

Greek garbage workers continue strike, South African electricity supply workers in unofficial stoppage

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Greek refuse workers continue strike

Municipal garbage workers in Greece are continuing their strike, resulting in piles of rubbish on the streets. On Wednesday, workers held a protest in central Athens.

They want an end to the use of temporary contracts and demand to be offered permanent posts. The majority are members of the POE-OTA union, which met with Syriza-led government representatives on Tuesday in an attempt to end the strike.

Syriza Interior Minister, Panos Skourletis, proposed that a quarter of the current workforce of 10,000 be offered permanent jobs but with an age cut-off of 45 years. Workers rejected this and on Tuesday a revised offer was made increasing the age cut-off to 50. The union did not feel they could sell this to its membership and rejected the offer.

A smaller union has accepted the proposals. The mayor of Greece's second largest city, Thessaloniki, said he would outsource rubbish collection to a private company in an attempt to break the strike.

UK atomic weapons workers in new series of strikes

Workers at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), which is responsible for the UK's nuclear weapons system, held a further strike on Thursday.

The members of the Unite union have held 29 days of strikes over AWE's plans to transfer the workforce to an inferior pension scheme. AWE sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield were affected by the strike.

Thursday was the first day of a new set of strikes that the workforce voted for in a ballot by a majority of over 90 percent. Further 24-hour strikes are due to take place on July 3, 13, 17 and 27, August 10, 14 and 24, and September 7, 11 and 21. They also began a continuous overtime ban from Thursday.

Housing maintenance staff in Manchester hold further strike

Around 170 housing maintenance workers employed by Mears and a joint venture company Manchester Working (operated by Mears) held a one-day strike Thursday.

The strike is the 16th day of action over pay differentials between the two companies, which means some workers being paid up to £3,500 less for doing the same work.

The Unite members also held a demonstration outside a Chartered Institute of Housing conference at which Mears representatives were due to speak.

A lot of the maintenance work is carried out for Northwards Housing, an arm's-length management organisation set up by Manchester City Council to maintain its properties in north Manchester. Unite is critical of Northwards' refusal to intervene in the dispute.

Hospital staff in Barts Health Trust, London to strike

Ninety-nine percent of the 1,000 staff working at the Barts Health Trust in London for the private contractor Serco voted for strike action.

The members of the Unite union are employed as cleaners, porters and security staff. Barts Trust comprises the Whipps Cross University, ST Bartholomew's, the Royal London, Newham University and Mile End hospitals.

The action to demand an extra 30p an hour above the minimum wage is set to start with a three-day stoppage on July 4. This will be followed by a 7-day strike due to begin July 11 and one of 14 days to begin July 25. Further strikes in August and September are planned.

In April, around 100 cleaners at the Royal London hospital site held an unofficial strike after Serco abolished their morning tea break. Serco was forced to reinstate the breaks the next day.

UK rail staff announce strike

Rail staff employed by Arriva Rail North are set to hold further strikes in the ongoing dispute over the company's plans to extend the use of Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union announced a 3-day strike to be held July 8 to July 10.

RMT says it failed to reach a compromise over the company's plans to bring in a 50 percent minimum of DOOs when it launches new rolling stock.

Train drivers in southern England due to strike

Train drivers working for Southern Rail, the company serving southeast England were due to begin an overtime ban Thursday. They are protesting staff shortages and accuse the company of failing to recruit drivers in a cost cutting measure.

The strike was called by ASLEF, the train drivers' union that represents 95 percent of drivers working for the company.

Drivers and conductors are also involved in an ongoing dispute with Southern in opposition to their plans to impose Driver Only Operated trains.

Irish crane drivers set to strike

Crane drivers on construction sites in Ireland were due to strike Thursday. Members of the Unite union voted by a 93 percent majority to strike, on a turnout of 77 percent. They are seeking a pay rise that would raise their hourly rate to €24 an hour from January 1 this year, €27 an hour from January 1 in 2018 and €30 an hour from January 1 in 2019.

Unite represents 170 crane drivers on construction sites, around 90 percent of the total. Crane drivers were previously represented by the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). SIPTU has accused Unite of poaching its members.

The strike is due to be followed today by a general members meeting to discuss the way forward.

Irish council staff strike

On Tuesday, 350 Cork County maintenance staff held a four-hour strike. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union members are protesting staff shortages. They work in the Roads and Drivers section based at around 12 depots across the county.

According to SIPTU, management are failing to replace staff who retire, leading to staff shortages. In addition to the four-hour stoppage, workers are mounting a work-to-rule, refusing to transport private contractors, insisting recognised manning levels are kept and imposing a strict demarcation of roles.

Strike by Belgium steel producers

Workers at the Segal steel galvanisation factory in Flemalle in east Belgium struck on June 23.

They are pushing for a pay increase. According to a report on Monday in the *Brussels Times*, the trade unions were meeting with Segal management in an attempt to resolve the dispute.

Segal is part of the Tata Steel conglomerate. Following investment and a recent reorganisation of the factory, annual production is expected to increase by 30,000 tonnes.

Strike by Portuguese airport security staff

Portuguese airport security staff held a nation-wide 48-hour strike over the weekend of June 24 and 25.

In addition, the members of the airport workers' union, SITAVA, held demonstrations at Lisbon and Porto airports. They are employed by Securitas and Prosecur and are seeking a collective bargaining agreement, improved working conditions and career prospects.

Slovakian auto workers end strike

After six days on strike Slovakian Volkswagen (VW) employers at the factory in Bratislava returned to work at the beginning of the week.

They were striking in pursuit of a 16 percent pay rise. After rejecting previous offers, the unions settled the dispute by accepting a 14.1 percent pay rise in three instalments—the final one being paid in November 2018. In addition, they will also get a €500 one-off bonus plus an extra day's leave.

VW is Slovakia's biggest private employer, with more than 12,000 employed at the plant of which 10,000 struck. It was the first strike at the plant, which was set up in 1992. When in production the factory turns out 1,000 vehicles each day.

Strike threat by Hungarian dentists

Hungarian dentists are threatening to strike on September 4-6 in an attempt to force the government to increase funding for dentistry. They would continue to provide emergency cover.

Dentists only receive half the state funding of that given to general practitioners and say they are being driven to take on more and more private work, which could result in no free provision within two years.

Iranian sugar workers locked out

Around 30 workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane factory in Iran were prevented from entering the factory last week by security guards.

Management claims that the 30 are the leaders of protests, including work stoppages, which have been occurring since March. The workers are protesting against unpaid wages and insurance benefits.

Planned strike by Israeli social workers on hold

A planned strike by Israeli social work staff working with the elderly has been put on hold. They were due to walkout over government plans to make 165 of them redundant. The strike was put on hold after the government said it had temporarily frozen its plans.

Africa

South African electric supply workers strike over unpaid wages

Electric supply workers are taking part in an unofficial strike in the industrial region of Msunduzi in South Africa, demanding unpaid wages. The indefinite strike was called a fortnight ago.

City authorities are importing contractors, shadowed by security guards, to scab on the strike.

Strikers are being accused of sabotaging electricity infrastructure. The South Africa Municipal Workers Union claims the city mayor is scapegoating its members for the dilapidated conditions of its facilities.

Some residents in the area have not had electricity and water for up to four days while others are experiencing continuing outages because of the strike. While negotiations are at a standstill, the affected residents complain the local authorities are treating the loss of vital amenities as of no consequence.

South African student nurses protest over cancellation of exams

Nurses from across South Africa angrily demonstrated outside the offices of the South African Nurses Council (SANC) in Pretoria on June 23 to protest having to rewrite their exam papers.

Police and security guards attacked protesters. The secretary general of the Young Nurses Independent Union was detained and beaten up.

SANC cancelled the exam, claiming some exam papers had been leaked, undermining the authority of the test. Besides the impact of the cancelled exam on students' qualifications and pay rates, many student nurses—some of whom are mothers—have to go through family life pressures again when they thought it was all over.

Hundreds of students from the 5,000 first- and second-year bridging students across the country have already sat the exams. If they pass, they qualify as general nurses or psychiatric nurses.

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, the other nurses' union in the dispute, is threatening SANC with legal action.

South African union accuses municipality of becoming a police state

Manguang municipality workers returned to work last week after a month-long strike. South African Municipal Workers' Union members, who struck over pay alleging victimisation and nepotism, returned to work without any signed agreement.

The workers are now being accused of arson because the Bloemfontein city hall was set alight during the strike. A union spokesman denies its members were involved, pointing the finger at the police, saying they were responsible for security of the city hall.

A union spokesman said the municipality is being turned into a police state, with police shooting at workers indiscriminately.

South African sugar workers prepare to strike

Illovo Sugar Company South Africa workers are preparing to strike after the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) assisted negotiations broke down.

Although the eight Illovo plants across South Africa rejected the Food and Allied Workers Union demands, a spokesman for the union hoped further negotiations over their claim for 10 percent wage increase,

establishing a provident fund, and protective clothing, would be successful.

The way has been cleared for a strike to take place, with a permit from the CCMA, providing the union gives 48 hours' notice. The sugar company is offering a five percent wage increase

Nigerian union federations prepare for further betrayals

Nigeria's National Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) are considering calling off the broad based strike in Rivers State.

Now in its second week, the strike is a resumption of action called off at the end of May, and is over the non-implementation of a 13-point agreement between the state government, the NLC and the TUC.

Irrespective of the state imposing an illegal no-work, no-pay policy on workers who did not turn up for work during the strike, many in the public sector have continued to strike.

The unions' main demands for calling off the strike is the payment of owed gratuities to pensioners and the sacking of consultants, who withheld remittances from workers' wages to union funds.

The unions are complaining that a bailout fund of several billion Naira, from the Paris Club (a financier of debtor countries), which is passed on from the government, has not materialised.

Public sector workers in the Nigerian state of Nasarawa are also being confronted by what the NLCs state chapter recognises as an illegal instruction—the deprivation of workers' wages during a legal strike.

Ghanaian port workers strike for direct employment

Ghanaian port workers have been barred from striking by the National Labour Commission (NLC). The Labour Court ruled against the attempts of the port workers to be directly employed by the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC).

CHEC is the main contractor at the \$1.5 billion Port Harbour Expansion Project. Workers were prevented from lobbying CHEC for direct employment by the NLC and banned from striking to achieve those aims.

L'aine Services, the project subcontractor retained by CHEC, employed the workforce on a casual basis. Workers were prepared to strike illegally to end their casual status and gain direct employment.

Although CHEC officials were involved with port workers over their employment position, they said they could not legally employ them.



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