

London hospital workers protest low pay and poor working conditions

# 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.

## London hospital workers protest low pay and poor working conditions

Protests took place outside five hospitals in London on Tuesday against low pay, poor working conditions and alleged bullying.

The protests were held at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kingston Hospital, Maudsley Hospital, Lambeth Hospital and Bethlem Hospital. They were organised by the GMB union against the outsourcing company ISS, which provides cleaning, security and portering services at the hospitals.

Workers are pushing the company to pay the voluntary "London Living Wage" currently set at £10.20. Many of the ISS staff earn as little as £7.88 an hour. Other grievances include the company withholding pay, the use of casual contracts and accusations that supervisors are following staff to the toilet.

## Strikes across Europe against Ryanair called off as company agrees to recognize unions

Faced with the prospect of strikes in several European countries, the Dublin-based low cost airline Ryanair has reversed its 32-year-old policy of refusing to negotiate with unions.

Pilots working for Ryanair in the UK, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy had called strikes in the run up to Christmas over wages and working conditions. The strikes have now been called off pending negotiation between the various national union bodies and Ryanair.

Representatives of pilots' unions working for the German wing of Ryanair's European operation flew into Dublin Wednesday to hold talks regarding union recognition.

The Dublin-based pilots working for Ryanair had been due to strike on Wednesday. Ryanair, however, failed to put in writing its agreement to recognize their union, Impact. The union responded by refusing to lift the strike threat unless Ryanair management put in writing its agreement to recognize the union by noon yesterday.

In addition, Ryanair has agreed to recognize the International Federation

of Transport Workers and in the New Year will hold negotiations with union representatives of its cabin crew staff throughout its European operation.

## UK rail union announces dates for industrial action in New Year

Guards working for several UK rail companies are to walk out in the New Year as part of the ongoing dispute over Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains. The rail companies want to extend the use of DOO trains, downgrading the role of guards with the eventual goal of eliminating their jobs. DOO will greatly compromise passenger safety and lead to the destruction of 6,000 guards' jobs.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) announced it will hold 24-hour strikes on January 8, 10 and 12 at South Western Railway, Greater Anglia, Merseyrail, Northern and the Island line on the Isle of Wight in southern England. RMT members working for Southern are due to walk out on January 8.

## UK Virgin West Coast train staff hold further one-day strike

Staff employed by Virgin West Coast walked out again today. They are seeking parity with drivers working for West Coast, who agreed the company could buy out their claim for a one hour reduction in the base working week with no loss of pay in return for an additional £500 pensionable increase on their basic pay.

The members of the RMT are due to hold a further planned four days of strikes throughout January.

## Staff working for UK capital light rail system to walkout New Year's eve

Staff employed by outsourcing company ISS employed on the London Docklands Light Railway system are set to strike on New Year's Eve. The staff provide cleaning services, security and information services on the network.

The RMT members are protesting the company's refusal to hold meaningful talks on low pay and other issues.

### **Wildcat action on London Crossrail project**

Around 200 Crossrail construction workers held a wildcat strike in London December 14. They are employed on the project constructing a new rail link across the UK capital.

The walkout was in response to construction firm Balfour Beatty making 54 workers redundant at short notice and locking out a further 50.

### **UK First Manchester bus workers continue industrial action**

Seventy bus drivers at the First Manchester bus depot in the Rusholme district of Manchester, England continued strike action Wednesday in an ongoing dispute over pay parity.

The workers are employed by the international company FirstGroup that also owns Greyhound, the largest bus operator in the US.

The workers are paid £5,000 a year (or 23 percent) less than other First Manchester drivers doing the same job--a disparity that began when First took over the depot from previous owner Finglands Coachways.

Pickets swelled to 60 strong, including drivers from other depots and local supporters, stopping some buses leaving the depot driven by management.

The Rusholme drivers were left isolated when their union Unite recommended drivers at another depot in nearby Bolton accept a pay deal, ending a planned joint strike.

### **Job centre staff in southern England strike for two days**

Job centre staff working at the Oak Tree Court job centre in Plymouth, England began a two-day strike yesterday over plans to close the centre with the loss of 46 jobs. Other staff face being forcibly relocated.

The government is set to close more than 1 in 10 Jobcentres around the UK, with the loss of up to 750 jobs.

The workers are members of the Public and Commercial Services union.

### **One-day action at Scottish food plants called off**

Staff working for Scotbeef, a large privately owned fresh meat producer based in Scotland, had been due to walkout on Tuesday. However, following talks under the auspices of Acas, the government mediation service, the action was called off.

Workers at the company's sites in East Kilbride and Queenslie in Glasgow had voted by over 80 percent for the action in protest at the company's pay offer of only 1.7 percent, and its proposals to change break arrangements.

The workers are members of the shop workers union, Usdaw.

### **UK: Journalists at Swindon Advertiser announce strike**

Journalists employed by local newspaper, the *Swindon Advertiser*, have announced they will walkout on January 2 and 3. The paper is owned by the Newsquest group.

The National Union of Journalists members are protesting low levels of pay. Newsquest is on target to make an operating profit of £4 million this year.

### **Strike by Dutch primary school staff**

Primary teachers in Holland went on strike for 24 hours on December 12. Their main demands include a pay increase, easing of workloads and for the recruitment of additional teachers.

Teachers are concerned the quality of primary school teaching in Holland is being undermined because of staff shortages.

Several unions, including CNV Education, called the strike, which was supported by parents' groups concerned at the state of primary education.

### **Icelandair strike suspended**

Aircraft mechanics working for Icelandair suspended their action on Tuesday. They walked out on Sunday seeking a pay increase and a new 12-month contract, until talks finished in the early hours of Tuesday.

The Icelandic Aircraft Mechanics Association have accepted an offer from employers including a new contract extended to 2019. Mechanics will vote over the next four weeks on the new offer.

### **Israeli pharmaceutical staff strike**

Workers at Israeli pharmaceutical company, Teva, struck on Tuesday. They were protesting plans by the multinational company to cut nearly 1,700 jobs throughout Israel, including 800 at its manufacturing plant in Jerusalem.

Teva is planning the cuts in an attempt clear its debts.

Staff at Tel Aviv airport and the Tel Aviv stock exchange held a half-day strike on Sunday in support of the Teva workers.

### **Kenyan nurses in Vihiga County threaten to continue strike**

Nurses in Vihiga County, Kenya, gave notice they will strike on Christmas Eve if the county government does not implement a previously agreed promotions policy.

A national strike, running for 151 days since June 5, was tentatively resolved at the beginning of November.

During the strike, 600 nurses were threatened with the termination of their employment and 191 nurses' jobs were advertised for replacement.

## **Kenyan Airline workers reinstated by Labour Court**

An industrial court ruling on the sacking by Kenyan Airlines of all of its 131 aircraft engineers has forced a reversal. Striking engineers took industrial action in pursuit of a pay claim that would bring their wages into line with their counterparts at Middle East airlines.

The judge explained her decision by saying she could not allow planes to fly without being serviced. A previous ruling by the Labour Court had deemed the strike illegal.

The date for reinstatement was set for December 19.

## **Swaziland tax revenue workers strike at border posts**

Five hundred employees of Swaziland's Revenue Authority went on strike December 13 to demand an increase in wages.

The workers are in the Swaziland Revenue Authority Workers Union (SRAWU), which initially put in a pay claim of 13.3 percent, but eventually settled for 6.8 percent.

When information leaked out that management had received a 20 percent salary increase, the workers decided to make a renewed effort for the full 13.3 percent.

The workers operate the country's 13 border gates, checking passports and collecting import and other duties.

In response to the border post authorities saying all crossings would be open, SRAWU president Tremendous Dlamini said that members had a choice whether to strike or not.

## **South African broadcasting unions capitulate**

Two South African broadcasting unions have ended a strike at the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The stoppage, called December 14 for a 10 percent wage increase backdated nine months, was called off on Monday.

The Communication Workers Union and the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media & Allied Workers Union settled for 4.8 percent pay increase and six months of back pay.

A poster on the picket line declared: "10 percent, it's not our fault" (meaning the fact that the broadcast company is bankrupt) and "Board gets millions and we get peanuts" ---a reference to the interim board of directors being paid R3.9 million.

The previous SABC board was dismissed for alleged corruption.

## **Senegalese air traffic controllers strike over safety and travel expenses**

Air traffic controllers went on strike for 24 hours at Senegal's new international airport on December 14. The Turkish/Senegalese consortium managing the \$680 million airport complained that 30 flights had to be cancelled because of the strike.

The controllers are striking because their training programme at the airport does not adequately enable them to ensure passenger safety.

Workers say they have little experience with the advanced technology

fitted at the control tower. They are also concerned that travel allowances need to be upgraded to compensate for the extra 28 miles they have to travel to work. The new airport is 38 miles from their previous place of work, in Senegal's capital, Dakar.

The old airport in the city centre has been taken over by the military.

A spokesman for the air traffic controllers union said the strike "could" go on if their terms were not met. Shortly afterwards, however, the union called off the strike, with no reported commitment to safety or consideration of extra cost to employees on the part of management.

## **Nigerian municipal workers to resume strike over reneged deals**

Nigerian municipal workers employed by Cross Rivers state government have threatened to walk out if the authorities do not honour a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This was signed in July with the National Labour Congress after workers took strike action.

The MoU incorporated an agreement to pay bonuses arrears and pensions going back to 2013.

Promotions initially covered in the deal were initiated, but the increases later reverted to the previous rates.

## **Nigerian civil servants threaten to strike for full pay**

Members of Nigeria's National Labour Congress in Osun State have threatened to strike in less than three weeks' time unless they get their wages in full.

Civil servants have been on what is referred to as modulated wages since 2015. Workers in three categories have been paid different percentages of their wages for the last two years. Category 1 to 7 gets their full pay, 8-12 gets 75 percent and 12 upwards only get 50 percent of their wages.

Workers will still not be getting full pay next year, as the government claims it lacks the resources.



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