

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 September 2017

Strike threat by Irish rail staff

Europe

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Talks under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission, between management at state-owned Irish Rail and the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) and Siptu over demands for a 3.75 percent pay rise, broke down Wednesday.

In previous negotiations the company has failed to make any significant offer. After the talks both unions announced they are likely to ballot for strike action, but are desperate for the company to come up with an offer they can sell. The 2,000 Irish rail staff have seen a virtual pay freeze over the last 10 years.

A strike would impact some 155,000 daily passengers.

Rise in absenteeism by Irish bus drivers

State-owned Bus Eireann has accused its drivers of high levels of sickness resulting in many cancellations. Following a three-week strike earlier in the year, the company introduced new work rosters in an attempt to save money.

The Siptu trade union denies the high levels of sickness is related to the new rostering schedules, but concedes there is anger over them. The company has threatened disciplinary measures, including the dismissal of those deemed to be taking high levels of sick leave.

The other main union representing Bus Eireann staff, the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU), has described the rosters as “Dickensian” and has threatened industrial action at the end of next month.

Strike by UK nuclear workers

Staff working for Sellafield Limited, Cumbria, in northwest England held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. The company reprocesses spent nuclear fuel. Members of the GMB union are seeking a pay rise in line with current inflation, running at 3.9 percent. They have rejected a 1.5 percent rise imposed by the company.

GMB members voted by a more than 75 percent majority to take strike

action. Around 2,000 Unite members at the processing plant are being balloted over the same issue with the result to be announced on October 2.

Refuse workers ballot for action in Doncaster, England

Refuse workers employed by the private contractor Suez, to empty domestic waste bins on behalf of Doncaster council, South Yorkshire, are being balloted for possible strike action. They are represented by the Unite union.

Suez is seeking to make around 100 of its 250 staff redundant ahead of a new contract it is due to sign with the council. The strike, if it goes ahead, is likely to take place over the Christmas period. A previously agreed strike was called off by the union after the intervention of the government reconciliation service, Acas.

UK rail staff set to walk out over Driver Operated Only trains

Rail guards at four UK rail companies—Southern, Merseyrail, Arriva Rail North and Greater Anglia—are set to strike on Tuesday October 3 and Thursday October 5 over the issue of the expansion of driver operated only (DOO) trains, which raise issues of safety and job redundancies for train guards.

It follows previous strikes by Southern, Merseyrail, and Arriva Rail North staff over the same issue. For staff at Greater Anglia it will be their first strike over the issue.

Unite union wraps up strike by London hospital ancillary staff

Cleaners and other ancillary workers at the Barts Hospital group in London have ended their series of strikes after voting by a three to one majority to accept a one percent pay increase. There will also be a one-off £270 lump sum for those working more than 20 hours a week while staff on lower hours will receive £85.

The members of the Unite union are employed by the outsourcing company Serco. The main issue for the union bureaucracy was securing its bargaining rights with Serco, which the company agreed.

The defiant energetic campaign by the hospital ancillary staff, which won widespread support, has been left isolated by the Unite union. The union called off a series of planned days of action throughout the dispute.

Greek miners demonstrate against Canadian mine company

Around 200 miners employed at a Canadian-owned gold mine in northern Greece demonstrated outside the Ministry of Development last week. They were protesting plans by Eldorado Gold, based in Vancouver, to suspend investment and merely maintain the mine infrastructure.

The company issued the threat after the Greek government withheld permits from the company allowing it to expand production. The miners are demanding the government agree to permits to protect their jobs.

Tesco in Hungary agrees on pay rise

Following strikes and the threat of further strikes by workers at Tesco in Hungary, the company has agreed to a pay increase. The two unions involved—KDFSZ and KASZ—confirmed the supermarket company had agreed to the raise. Backdated to September 1, Tesco's lowest paid staff will get HUF 179,000 (\$675) a month. Further talks between the unions and Tesco management are set to begin next week.

The company did not agree with the other demand of the strikers for a 15 percent increase in staff numbers. The company has sent what was described as a "complex document" to the unions relating to the number of staff employed at each store, which will serve as a basis for negotiations. The content of the document has not been publicly revealed. Tesco employs around 20,000 people at over 200 stores in the country.

Walk-out by Italian warehouse staff

Beginning last week, warehouse workers across Italy have been coming out on strike in response to employers abrogating working terms and conditions.

The strike began in Carpiano just outside Milan but has since spread to several other cities, including Bologna, Rome, Turin, Pavia and Brescia.

Staff at Norwegian fish processing plant demand rights

Workers at Norse Production, a fish processing plant in the Norwegian city of Bergen, have been on strike since September 8 demanding a collective bargaining agreement with the company. They are represented by the Norwegian Food and Allied Workers Union (NNN).

Many of the strikers are immigrant workers from Poland and Lithuania. There has been a long-standing dispute over working conditions at the factory.

Middle East

Iranian industrial workers demand unpaid wages

Workers at Azarab and Hepco industrial units in the Iranian central city of Arak have gone on strike over unpaid wages. The two private companies provide heavy equipment for the road construction and oil

industries.

Earlier protests by Azarab and Hepco workers were brutally broken up in a heavy-handed fashion by riot police.

Africa

South African civil servants' wages deducted for striking

Workers that went on strike earlier in the year are being penalised by their local government employer. Public employees at South Africa's Bushbuckridge municipal authority have had R2,000 (US\$148) deducted from their monthly wage.

The civil servants went out on unofficial strike in April. As a part of their return to work agreement, they were to be paid for the period of the strike.

Instead the money has been deducted from their pay, with the council stating that this had been agreed with the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU).

South African bus workers in dispute

The bus workers union, South African Transport and Allied Workers (SATAWU), came out on strike Tuesday. Around 800 bus workers employed at North West Star bus services, in Hammanskraal, are striking over the conditions of the buses they operate, and over what is happening to their medical contributions.

Bus drivers claim the present buses are not fit for purpose and they are constantly breaking down, in many cases in very remote places, leaving them to suffer the wrath of passengers.

The union says it has an agreement with the management over the replacement of buses, but that agreement is not being implemented. SATAWU is demanding the management publish the agreement in the newspapers to put the company under public scrutiny.

South African miners resurface from underground protest

Miners who had been on strike and protesting underground at the Petra Diamond Finch mine, South Africa, have surfaced. They had protested for several days underground and only came up with the agreement that there would be no victimisation by management.

The protesting miners want an increase in wages, medical aid and housing subsidies of 10 percent in the next three consecutive years.

Management has so far not contacted their union, the National Union of Mineworkers, for further negotiations on the strikers' demands, but the management have said they will not be paying the monthly bonus.

Nigerian dock workers oppose illegal practices by oil company

Nigerian dock workers in Akwa Ibom State came out on strike on September 25 in protest of the bypassing of registered dockers for what they call "quacks."

The dockers union claims the oil and gas-producing company, Virgin Forest Energy, is refusing to employ its registered members in contravention of the country's labour laws.

The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria is attempting to pressure the government to intervene, citing labour and safety laws. They are also raising the issue of registered dockers having to pay 0.5 percent of their wages in to state funds for their administration.

Food administration workers go on national strike in Nigeria

Nigerian food and drug administration workers began a national strike September 21. The strike at the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, NAFDAC, by the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria is over allowances and the renewal of the company director general.

The director general's contract has run out but the new appointment is the responsibility of the president and is not being acted on. The allowance claim is a demand for parity with other workers in the same pay grade; it goes back to 2013.



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