous fire in April 2015 in the Khakassia. One of the six was admitted to hospital because of the hunger strike.

Swiss scientific staff strike

Around 130 staff employed at the Thermo Fisher Scientific facility in the Ecublens area of Lausanne have been striking to protest the company's plans to relocate part of its production facility to Brno in the Czech Republic. The relocation would mean the loss of around 100 jobs among the workers, who are members of the Unia union.

The Ecublens facility manufactures X-Ray and optical emission spectrometers. The US-owned firm is refusing to recognize the right of Unia to represent the workforce.

Strike by window makers in southwest England

Workers employed by Sierra Windows in Paignton, Devon, began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. Plans for similar 48-hour strikes over the next four weeks are in place, pending a resolution of the dispute. The 150-member workforce, who are members of the Unite union, have rejected a 1.5 percent pay offer. Workers have not had a raise since 2015 and reject company plans to replace the current five-day/seven-hour shift pattern with a four-day/twelve-hour shift.

Postal workers at Scottish depot in wildcat action

Postal workers at Royal Mail's depot in Kilmarnock, Scotland, walked out on unofficial action last week over allegations of bullying and harassment by management. The final straw, which sparked the walkout, was the sacking of a longtime worker at the depot over his sickness record. His colleagues said the sick leave was a result of injuries sustained at work. Attempting to break the strike, Royal Mail imported managers from across Scotland to deliver mail. The workers returned to work Tuesday following talks between management and the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

London teachers strike to oppose budget cuts

Teachers at Plumstead Manor School and at Corelli College in Greenwich in south London struck on Tuesday and Wednesday this week. This follows a strike on April 20. The action by the National Union of Teachers members is in opposition to planned cuts to budgets at the schools. Seventeen posts at Corelli College are at risk because of the proposed budget cut.

UK Fujitsu staff hold further strikes

IT workers at various Fujitsu sites across the UK, including London, Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and Wakefield, began a 48-hour strike Thursday in an ongoing dispute. Further 48-hour strikes are scheduled by the members of the Unite union for May 4 and 11, with a 24-hour strike planned for May 8.

The Japanese-based conglomerate is trying to push through 1,800 job cuts in the UK, as part of a European-wide restructuring operation. The strikers are also seeking a pay increase and oppose cuts to their pension scheme.

Middle East

Strike by Israeli public sector staff called off

A strike by public sector workers, due to have taken place Tuesday, was called off after talks between the Finance Ministry and the Histadrut labour federation.

The strike would have affected government departments, schools, hospitals and the rail network among others and was called over the Israeli government's restructuring of the national broadcasting body. Under the plan, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) is to be replaced by the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation (IBC).

As part of the restructuring, 170 IBA jobs were due to be lost. The workers to go were mainly those aged between 40 and 50. Under the agreement, around 100 former IBA staff will transfer to the IBC and those IBA workers aged 40 to 50 will either be transferred to the IBC or the civil service.

South African Airways cabin crew strike over meal allowances

Flight cancellations are mounting as the South African Airways (SAA) cabin crews went on strike Wednesday demanding an increase in overseas meal and hotel allowances. Staff are complaining that allowances have not increased from R1, 712 (US \$131) a day for six years, and they require an increase to R2, 222 (US \$170) to afford increased expenses. Pilots get R1959 (\$150).

The allowances are not enough to cover hotel bills and meals. SAA have offered a R84 (US \$6) increase but the South African Cabin Crew Association (SACC) demands R352 (US \$26). South African Airways are appealing to the labour courts to have the strike deemed illegal. The SACC are opposing an SAA injunction claim saying the dispute is illegal. Over 30 flights were cancelled on the first day of the strike, one of which was an international flight.

South Africa's rail union avoids industrial action

South Africa's rail union, the United National Transport Union, is opposing industrial action following failed arbitration despite a strike authorization vote from workers. The union has agreed to enter further talks with management to avert a strike, saying a national walkout would not be in the best interest of the company, commuters or the population. The rail company officials claim they have a R1.4 billion (£105 million) budget deficit although they could explain to parliament a loss of R14 billion (US \$1.05 billion) in its accounts.

Namibian miners in unofficial strike over victimisation

Namibian miners went on a wildcat strike April 19 and 20 at the Rosh Pinhar Mining Corporation Zinc Mine after management repeatedly ignored miners' complaints, including inhuman treatment by the engineering manager and industrial relations officer. Miners say they are being victimised over a previous strike, with the perpetrators using anti-labour regulation methods to remove them. Workers want the two individuals involved sacked.

As the workers struck, the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) negotiated with management. It was reported that management had considered sacking the entire 320-member work force. The union came away with a proposal that workers should return to work immediately, with each accepting a final warning, and that management would deal with workers' grievances through "correct channels." The chairman of the MUN Rosh Pinhar said he would take the dispute to the Office of the Labour Commissioner.

South African public service workers strike over pay

South African public service workers in Bushbuckridge local council came out on strike last week. They are demanding a 2014 pay progression agreement be implemented. Under the agreement, local government workers should have received a pay increase after their first year of employment, but in most cases this has not happened.

The South African Municipal Workers Union claims the council owes the workforce around R10 million (\$750,000) going back to the beginning of 2014. It also complains that management continue to receive bloated

wages, paid above their grade scale, and that those close to management are receiving their progression pay. A recent ruling by the Commission of Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration decided in favour of the public servants but the council chose to ignore the ruling.

Nigerian polytechnic staff strike over back pay

Nigerian academic staff at Lagos State Polytechnic have threatened to strike today. They are demanding management fund the CONTISS 15 migration wage structure out of funds provided by the Lagos state government. The Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics claim the polytechnic owes staff 87-months' worth of back payments. The union said if management did not pay up, there would be no full or part-time learning taking place today.



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