

Slovakian autoworkers strike, Kenyan nurses continue nationwide walkout

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 June 2017

### Slovakian VW autoworkers strike

Around 70 percent of Volkswagen (VW) employees at three VW factories in Slovakia began a 12-day strike Tuesday. They are seeking a 16 percent pay increase and have rejected management's offer of a 4.5 percent rise this year and 4.2 percent next year together with bonus payments.

Bloomberg reported that workers gathered on the first day of the strike at VW's Bratislava factory holding placards reading, "Don't Humiliate Us" and "We Do the Maximum, You do the Minimum." VW is Slovakia's largest employer.

### Greek municipal workers strike over job security

On Monday, municipal workers held a protest at the Ministry of the Interior in Athens. The POE-OTA union members were demanding that municipal employees on temporary contracts be made permanent. Other municipal workers occupied garbage truck facilities over the same issue.

Around 80 of the protestors at the Interior Ministry briefly occupied the building. They left after being promised a meeting with Panos Skourletis, the Syriza government Interior Minister, on Tuesday. The Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government was elected on anti-austerity program in January 2015 only to impose the savage demands of the EU, IMF and European Central Bank.

The day after the protest municipal workers held a 24-hour strike. POE-OTA has called a 24-hour Pan-Hellenic strike of local government employees for June 26.

### Wildcat walkouts by UK Royal Mail staff

Royal Mail staff at four sorting offices took wildcat action last week. On June 15, around 70 staff in Canterbury in southeast England walked out following the suspension of six of their colleagues for their opposition to job overloading.

On June 16 in Scarborough in northeast England, Royal Mail staff walked out after management reneged on an agreement over an offer of extra hours. Staff had believed the extra hours were permanent but found

out it was only on a trial run for a few weeks so management could test out the arrangement.

Employees at the Whitechapel delivery office in east London walked out after management deducted money from a female colleague's pay after she allegedly took sick leave rather than annual leave because of childcare problems. Workers at the Carmarthen office in Wales walked out briefly in response to management's attempts to push through cuts.

### Italy hit by transport strikes

A series of strikes by transport workers hit Italy at the end of last week, affecting bus, train and air travel. Three union bodies, Cub-Sgb, Usi-Ait and Cobas Lavoro private, called the strikes to protest moves to privatise the transport sector and to call for improved working conditions.

Strikes began on the evening of June 15 and continued throughout the next day as different sectors came out on strike for different periods. In Rome, the Metro and Roma-Lido train line were affected. Train and bus services in various Italian cities including Milan and Florence were affected.

Airport and air cabin crew took part in the action. The Alitalia airline had to cancel scores of international and domestic flights. The Italian government is seeking to hive off parts of the rail system to private buyers while also looking for a buyer for the failing Italia airline, which is currently under state management.

### University academic staff strike in Manchester, UK

Teaching staff at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) took 48-hour strike action Tuesday and Wednesday to protest the closure of its campus in Crewe, Cheshire. University bosses plan to shut its Crewe campus in August 2019, threatening 370 jobs, including 160 teaching jobs, on the grounds that it is "no longer academically or financially sustainable."

The University and College Union (UCU) has appealed to management to accept voluntary redundancies, bemoaning that the university has 'rejected' its request to postpone redundancies, carry out further talks and involve ACAS to try to solve the dispute.

MMU is the fifth largest university in the UK, comprising among other

faculties the famous Manchester school of Art. Half of its teaching staff are on zero hours contracts.

### **London teachers strike against plans to turn their schools into academies**

National Union of Teacher (NUT) members at Drayton Green primary school held a two-day strike beginning Tuesday. NUT members at Dormers Wells High School began a three-day strike the same day. Both west London schools are being made into academies, which are government-funded but privately run institutions, akin to charter schools in the US.

### **British Airway's air cabin crew to strike**

More than 1,000 cabin crew working for British Airway's (BA) mixed fleet are to hold a two-week strike beginning July 1. The members of the Unite union have carried out 26 days of strikes over poverty pay rates. The mixed fleet cabin crew are part of a two-tier wage scheme, which was introduced with the agreement of Unite.

The stoppage had been called after BA refused to restore concessionary flights and bonuses to some staff who had taken part in strikes. The union called off a four-day strike due to have begun June 16 and agreed to talks under the auspices of the government reconciliation service. The talks resulted in no agreement, with management refusing to make concessions.

### **Walkout by French TV staff**

Technicians and journalists working for France 24, the international news and current affairs network based in Paris, walked out on June 15. The 120-plus staff, members of the CFTC union, staged a 24-hour strike and picketed the company's headquarters.

They took the action after the company reneged on a 2015 agreement over so-called unsocial hours, i.e., working weekends and night shifts. Originally, the agreement had reduced the working day from 8 hours to 7 hours for those working unsocial hours over staff health concerns.

However, France 24 began to pressure some individual staff to sign amended contracts negating the shorter working hours contract over unsocial hours. This led to the walkout by staff across the company.

### **Dutch rail staff strike**

Rail staff, employed by state rail company NS at the central stations in The Hague and Zwolle, held a four-hour strike beginning Monday morning. Members of FNV Spoor were protesting plans by NS to break up the state company. The plans include outsourcing regional lines along with store and restaurant facilities. The workers were also demanding the assignment of two conductors on double decker trains.

### **Spanish dockers strike continues**

Spanish dockers are continuing to strike over deregulation. They are striking on alternate hours on Monday, Wednesday and Friday this week. The walkout affected the ports of Algeciras, Valencia, Bilbao, Seville and Santander.

The CETM union called the strikes after talks with the port employers' body, Enesco, broke down. The Popular Party government at the behest of the European Union is forcing through the abolition of the SAGEPS dock labour scheme, which afforded dockers a degree of job security and relatively better wages.

The union called off previous planned strikes, and the current action was only called over disagreements over the number of jobs to be cut and the amount in wage reductions to be implemented. Further alternate hourly strikes are scheduled for June 26, 28 and 29 with further dates in July.

### **Strike threat by Irish crane operators**

Irish crane operators voted by a 93 percent majority on a 77 percent turnout for strike action. They are seeking a €27 (US \$30) an hour pay rate.

Previously members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), the crane operators recently switched to Unite after SIPTU refused to press their case. Around 90 percent of the more than 200 crane operators in the country are Unite members.

The vote follows a mass "sick-in" earlier this month. Talks under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission were due to be held this week, but employers have been served a notification of the strike action, which could begin from June 27.

Unite is already trying to row back from action, with Unite regional officer Tom Fitzgerald telling the Irish *Independent* newspaper, "If the employers engage with us there won't be strike action." The union made clear if the strike went ahead it would be limited to selective strike action.

### **Turkish workers oppose victimizations**

Some 25 workers at the German owned AKG Thermotechnik in Izmir have been dismissed after protesting low wages and poor conditions at the factory.

The Birlesik Metal-Is union was granted a certificate to represent the majority of the workforce. Following the dismissal of eight workers, who are leaders of the union, other workers protested outside the factory and 17 of them held a sit-in but were removed by riot police and then dismissed.

### **Ukrainian rail workers protest/subhead]**

Last week rail workers belonging to the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine held a protest demanding substantial pay increases. They gathered outside the offices of Ukrainian Railways and the protest continued overnight.

## **Kenyan nurses continue strike**

26,000 Kenyan nurses are continuing their strike into a third week over the resistance of the Council of Governors to sign and apply the agreed 2016 Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Religious organisations have come in alongside the Council of Governors to persuade the nurses to return to work. Catholic hospitals are continuing to provide a health service to patients affected by the national strike. They have doubled their intake of patients with two patients in a bed in an attempt to break the strike.

The nurses union, the Kenyan National Union of Nurses, rejects the claim of the Council of Governors that the strike is illegal. While governors implement an illegal no-work, no-pay rule they are instructing the county payroll managers not to pay workers' union dues into their unions.

## **Kenyan doctors return to striking over Collective Bargaining Agreement**

Around 200 doctors in Nairobi who took part in the 100-day national strike have been denied pay for that period. As members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists' Union, they had fought for the implementation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

They resumed their strike Tuesday over not being paid since December, with some going without pay even longer. The state governor claims he has not received funds from the central government to pay wages, and he refuses to pay for the period of the strike.

## **Malawi civil servants plan to strike for wage increase**

Malawi civil servants are planning to strike if there is no response in negotiations for a 45 percent wage rise. The Civil Servants Trade Union (CSTU) negotiations with the government have broken down as the states' representatives have not made an offer other than a 10 percent increase based on merit.

The public-sector strike threat comes on top of a six-month strike of college lecturers and university academics. President Peter Mutharika declared if employees are not happy with their pay, they should apply to the private sector.

The Malawian economy is under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund, which claims that states' wages bill cannot be sustained because of low tax receipts.

## **Nigerian government threatens to break doctors strike**

Around 160 state medical doctors in the Nigerian state of Kogi have been on strike since June 5 over failed promises by the administration to pay outstanding wages.

Kogi's Health Commissioner has now begun a campaign to recruit 230 doctors claiming they will be employed as additional medics. The doctors union, the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), says the new doctors will be used to replace striking medics.

## **South African gold mining firm sacks half its workforce after wildcat strike**

Half the 4,000-strong workforce at Sibanye Gold's Cooke gold mine in South Africa have been sacked after miners went on a wildcat strike over the reduction of food they are allowed to take down the pit. Sibanye claims the miners were using food to feed criminal gangs that are known to stay underground without surfacing for up to a month.

A confrontation erupted between the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) over support for the strikers. The NUM claimed AMCU members attacked and injured NUM members who crossed picket lines and called on police to defend its members.

Out of the dismissed miners, 700 are NUM members and 500 belong to AMCU. The NUM led a violent attack on striking platinum miners, members of the NUM breakaway union, AMCU, at the Marikana Mine in August-September 2012. Police dispatched by the African National Congress (ANC), on behalf of the mine bosses, killed 41 striking miners.

## **South African miners strike over bargaining forum breakup**

National Union of Mineworkers members went on strike at the Msobo Coal mine in Mpumalanga province South Africa on Tuesday. The NUM says it is opposed to the breaking up of the national bargaining forum at the Chamber of Mines.

The forum had represented the big coal mining companies such as Anglo American and Glencoe in negotiations. Each company will now negotiate on its own basis. The NUM initially claimed a victory when Msobo Coal said it would not pull out of the forum but the company subsequently reversed its position.



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