

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

24 November 2017

## Strike by UK Arriva rail staff

Rail workers at private rail firm Arriva Cross Country held a 24-hour strike on Sunday. Three other 24-hour strikes and one 48-hour strike at weekends are planned in the weeks leading up to the end of the year.

The RMT members are protesting plans by Arriva to recruit train managers without training to carry out the safety role currently carried out by guards.

Drivers at Arriva are also opposing the company's attempts to impose compulsory overtime.

Arriva Cross Country runs services throughout the UK.

Train guards and drivers at Arriva and other private rail franchises are currently opposing plans by the companies to impose the Driver Only Operated system on trains, which will result in the elimination of the guards job and severely jeopardize public safety.

## Strike vote by UK rail staff on Virgin West Coast route

Around 1,800 rail staff, including train managers and on board caterers working for Virgin West Coast, have voted 9-1 in favour of strike action.

They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

Virgin had agreed a deal for train drivers to buy out their claim for a one-hour reduction in the working week by giving an additional £500 on their basic salary, while asking RMT to enter into self-financing arrangements for other grades.

The RMT is calling for its members to receive the same offer as the drivers.

The union's executive will consider the result of the ballot but have made clear it is open to further talks before sanctioning any action.

Members of the RMT working for Virgin East Coast, are to be balloted in the coming weeks over the same issue.

## Outsourced staff at University of London hold protest and strike

Outsourced staff providing domestic support services at the City of London University held a strike together with a demonstration outside the university's Senate House on Tuesday.

They are employed by the facilities management company Cordant Security and are seeking a pay rise to end zero hours contracts and for their jobs to be taken in house.

The 75 staff represented by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain have also launched a legal challenge to demand the university employ them directly and bring their pay and conditions in line with other university staff.

## UK nuclear staff to hold further strike

Around 3,000 nuclear processing workers at Sellafield in northwest England are to hold a second 24-hour strike on November 29.

The GMB union members are protesting an imposed pay rise of just 1.5 percent by their employer, Sellafield Ltd.

## UK army tank driving instructors hold strike

Staff working for the Babcock International Group responsible for instructing armed forces personnel to drive tanks and armored cars held a one-day strike on Wednesday.

The Public and Commercial Services union members have rejected a below inflation pay offer. They have received below inflation rises for several years while profits made by Babcock have increased by nearly 80 percent over the last four years.

## Bus drivers in Manchester, UK to step up action

70 bus drivers working for the First Manchester bus company at the Rusholme depot are to step up their dispute over pay parity. Members of the Unite trade union, they have been holding strikes each Monday since October.

First Manchester took over the Rusholme depot from former owner Finglands Coachways in 2013. Staff at Rusholme are paid around £5,000 less per annum compared to other First Manchester staff in Manchester. An offer from the company would still have left the Rusholme workers earning around £4,000 per annum less than other staff in the company.

The drivers will strike Monday, Wednesday and Friday until December 15.

## Subway staff in Greek capital strike

Staff on the Athens Metro subway system, STASY, held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The strike caused gridlock as the Metro normally carries around 1 million passengers each day.

The workers are calling for additional funding for the network and oppose proposals by the pseudo-left Syriza government to privatise the system. Syriza plans to include STASY in the assets of its new privatisation fund.

Workers also demand the continuation of the Metro's free provision for the unemployed and subsidies for low-income customers.

### **Strike of Greek local authority staff**

Greek local authority staff held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. They also held protests in Athens, with one outside the Education Ministry at 9am and another outside the Interior Ministry at noon.

The POE-OTA union members demands include the hiring of additional staff to plug holes in services and for a new collective agreement that would offer enhanced job security and employment rights.

### **Finnish social workers call for more resources**

Over a thousand Finnish social workers have petitioned national and municipal authorities to provide more resources for child welfare.

The petition highlights the heavy caseloads being carried out by social work staff. Social workers are responsible for 40-50 cases on average, even though the recommended maximum is 30.

A 2013 assessment of social workers' caseloads carried out by the regional state for Eastern Finland, highlighted some social workers with caseloads of 80 to 120.

### **South African appliances workers strike for increased housing allowance**

Workers employed at the South African producer of domestic appliances, Whirlpool, are continuing to strike over housing allowances.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) are asking the company to increase its housing allowances for the workforce from R150 (US \$10) to R500 (US \$35) a month.

The strike began November 6 and 900 union members and non-members joined the strike. A meeting with the company and the union was convened Tuesday this week with no reported outcome as yet.

The lowest paid workers at the company gets R43 an hour (US \$3).

### **South African Coca Cola workers continue striking over self-financed wage increase**

After six weeks on strike, around 70 percent of 1,800 South African Coca Cola workers are refusing to return to work. The workers are former employees of Coca Cola Fortune, which was merged with other entities in 2016 to form Coca Cola Beveridges South Africa.

Workers initially demanded a 12 percent pay increase, which the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) revised down to a seven percent unconditional wage increase, plus improvements in working conditions.

Coca Cola upped their three percent offer to seven percent but introduced productivity strings, including working weekends and holidays without premium payments.

FAWU has isolated the strike to the former Fortune plants in the Eastern

Cape, Free State, Northern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

### **Striking Ugandan doctors taken to court by government and unions**

As 1,200 doctors enter their fourth week of strike action, the Ugandan Medical Workers Union (UMWU) and government have joined forces in seeking to have the strike declared illegal.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said the doctors would regret their strike, while the Health Minister is demanding that the doctors leave their government houses.

For their part, the UMWU, backed by the National Organization of Trade unions and the Uganda Nurses and Midwives, have gone to the High Court in Kampala claiming that the Ugandan Medical Association (UMA) [a professional body] had no right to call the ongoing strike.

Representatives from the Ugandan government have been in negotiations with the UMA since the outset of the strike, not the UMWU.

The hospitals continue working under emergency care services, with a number of police and military doctors and nurses being drafted into some hospitals in an effort to break the strike.

### **Uranium miners union protects Namibian company interests**

Uranium miners demonstrated at Namibia's Swakop Husab Mine head office November 15 over wages and conditions

The Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) has failed get the miners their 2016 annual settlement implemented and is being sidelined in the 2017 wage negotiations.

The chairman of the union branch is quoted in *The Namibian* as stating in a petition put to the company prior to a list of grievances: "As leadership we have always tried to protect the company from any embarrassing situation. However, as leaders, we are also bound by the wishes of the members, where it is justified to do so."

Workers complain of an unfair grading system that moves staff from lower paid jobs into a higher graded jobs without due compensation.

### **Kenyan academics strike further provoked by government announcement**

The ongoing Kenyan university lecturers' strike over the renegeing by employers of the University Academic Staff Union's 2013-17 collective bargaining agreement (CBA), has been fueled by threats of casualization.

New regulations announced by the Education Secretary, to be introduced from 2018, would mean teaching and non-teaching staff being hired on non-permanent and non-pensionable terms.

A 54 day strike ended earlier this year when the CBA was signed and N10 billion (US \$277.8 million) released to finance owed wages and increased pay and conditions for university sector employees.

However, the employers reneged on the deal and reverted back to the old pay scale.



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