

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East and Africa

27 October 2017

Strike by Metro staff in Greek capital

Workers on Athens' Metro system were set to carry out a 24-hour strike Thursday. Organised by the SELMA union, the strike was called to protest the Syriza government's plans to include the company operating the Athens Metro system, Stasy, in its privatization plans.

24-hour strike by Portuguese medics

Doctors in the Algarve, Portugal, as well as Greater Lisbon held a 24-hour strike Wednesday as part of an ongoing campaign. They are seeking a reduction in hours on Accident & Emergency wards, from 18 to 12 hours, along with a reduction in the maximum number of patients doctors must see, from 1,900 to 1,500.

Protest by Polish medics

Polish medics in the southern Polish district of Malopolska belonging to OZZL, the doctors' union, boycotted all but emergency cover on Wednesday. They did so in support of a hunger strike by young doctors demanding higher pay and financial support for the Polish medical system.

A group of 20 resident doctors began a hunger strike October 2 at a Warsaw paediatric hospital calling on the government to increase spending on the health service to 6.8 percent of GDP by 2021, along with a pay raise.

Further strikes by UK rail staff set for next month over driver only operated trains

Rail staff at five private railway companies are set to hold further strikes in opposition to the wider use of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at Southern, South Western Railway and Greater Anglia will begin a 48-hour strike on November 8, while Merseyrail and Arriva Rail North staff will hold 24-hour strikes.

The RMT is desperate to end the dispute and is willing to make concessions on the increasing use of DOO on trains.

RMT general secretary, Mick Cash, told the *Guardian*, "Every single

effort that RMT has made to reach negotiated settlements ... has been kicked back in our faces and we are left with no option but to confirm a further phase of industrial action."

Further day of strikes by Manchester bus staff

No Arriva North bus services ran in Greater Manchester on Monday as staff struck in a standoff over pay.

Bus drivers at the firm are set to hold a second 24-hour strike on October 30, with a further third day of action planned. The Unite and GMB trade union members are demanding a pay increase.

The day before the strike, Phil Stone, managing director for Arriva North West, said, "Our priority is to continue working together with UNITE and GMB to reach a mutually acceptable outcome, recognising that any pay increase has to be sustainable for the business going forward."

Unemployment centre workers in Sheffield begin month-long strike

Staff working at the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre on Eastern Avenue in Sheffield began a month-long strike Monday.

The members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) have already taken 26 days of strike action over DWP plans to close the Sheffield office, as part of its plans to close a total of 78 offices nationwide. The Sheffield office is slated to close on November 17.

Staff at University of Manchester to strike against job cuts

Workers at the University of Manchester in the northwest of England struck for two days on October 23-24 to oppose 171 job cuts, of which 140 are academic posts. The strike is to be followed by a work-to-rule action. The stoppage forced the cancellation of many lectures and seminars.

The job cuts will hit the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health (65 posts) with the rest coming from the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures and the Alliance Manchester Business School. While cutting existing jobs, the university is also planning to take on 100 new academics at lower rates of pay.

In a strike ballot held by the University and College Union (UCU), 93 percent favoured taking industrial action with 87 percent of members

voting.

Three unions at the university have been in negotiations with management for more than a year. Right up to the date of the strike, the UCU were asking management to withdraw the compulsory redundancies so that they could call it off and use other methods to make the job cuts. UCU regional officer, Martyn Moss, said “striking is always a last resort and there is still the opportunity to avoid it” if the University would “take compulsory redundancies off the table.”

The University of Manchester is the largest in the UK. It recorded a surplus of £36 million last year and declared it had £1.5 billion in reserve in 2015-16.

UK: Manchester Airport cleaners to strike

Cleaning staff employed by Mitie Cleaning and Environmental Services at Manchester Airport are set to hold three one-day strikes in November, December and January. The members of the Unite union are pushing for a pay increase. They currently earn the minimum wage of £7.50 and are seeking to be paid at least the voluntary “living wage” figure of £8.45.

Cypriot unions call off proposed strike

A three-hour strike, due to take place on Thursday, was called off following talks between public sector unions and finance minister Harris Georgiades. The strike was called to push for a pay rise.

PEO union general secretary, Pambis Kyritsis, welcomed the agreement reached.

Initially, the government had been threatening to no pay increase but now a pay rise will be introduced following further negotiations—but it will be no more than two percent.

The small increase follows pay cuts imposed since 2012.

Strike called by Finnish electricians union

The union representing Finnish electricians has announced a one-week strike beginning November 1.

It is expected around 1,000 workers will take part in the strike, hitting companies such as SSAB, which manufactures high strength steel products.

The strike was called in pursuit of a pay rise and in defense of industry-wide collective agreements.

Strike threat by Deutsche Bank Postbank staff

Staff at Deutsche Bank Postbank have voted by over 97 percent to strike in pursuit of a pay rise.

The ballot was called by the Verdi union, which is hoping that further negotiations, beginning this week, will produce results they can sell to the membership. Postbank is currently being integrated into Deutsche Bank.

Verdi is seeking to continue the current job guarantees, but only until

2022. Postbank is pushing for a 2019 cutoff. Verdi is also asking for a 5 percent pay increase for the 18,000 staff at Postbank, which has offered a 2.5 percent rise in two stages.

Irish rail unions announce strike dates

The National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) have announced five 24-hour strikes of Irish Rail staff, including the Dublin Bay rail service Dart.

The strikes are in pursuit of a 3.75 percent pay claim. The strike dates are November 1, 7, 14, 23 and December 8

NBRU members voted by a 93 percent majority for the action, while SIPTU members voted by 84 percent. SIPTU has 1,900 members employed by Irish Rail.

The company has offered a 1.75 percent rise. According to NBRU general secretary, Dermot O’Leary, at talks held last week the company made an offer of 2.5 percent but later withdrew it.

Libyan university staff strike threat

Staff at Benghazi University, including lecturers, cleaners and porters are threatening to strike over pay and conditions. At a meeting last week, they said they would go ahead with the strike unless the university improved their pay and conditions.

Tunisian metal workers set to strike

Private sector metal workers in Tunisia, organised by the FGME-UGTT union, were set to strike for three days this week beginning Tuesday. This follows three days of strikes in September. They are seeking a pay rise backdated to last year. The employers’ organisation, the federation of foundries and mechanical engineering, has so far failed to commit to negotiations over the claim.

Thousands of Kenyan plantation workers strike over unpaid wage deal

Sixty thousand tea plantation workers in Kenya went on strike more than a week ago protesting the non-implementation of a Labour Court ordered pay rise.

The court ordered a 30 percent pay increase in 2014, to be paid over two years—strikers had demanded a 50 percent wage rise.

The multinational employers, the Kenya Tea Growers Association (KTGA), paid the first 15 percent but have consistently resisted the second payment, appealing to the Court to block the remaining 15 percent payment.

A more recent collective bargaining agreement for 2016/17 has similarly not been honoured.

The KTGA successfully appealed to the Court to ban the present strike, demanding the plantation workers return to work.

In response, the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU) pleaded the strike was already underway and could not be reversed.

The Labour Court advised the KTGA that because “We got the notice when the strike was on ... the best that the KTGA can do is to go back to court and get fresh orders given that this one has been overtaken by events.”

The KTGA also threatened to use the police to drive the workers from their home, which are owned by the employers.



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Nigerian Emergency Agency workers strike

Nigeria’s National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) staff went out on strike last week over unpaid allowances and several other outstanding grievances.

The agency is responsible for overseeing the Internally Displaced Peoples camps and the strike is the first such action in its 10-year history.

The Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN) announced the strike last Thursday. The union said the strike would be indefinite until the management “listen to their demands.”

Nigerian airline workers union abandon strike

Unions in the Nigerian aviation industry called off a planned strike due to have started Wednesday.

Aviation workers are worried about possible jobs losses, resulting from non-payment of debt for services rendered to private companies by the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN).

One private operation has accumulated debts of over N2bn (\$5.5m) owed to the state body FAAN, going back to the inauguration of concessions in 2007.

After a meeting convened by the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Labour and the managers of relevant agencies, the Air Transport Senior Staff Services Association of Nigeria, the National Union of Air Transport Employees and the pension organisation, the National Union of Pensioners, accepted government assurances that no jobs were threatened.

The unions justified the sell-out to their members by saying the strike call was based on a “misunderstanding.”

South African rival engineering union demands right to represent workers

Toyota Tsusho workers in Durban, South Africa, began a strike over union representation rights last week.

The Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa (LIMUSA) was established in 2014 and affiliated to COSATU—the Confederation of South African Trade Unions.

The company and the new union and the government’s conciliation services, CCMA, have come together over the dispute and are in discussion.

Business commentators have raised fears that unions competing for members is creating “unrealistic” demands and driving up the cost of labour.