

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Protest at Berlin's Tegel airport over Air Berlin bankruptcy and job threat

Workers at Tegel Airport in Berlin staged a midday protest on Monday over the insolvency of Air Berlin, Germany's second-biggest airline. The company filed for bankruptcy in August, having lost €2 billion over six years in the face of competition from low cost carriers.

The protest was called by the Verdi union.

The majority of the airline's 8,000 employees will be laid off after the airline stops operating on October 28.

By contrast, Air Berlin's chief executive Thomas Winkelmann will continue to draw a €4.5 million euros salary until 2021. When taking over the firm in February, he agreed to a salary of €950,000 per year plus a bonus of €400,000 for the first year. He also negotiated a bank guarantee to insure his earnings in the event of the company winding up.

Brewery workers strike in Belgium

Workers went out on strike to demand better pay at three Belgian breweries owned by Anheuser-Busch InBev, including their main site in Leuven, on October 13.

According to Belgian newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad*, workers are also demanding a new collective bargaining deal.

The workers picketed at breweries, in Leuven, Hoegaarden and Jupille, and blocked gates for two hours. The Leuven plant is adjacent to AB InBev's global headquarters, and brews its popular Stella Artois and Leffe beers.

Following the strike, further action was suspended by trade union representatives to allow for negotiations.

Capita office staff to strike in UK

Office staff at Capita in the UK voted by 95 percent to strike against changes to their pension scheme that could reduce the value of pensions by 70 percent for some employees.

The members of the Unite union are to strike on October 28 for nine days.

Pensions will be cut because the company plans to change from a defined benefit pension scheme to a defined contribution scheme, with no guarantees on the benefit to the recipient. Around four percent of Capita's employees would be affected initially, setting a precedent for future changes.

Bus drivers strike in Manchester UK, as union calls off another strike at same company

Bus drivers on routes in south Manchester struck on Monday as part of a pay dispute.

Buses from the Rusholme depot ground to a halt, hitting services to and from Sale and the city centre. Services between East Didsbury and the city centre were also hit.

The *Manchester Evening News* reported, "The Rusholme branch was taken over from Finglands in 2014, and it's understood they are on a lesser rate of pay than colleagues at other depots."

A strike by bus drivers employed by First, due to go ahead on October 16 in Bolton, was called off by the Unite union.

An earlier strike by First drivers was held on October 2, to protest a low pay offer.

On October 7, Unite suspended the strike while negotiations took place. The strike was then cancelled on the basis of a revised pay offer from the company. No details are available on the contents of the deal.

Doctors in Czech Republic strike over pay

Doctors in the Czech Republic took strike action for one day on October 18 causing clinics and surgeries to close.

The strike was held to protest low pay and to oppose new electronic prescriptions. Local doctors have been told they will not get a pay rise this year, while doctors in hospitals will.

Doctors in some outpatient clinics joined the protest as did hundreds of high street pharmacies, which closed for half an hour to show their support.

The doctors are also refusing to switch over to using electronic prescriptions instead of paper.

Junior doctors hold rally in Warsaw, Poland

Junior doctors in Warsaw, Poland held a rally in front of the prime minister's office on October 14 to protest low pay and the chronic underfunding of the health service.

The rally was held to bring attention to a two-week long hunger strike by 20 junior doctors in a Warsaw children's hospital.

The doctors say they will be forced to emigrate unless their meagre monthly salary of 1,500 zlotys (USD 420) is increased.

A banner held on the protest read, "Stop dying in queues". The health service in Poland was decimated during the "shock therapy" that accompanied the post-1989 restoration of capitalism.

Baggage handlers stage unofficial strike at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport

Baggage handlers who are facing termination of their seasonal contracts staged an unofficial work stoppage at Ben Gurion Airport on October 15. The strike caused flight delays of several hours.

Around 250 seasonal workers are set to lose their jobs as the peak travel season comes to an end. The baggage handlers had been issued with letters for an upcoming meeting to terminate their employment, but pre-empted the meeting by striking.

Israel Business News reported that the Ben Gurion Airport workers' committee coordinated the action.

Israeli tile makers locked out

Workers arriving for their jobs at the factory owned by Negev Ceramics Ltd. in Yeroham, Israel on October 13 found themselves confronted by armed security guards who prevented them from entering.

The company employs 700 people at 10 store branches and offices across the country.

Around 130 workers are set to lose their jobs if the factory is closed.

Zambian miners' union opposes secondment conditions

Three Zambian miners' unions have rejected a secondment proposal by Konkola Copper Mines plc (KCM), and in response the company has called a dispute.

Proposals were made to the Mine Workers' Union of Zambia (MUZ), National Union of Mine and Allied Workers (NUMAW) and the United Mine Workers Union of Zambia (UMUZ) as part of plans to second workers to a new contractor. The unions made counter proposals, which KCM opposed.

The unions demanded that KCM continue to provide a range of basic employment conditions including transport, meals, safety, and that current allowances and shift patterns be retained. After KCM rejected these demands the unions ended negotiations. The company has called on the support of conciliation services to force acceptance of the new arrangements.

Tunisian engineers to strike for wage increase

Tunisian engineering workers plan to strike October 24-26 if their employers' organisation does not implement a wage increase.

Negotiations have been ongoing since last March through a tripartite organisation consisting of the government, the employers and the unions. A pay agreement was conceded in response to industrial action taken last month.

After the agreement was conceded, it was regarded as standard for all employers to implement it.

The Federation of Foundries and Mechanical Engineering bargaining unit refused to sign the agreement for the tripartite agreed wage increases for 2016 and 2017.

Workers in companies that abide by the collective bargaining agreement forced the pay increase and the engineering workers are demanding their increase.

South African insurance staff strike over dangerous working conditions

South Africa's Road Accident Fund (RAF) employees are threatening to strike over poor working conditions. RAF, a state-owned company, provides motor vehicle accident cover and has been mired in financial crisis over several years.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) claim that conditions at work are dangerous and that the Fund does not care about its workers.

A two-day power cut left employees' offices without air conditioning last month, causing several workers to faint at their stations.

The near bankruptcy is also impacting workers, who have to double-up on computers. Companies that are owed money by RAF are seizing computers to cover overdue debts.

NUMSA holds a certificate enabling it to take industrial action, but says it would rather avoid a strike and settle amicably. Union members struck in March over similar issues.

South African teachers demonstrate over pay and conditions

Teachers demonstrated in Durban, South Africa October 13 over several issues affecting public education, including wages and promotions. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) planned to march in Pretoria on Tuesday.

Students were due to return to school Monday to face matriculation exams.

A central issue in the demonstrations is the non-recognition by the government of SADTU, the country's largest teachers' union. SADTU is also protesting vital posts going unfilled and delays in school funding.

Other grievances by teachers include a lack of basic facilities in schools, including toilets and support facilities for teachers and other educational staff.

The union presented the government's education department with a memorandum of its complaints, threatening further "rolling mass action" if they do not respond.

Pilots and first officers strike at South African low-cost airline

Pilots went on strike on Monday at Mango Airlines after the company rejected their pay demand. Mango, a low-cost airline operating out of South Africa, is offering only a 6 percent pay increase, while the union demands 8.5 percent.

The union involved, Solidarity, organises 95 percent of the airline's pilots and first officers who are also on strike. Solidarity said it is prepared to make a shift on its demands, but the company refuses to discuss any proposal outside its initial offer.

Solidarity initiated a survey of 1,000 airlines to establish their median pay. The survey revealed that the rate paid by Mango Airlines for pilots stood at 23 percent below the median pay rate and 40 percent lower for first officers.

Part of the union's appeal is the claim that their 8.5 percent pay demand will secure the allegiance of the pilots to the company, under conditions where they have lost around half their pilots to other airlines.

The pilots claim that other airlines are settling around their demand.

South African Airlink airline, threatened with strike action, settled with its South African Transport Workers Union-organised workforce at 10 percent.

South African cement workers strike

South African employees at PCC Cement and Slurry have gone on strike for a 12 percent wage increase. The strike got underway Monday after workers rejected the company's 6 percent offer.

The National Union of Mineworkers is also demanding an increase in housing allowances and union facilities. These include a pool car, time off for officials to visit members and a position for a full-time health and safety officer.

The company, South Africa's principal cement producer, has yet to respond to the demands.



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