

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## British Airways cabin crew extend strike

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Europe

### UK airline cabin crew extend strike

British Airways (BA) staff working for the Heathrow Mixed Fleet as cabin crew are to continue their current strike. The action is due to end on August 15, with a proposed extension to August 30, which would cover the UK August bank holiday period.

If it goes ahead, the cabin crew base will have been on continuous strike for the whole of July and August. The members of the Unite union are opposing the removal of bonuses and travel privileges of those members who took part in earlier strikes.

The original strike was called over poverty pay for Mixed Fleet cabin crew. Following an agreement between Unite and BA, staff taken on for Mixed Fleet posts since 2010 are employed on inferior terms to current staff.

BA is mitigating the impact of the strike by “wet leasing” nine aircraft from Qatar Airway. Unite is mounting a legal challenge to this practice, saying it breaches European regulations.

The dispute is one of the longest running in the history of the European airline industry. Despite the determination of the workers, the unions have sabotaged the actions, permitting the airlines to continue transporting passengers without serious disruption.

### Strike by Birmingham refuse collectors enters fifth week

Refuse collectors in the English midlands city of Birmingham have begun their fifth week of strike action. Initially the workers, who are members of the trade union Unite, struck two hours a day but that has now been increased to three hours. The current action is planned to continue until September.

The strike was called in response to plans by the council to restructure the service and in the process get rid of around 120 jobs. The re-grading of the refuse collectors’ jobs would mean many taking a pay cut of up to £5,000.

While the Labour controlled council is saying there would be no compulsory redundancies, any displaced worker would have to apply for posts within the council and many fear there would be no suitable post for

which they could apply, or could end up being placed in a fixed-term contract post and ultimately losing their council job.

In 2011, the refuse collectors suffered job losses when the number of operatives on each wagon was reduced from five to three, compromising health and safety.

The union and council are desperate to settle the dispute. The council has had to face protests about the “sea of rubbish” engulfing the city. The city’s Labour MPs are pressuring workers to settle without the dispute being resolved in their favour.

### Cinema staff in London hold further strikes

Cinema staff at Picturehouse cinemas in London held strikes on August 4 and 5 as part of their ongoing fight to be paid the London Living Wage, sick pay and other entitlements.

The BECTU union members have been involved in a long campaign to win their demands. Four staff at the Ritzy cinema that acted as union representatives were sacked for taking part in strikes.

### Job centre staff to strike over closure

Jobcentre staff at Whitley Bay in northeast England are to protest on Saturday, followed by a strike on August 17-18. They are fighting the closure of the Job Centre due to take place August 18.

The members of the Public and Commercial Services union voted unanimously on a 100 percent turnout to strike. The closure of the Whitley Bay site is just one of more than 100 planned closures of Jobcentres nationally.

### Nuclear workers in northwest England to be balloted for strike

Around 5,000 staff employed by Sellafield Ltd, which is part of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, are to ballot for possible strike action. They are members of the Unite and GMB unions and are protesting the imposition of a 1.5 percent pay increase, which is below the inflation rate and has been preceded by years of inadequate increases amounting to cuts in real pay terms.

## **strike**

### **Scaffolders at UK power station vote to strike**

Scaffolders carrying out annual maintenance on Eggborough power station near Goole in the East Riding of Yorkshire have voted unanimously to strike.

They work for Cape Industrial Services and are members of the Unite union. They are set to begin an overtime ban on August 16 followed by 48-hour strikes beginning August 17 and 21. They accuse the company of being in breach of a national pay agreement.

### **UK Argos retailer warehouse staff to strike**

Around 1,000 Unite members working for catalogue retailer Argos at their warehouse in Lutterworth in Leicestershire are due to strike on August 15 for three weeks. The action is in response to Argos's plan to close the Lutterworth site and transfer 500 of the jobs to Kettering in Northamptonshire.

### **Strike threat by refuse collectors in northern England**

Following an 89 percent vote in favour of a strike, the Unite union has announced strikes by Doncaster council's refuse collectors. Suez, a private company is contracted by the council to carry out refuse collection in the city. Initially they will strike from August 23 to August 27 followed by a further strike beginning September 2 through September 6.

The threat is in response to the company's offered two percent pay increase linked to a removal of guaranteed overtime, which would result in no overall pay increase.

In another attack, from October the company is seeking to halve its current workforce of 250 and bring in a 4-day instead of 5-day work pattern. Unite has announced it will hold a separate ballot over the proposal.

### **Protest and strike threat by Croatian ship workers**

On Monday, workers employed by the Croatia state owned shipping company, Jadrolinija, held a protest in Split and threatened strike action. They are members of the Independent Union of Seafarers of Croatian Passenger Ships.

They have several grievances relating to their pay and conditions. They have not had a pay increase for 10 years and recently had their pay cut. Some workers have no security, being on fixed term contracts.

Some on-board staff are expected to work 19 hours in a row in contravention of the legal limit of a 14-hour day.

Africa

### **South African miners union planning demonstration and general**

The South African National Union of Miners (NUM) is planning a protest demonstration against job losses following a demonstration last week at Anglo Gold Ashanti at their offices in Johannesburg. The company plans to cut 8,500 jobs.

Bokoni Platinum Mine has announced 2,600 jobs losses, to go almost immediately.

The union is threatening to call a "more than one day general strike" and are calling on African National Congress Resources Minister Mosebenzi Zwane to demand the mining industry halt the job losses.

### **South Africa's engineering unions avoid confrontation with employers**

The South African trade unions in the metal industry are close to a settlement with employer's organisations.

However, a deal due to be announced yesterday did not include the National Employers Association of South Africa (NEASA). NEASA refuses to be bound by the much larger Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of SA's domination in the Metal Industries Bargaining Council (MIBC) negotiation body.

The two main unions involved in the dispute, the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) and the United Association of South Africa (UASA), have split and UASA are opposing strikes by doing deals with individual employers.

The negotiations had reached an impasse with the labour arbitration body failing to get a resolution to the unions pay claims of 12 percent. The MIBC is offering just 5.4 per cent.

Even if the union settles for the below inflation figure of 5.4 percent, the NEASA said it would refuse to abide by the agreement.

According to reports, 25,000 jobs were lost from the industry last year and the South African economy has gone into recession.

Youth unemployment in the country officially stands at 67 percent and general unemployment is said to be 27 percent.

### **Transnet South Africa reneges on promises of full-time jobs**

Casual employees previously employed by Transnet, South Africa's transport system, demonstrated this week over losing their jobs.

Three hundred casuals were protesting the company reneging on a promise to convert their informal jobs into official jobs on the company books.

Demonstrators complained that the jobs they had lost were being advertised to workers employed within the company. Workers handed in a memorandum in an appeal to the company to honour its promises.

### **South African national parks staff forced back to work**

The Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERA), returned to work August 2. The union organises employees at South Africa's national parks, who were striking for a revised 7.5

percent pay increase, down from 9 percent.

Workers had been on strike for two weeks in response to SANParks offer of just over six percent, which the members rejected. According to a report in the *IOL news*, the union “unconditionally” abandoned the strike.

HOSPERA encompasses park rangers, field guides, cleaners and security guards and operates across 19 national parks.

### **Polytechnic staff strike banned by decree in Lagos State, Nigeria**

Nigerian polytechnic staff have been ordered not to strike by decree, as a result of an interlocutory injunction, served by the National Industrial Court. Staff members at Lapotech Polytechnic have been barred from striking and are instructed to go back to work immediately.

Staff resumed a postponed strike after giving the Lagos state government a month to come up with a solution ending July 31. An indefinite strike was launched August 1.

Three unions at the polytechnic, the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Polytechnics and the Non Academic Staff Union are in dispute over a 2009 non-implemented wage structure.

The Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (CONTISS) 15 Migration Scheme was agreed, but not implemented. As a consequence, N1.7 billion (US\$4.7m) is owed in back pay.

### **Nigerian council workers withdraw labour over 15 months of unpaid wages**

The strike by council workers in Bayelsa State over unpaid wages and allowances has entered its third week

Some of the workers are owed up to 15 months in wages and the union, the National Union of Local government (NULGE), has called on the state governor to divert infrastructure spending to pay the unpaid wages.

### **Pilots and engineers strike over redundancy payments at Nigerian airline**

Airline pilots and engineers have declared a national strike over the sacking, without termination payments, of 600 of their colleagues at Aero Contractors of Nigeria Company.

The airline company is currently being bailed out by the state-financed Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON) with the resulting loss of jobs.

The National Association of Airline Pilots and Engineers said they agreed with the redundancies in an attempt to rescue the airline, while more than half the workforce lost their jobs.

### **Ugandan rail workers strike over unpaid wages and security funds**

Four hundred rail workers went out on strike July 26 in Uganda demanding the payment of June and July’s wages.

Rift Valley Railways Uganda, responsible for running the Ugandan and Kenyan railway parastatals have also not been paying workers provident funds. Management, confronted with lawyers demanding workers provident fund payments, claim they had to use wages to cover the claim.

According to management, workers downed tools without a call from their union, the Uganda Railways Workers' Union, and they regard the action as illegal.



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