

UK rail staff in limited strike

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.

Europe

Strike by staff at five UK rail companies

Rail staff at five UK rail companies, Southern, South Western Railway and Greater Anglia, began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday, while staff at Merseyrail and Arriva Rail North began 24-hour strikes. Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union are resisting plans by the rail companies to extend the use of driver-only operated (DOO) trains. The move to DOO train operations threatens around 6,000 train guard/conductor posts.

The series of strikes was well-supported, with picket lines at all workplaces, and resulted in a big disruption to rail services; South West Trains was particularly affected, with over a third of its services hit by the dispute.

The limited actions are one in a series of strikes against the use of DOO trains and appear aimed at dissipating workers' militancy without seriously impacting management.

Walkouts hit bus services in northwest England

Around 2,000 bus drivers and engineers working for Arriva North West at 11 depots in northwest England, covering Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire, went on a 24-hour strike Wednesday in an ongoing pay dispute. The strike, coordinated with the rail strike on Merseyside, had a big impact on public transport access in the area. The workers have taken strike action for the last six Mondays.

The drivers are members of the Unite and GMB unions. Further strikes are planned for November 13, 20 and 27.

In a separate dispute, drivers working for First Bus in Rusholme area of Manchester were on strike Monday over pay parity. First took over the Rusholme depot from Finglands in 2013, but staff continue to be paid around £5,000 a year less than First Bus staff at other depots in the Manchester area.

UK nuclear plant staff fight for pay rise

On Wednesday, around 1,000 staff working for Sellafield Ltd, which decommissions nuclear material, held a 24-hour strike. Unite union members are opposing an imposed 1.5 percent pay increase back-dated till April.

The workers voted by more than 90 percent for strike action.

Housing workers in Manchester to begin series of strikes

Nearly 200 housing maintenance staff working for Mears and Manchester have voted to take 49 days' strike action, beginning next week and spread over various dates through February of next year.

Members of the Unite union voted for the new round of strikes following 40 days of strikes earlier this year. They are contracted to maintain Manchester City Council housing stock and are in dispute over pay parity, receiving around £3,500 less than others doing similar work.

Job centre staff in southern England in dispute

Staff at the Exeter Street job centre in Plymouth held a 24-hour strike on Monday over plans by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to close the office along with other offices throughout the country. The staff are members of the Public and Commercial Services union.

Under DWP plans, around 50 staff at the Exeter Street office would be made redundant, while a further 350 would be relocated to other job centre sites.

London cinema staff demand living wage

Staff at five Picturehouse cinemas in London held strikes on Sunday and Monday as part of their ongoing fight to be paid the London Living Wage, currently set at £10.20. The members of the Bectu section of the Prospect union are also demanding sick pay and maternity pay.

Gas plant staff in northern Scotland set to strike

Workers at the Gas Plant terminal in Shetland, northern Scotland, owned by Total, have voted to strike over pay issues.

Around 80 staff employed by Aker Solution are members of the Unite union and voted by a more than 90 percent majority to take the action, which will involve striking every Monday and Wednesday beginning November 20. The terminal, which handles around 10 percent of UK gas production, is expected to be badly affected by the action.

Irish rail staff hold further walkout

Staff at the Irish Rail Company, Iarnrod Eireann, held a further one-day strike on Tuesday hitting commuter, intercity services and the Dublin Bay Dart service.

The staff, members of the National Bus and Railworkers Union and the Services Industrial, Professional and Technical Union are seeking a 3.75 percent pay rise. Further strikes are planned for November 14, 23 and December 8.

Finnish electrical workers return to work

Around 1,000 striking members of the Electrical Workers' Union returned to work Tuesday. They were protesting the failure of employers, organised under the umbrella of the Technology Industries of Finland, to negotiate a continuation of the current collective agreement that expired at the end of October.

A further strike of electrical workers, involving 2,500 members from across the technology industry, is due to start today and would last till November 27 if no agreement is reached.

Cypriot power workers cancel action

A two-hour strike organised by four unions representing staff working for EAC, the country's electric power company, due to have taken place on Thursday, was cancelled. A 24-hour strike was also due to take place next week. EAC workers are protesting government plans to open up the state-owned EAC to privatisation.

The strike was cancelled following promises by the Cypriot president, Nicos Anastasiades, to meet with union representatives.

Middle East

Israeli trade union federation dispute over nursing care insurance

Last week, the Israeli general federation of labour, Histadrut, announced it would declare a dispute over plans by the government to end nursing care insurance from January 1. The proposed strike would hit education, as two educational unions would be expected to support the action. If it goes ahead, Histadrut would be able to call the strike sometime next week.

Egyptian government attacks union rights

On Tuesday, a draft bill was presented to the Egyptian parliament seeking to restrict the ability of independent trade unions to operate. In effect, it would mean that the state-controlled, Egyptian Trade Union Federation would become the only union able to represent workers.

Yemeni teachers strike

Teachers in the Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen have gone on strike over non-payment of wages. Many have not been paid for more than a year. The teachers are represented by the Yemen Teachers Syndicate.

Africa

Ugandan doctors demand improvement in pay and conditions

Ugandan doctors went on strike Monday demanding a pay raise and equipment to carry out their work.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni threatened the strikers, who work in public hospitals, with a state of emergency and to jail the medics prior to them striking.

A spokesman for the doctors said they are working without such necessities as painkillers, disinfectant and gloves.

Entry-level doctor's salaries average 1.1 million shillings (US\$300) a month, while a senior doctor earns around three times as much.

Reuters reported on November 6 that the doctors are demanding 8.5 million shillings (US\$2,340) and 45 million shillings (US\$12,400) a month, respectively.

Uganda's judicial workers were reported to be also preparing to strike next month complaining agreements with the government have failed to materialise.

College and polytechnic workers protest unpaid wages

Workers in tertiary education in Oyo state, Nigeria, went on strike last Friday over months of unpaid wages. In many cases, workers have gone without wages for up to 15 months.

The strike was called under the umbrella of the Joint Action Committee of All Trade Unions (JACATU) and has affected Colleges and Polytechnics across the state.

JACATU pleaded they have tried always to avoid a strike, but after issuing a warning strike notice October 19, the action had become unavoidable.

Apart from the wages arrears, the unions are also appealing to the state to return to paying wages in full. Workers have not been paid a full salary since January 2016, receiving only 25 percent of their pay while paying 100 percent tax.

Nationally, the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics said it would embark on a strike as soon as its 21 days warning to strike ends on November 13. The unions complain the government is not interested in coming up with an agreement even though the sector is on the verge of collapse.

Nigerian public sector workers demonstrate “against autocracy”

The National Labour Congress organised a march to protest the sacking of 21,780 teachers in the Nigerian state of Kaduna.

The state government is using a “competency” test to remove the teachers from their jobs.

Thousands of teachers supported by local government and health service workers from 23 administrations took part in the march, demanding the reinstatement of the teachers. Slogans featured included “Kick Against Autocracy.”

Pupils from the schools of sacked teachers came out to demonstrate in their localities, in some cases lying down across highways.

A sacked teacher, Ibrahim Yusuf, claimed that many of the retained “teachers” on the state’s list were security guards, retired teachers and, on the books, even people that had died long ago.

The National Union of Teachers has issued a strike warning to be implemented in two weeks unless the state reinstates the sacked teachers.

Kenyan nurses face lockout

Nurses returning to work at Kenya’s Muranga hospital, after their strike had been called off last week, have been locked out.

The strike was ongoing since December 2016, with a brief interlude when the union called it off at the end of April based on a bogus settlement that included a non-victimisation clause.

To drive nurses back to work, the councils of governors across the counties advertised the nurses’ jobs and in some cases replaced them with a short-term scab labour force.

As part of a settlement, Kenya’s Labour Court instructed the governors to remove any staff employed in place of the strikers, and return the nurses to their jobs. Nurses’ jobs that had been taken by scabs were paid at about a third less than the official rate and restricted to a one-year contract.

At the strike settlement, Muranga’s county governor directed hospital management to refuse to reinstate the original nursing staff, retaining 35 strikebreakers and 35 extra scabs it employed near the conclusion of the strike.

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses says it will uphold the rights of the nurses and, ostensibly, the Labour Court decision.

Kenyan university lecturers out on strike

Kenyan university lecturers came out on strike November 1 for the third time this year.

The federal government has continuously disregarded the 2013-2017 collective bargaining agreement (CBA), provoking regular disruption of the university system.

The CBA was signed with the University of Academic Staffs Association (UASA), but not implemented. Only five universities have put the CBA into operation, while UASA staff at all 31 public universities are supporting the strike.

Nine-thousand academic staff are owed around US\$50 million in

Kenyan tea workers’ action called off again

Kenyan plantation workers have been sent back to work by their union on a Labour Court order.

Before the court order was issued, the general secretary of the Kenyan Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (also general secretary of the Central Organisation of the Trade Unions) had called on its members to stick with the strike, as it was legal.

The union leader accused the Kenya Tea Growers Association (KTGA) as acting in defiance of a Labour Court order for them come together and negotiate.

Sixty-thousand plantation workers had been on strike for three weeks to get the KTGA to honour a second payment of a 30 percent pay rise going back to 2015.

Unidentified arsonists were held responsible for setting fire to parts of a plantation to put the blame on the strikers.

The Labour Courts had to reassert a previous ruling stopping the KTGA from sacking and throwing its employees out of their accommodations.

Ghana aviation workers fight imposition of company union

Ghana aviation workers took strike action last Friday over working conditions and union representation. Workers complained that the management of the newly built airport were undermining their local union to impose a company union on them.

The hundreds of casual workers, represented by the local union, had not had safety and transportation facilities arranged for them at the newly built US\$25 million airport. The new airport is extolled as a part of a leading state-owned business entity with a large-scale investments programme, which included the refurbishments of state-owned airports throughout the country.



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