

Rally by striking UK air cabin crew

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 July 2017

Bart's health trust staff in London strike

Around 700 domestic staff working for the Bart's Health NHS trust, which covers four hospitals in east London, began a seven-day strike on Tuesday, following up a three-day strike last week. They work for Serco, who took over the service in April of this year from Carillion. The staff provide cleaning, portering and security services to the four hospitals. The strikers, members of the Unite union, are demanding a 30 pence-an-hour pay increase.

They voted by a 99 percent majority for strike action. When Serco took over the service, the workers were faced with carrying out additional duties. They now have to clean medical equipment, a task previously carried out by health care assistants, but without additional staff resources. They also say they do not have appropriate equipment to carry out the tasks they face.

Cleaners who spoke to the *Guardian* newspaper said the increased workload has led to hygiene problems on the wards, which could result in outbreaks of infections such as MRSA and C diff. The seven-day strike is to be followed by a 14-day strike beginning July 25.

Serbian autoworkers' strike continues

Autoworkers at the Fiat Chrysler factory in Kragujevac are continuing their strike, which began on June 27. The factory is a joint enterprise between Fiat, which owns 67 percent of stock, and the Serbian state.

Their demands include a 12 percent pay increase, help with travel costs, payment of previously promised bonuses and the recruitment of additional staff. In 2015, the company cut the number of shifts from three to two and pushed through redundancies. On Monday Ana Brnabic, the Serbian prime minister, called for an end to the strike, citing the economic impact on the country. The factory accounts for three percent of Serbia's economic output.

Wildcat strike by Swedish garbage workers

Around 70 garbage collectors in the Swedish capital of Stockholm walked out July 5 in a wildcat strike to protest their employer's intention to cut their pay in October. On July 12, 65 of them handed in their notice and resigned their jobs.

They had been employed by Reno Norden, which serves around 10,000 households in the city. The company, which at first threatened to sack the strikers, subsequently agreed to keep their pay at its current \$4,170 a month if the workers agreed to increase their hours by five hours a week. At one point, staff employed by Liselotte Loof, which also collects garbage in Stockholm, walked out in sympathy.

Irish crane operators escalate strike action

Crane drivers on building sites in Ireland had recently taken strike action in pursuit of a pay increase. The members of the Unite union are seeking an immediate pay rise to €24 an hour, rising to €30 by January 2019.

They resumed their action Tuesday and will expand the scope of their strike by picketing Construction Industry Federation (CIF) sites on Thursday. Previously, they had only hit agency sites or those outside the CIF.

Some 170 crane operators are involved in the action, but because of their vital role, many building sites are expected to come to a halt.

Rally by striking UK air cabin crew

Unite members working for British Airways (BA) Mixed Fleet based at Heathrow, currently on strike until July 16, held a rally outside the UK parliament on Wednesday. The rally was addressed by Labour's Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell. BA has attempted to break the strike by hiring planes and crew from Qatar Airways. McDonnell said a future Labour government would outlaw such action by BA.

The cabin crew are striking against low pay and sanctions imposed on those who participated in earlier strikes. A second 14-day strike is set to begin on July 19, three days after the current strike action ends.

UK rail strikes over driver operated only trains

Rail staff working for Northern Rail, members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT), held a three-day strike beginning Saturday. Meanwhile RMT members working for Southern Rail and Merseyrail held a one-day strike Monday.

In all three disputes, the issue is over the rail companies' plans to extend the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, eliminating the role of train guards. Merseyrail staff are also to hold a strike on July 23 over the same issue. The strikes led to disruption of services across the three regions affected.

Strike threat by Portuguese telecom workers

Telecom workers employed by Portugal Telecom (PT) have threatened to strike on July 21 to protest PT's transfer of 118 jobs to external companies, Visabeira, Tnord and Sudtel, which took place at the end of June. PT is the wholly owned subsidiary of the Dutch-based multinational Altice Group Company. If the strike goes ahead, it will be the first such action for 10 years.

Maltese court staff register dispute

Maltese court staff have registered an industrial dispute notice. They are threatening a work-to-rule action and refusing to answer phones or emails, due to a collective bargaining agreement with the Ministry of Justice, signed in April, not being implemented.

The agreement covered an increase in pay and benefits as well as promotion incentives and further study facilities.

Kenyan university staff strike to enforce pay increase

Kenyan university staff are continuing their national strike over an unpaid wage deal, despite promises of a 17.5 percent to 24 percent rise in full this year.

Around 27,000 staff are striking over the Sh10 billion (\$96.2 million) wage deal, which was agreed to but not implemented.

The government is introducing the pay deal in two halves against the agreement and the demands of three unions representing university staff.

Kenyan governors push for renegotiation of nurses' agreement

The Kenyan Council of Governors (CGs) is blocking the implementation of the nurses' Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) signed in December last year. They are demanding the nurses union, the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN), renegotiate the CBA. KNUN has rejected the governors' demand.

At the signing of the CBA, nurses were expecting an increase in expenses of an on-call allowance of Sh10,000 (\$96.2 million) a month, risk allowance Sh15,000 (\$144) a month, and a uniform allowance of Sh50,000 (\$480) a year. It also included a Sh15,000 (\$144) to Sh20,000 (\$192) a year allowance for the nursing career.

Doctors, who officially ended their strike in the last fortnight, say they cannot function without nurses, but the health department and the CGs have not spoken to KNUN for over two weeks.

Abattoir workers resist victimization at Namibian meat processing factory

Workers employed at Namibia's Natural Namibian Meat Products face discipline for complaining over unpaid overtime. The meat company had set a date to impose punishment on 53 workers for simply lobbying the company's offices at lunchtime.

Workers had prepared for the disciplinary meeting by calling in a Namibian Allied Food Union representative (NAFU), and say the abattoir called off the meeting because they had representation. Previously the company had barred any union activity on its premises.

Nigerian port workers oppose privatization and corruption

Nigerian Port Authority workers demonstrated on Tuesday and are preparing to strike over law changes governing the Authority. The national action is being called by the maritime branch of the Senior Staff Association of Communications, Transport and Corporations and the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria.

The unions are complaining over a bill going through the National Assembly concerning port assets. They accuse individuals in parliament of personal gain through privatisation and probable mass sackings of its members.

South African engineers fight reduced minimum wage

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has requested a certificate to strike in its dispute with engineering employers' federations. The union is demanding a 15 percent annual increase over two years and it is insisting the negotiations are carried out through the existing negotiating bodies.

The employers are actively breaking up the traditional bargaining organisations and are pursuing deals with workers as individuals or collectively at work places. Employers are quoted as claiming, "There are issues on which there is no longer the possibility of consensus among the employer bodies."

NUMSA, which represents 29,000 workers in the industry, say they are also having to resist employers' attempts to introduce a reduced rate for new employees, set at R20 (\$1.50) per hour, 50 percent less than the going rate.

South African zoo workers in overtime dispute

Workers at the National Zoological Gardens in South Africa held a strike last Saturday over overtime payments. Negotiations assisted by the Arbitration Commission had broken down and the union had received a strike certificate.

The strikers are members of the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and are being accused of violently restricting a scabbing operation to keep the zoo open.

Although 120 workers have walked out, their employers say two-thirds of its workforce is continuing to work, assisted by the South African

Police Force.

South African ambulance workers sent back to work

South African ambulance workers, in the North West province, were sent back to work by their union NEHAWU after the courts declared the strike illegal.

The ambulance workers came out on strike in response to the privatisation of the industry, and employment of NGOs as health officials.

The union has declared it will continue its action through the courts.



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