UK refuse collectors defy unions; French rail strikes continue; Uber drivers, telecom and rail strikes in South Africa

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 July 2018

Europe

French rail strike to continue

Members of two French rail unions, Sud-rail and the Stalinist aligned CGT, are to strike today and tomorrow against government legislation to end rail workers' work and pensions conditions and privatization.

The ongoing dispute began in April, involving all the rail unions. The last two days of action by the unions took place on June 27 and 28.

Irish based Ryanair pilots vote to strike

Dublin-based Irish pilots at Ryanair have voted overwhelmingly in favour of striking on July 12, with additional strikes a possibility. The members of the Irish Air Line Pilots' Association are accusing Ryanair of making slow progress over talks about improved pay and working conditions.

Refuse collectors in Huddersfield, UK strike against union/council offer

Around 80 refuse collectors who work for Kirklees Council, in West Yorkshire, England began a seven-day strike on Tuesday. The workers are opposing bullying and racial abuse by management and violations of their rights to take leave. Citing staff shortages, management has declined requests to use accumulated time off. Some workers are owed 30 weeks accrued leave, while others have been refused permission to attend vital medical appointments.

The *Huddersfield Examiner* reported that prior to the strike, Unison trade union officials met officials of the Labour-controlled council. The council put forward a proposal recommended by Unison. This was rejected by the workforce at a lunchtime meeting, which agreed to continue their strike.

On the first day of the strike, 30 street cleaners, who are not part of the strike, refused to cross the picket line. Police with dogs turned up at the beginning of the picket on Tuesday. A rally and march by the strikers and supporters is due to take place today at 1 p.m.—assembling at the refuse collectors' depot in Vine Street in Huddersfield, the largest town and administrative centre of Kirklees.

Teachers in northeast England strike against workload

Teachers at the Washington Academy in Sunderland began a three-day strike Tuesday, with a further two days planned later in July. They walked out last week for one day. The members of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers are protesting excessive workloads and working conditions.

Protests by UK restaurant staff over tipping

Demonstrations were held at around 30 TGI Friday's restaurants on Wednesday in London, Glasgow, Wales and the northwest of England. Unite union members are protesting exploitative work conditions and a change in tipping policy leading to some wait staff losing around £250 a month. Workers at TGI Friday's previously took four days strike action in May and June over the issue.

Scottish recycling staff strike announced

Workers at the Mavis Valley Recycling Centre in East Dunbartonshire are to strike between July 12 and 15, following action in June. The workers, members of GMB, Unison and Unite unions, are opposing abusive working conditions as well as the council's plans to cut leave entitlement and reduce overtime payments.

UK offshore oil workers vote to strike

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Workers employed at oil company Total on the offshore platforms Alwyn, Dunbar and Elgin have voted to strike by an overwhelming majority. The workers are opposed to the company's plans to change working conditions, including the work rotation—currently two weeks on and three weeks off. Total management want to change it to three weeks on, three weeks off. The Unite union is consulting the membership on possible strike action.

Protest in Athens over temporary contracts and staff shortages

Hospital staff, medics in Athens, and Piraeus doctors walked out on Tuesday from 11 a.m. until the end of their shift. Athens municipal workers in the OTA union were set to strike from 12 noon the same day for the rest of their shift. OTA planned a rally outside the Ministry of Labour. Both strikes are to demand workers on temporary contracts be made permanent and that more staff are hired to overcome shortages.

Irish retail workers to strike

Workers at the budget clothing retailer TK Maxx in Arklow on the Irish east coast are due to strike tomorrow. The Mandate union members are taking action after the store refused to recognise the union and abide by a Labour Court recommendation. Mandate went to court over banded-hour contracts (allowing the employer to vary hours worked), pay scales and notice of rosters.

Irish pharmacy staff to strike

Around 250 workers at 40 Lloyds pharmacy stores across Ireland are to hold a 24-hour strike today, with two more strike days proposed for July 12 and 20. This follows a one-hour strike on June 13 and a two-hour strike on June 22.

The Mandate union members are demanding improvements to pay, sick pay and annual leave entitlement, and to oppose the use of zero-hour contracts. Lloyds has refused to accept a Labour Court recommendation that it recognise Mandate's right to represent the staff.

Irish local authority dispute ends

A strike by around 160 Roscommon County Council staff ended following talks at the Workplace Relations Commission in Dublin. The members of the Forsa union had struck for two days a week over the past two weeks because the council reneged on family friendly measures in relation to taking flexi-leave. Members of the SIPTU union had just voted to join the strike.

Cypriot municipal workers strike

Municipal council workers in the Aglandjia area of Nicosia, Cyprus struck for 24 hours on June 28 to oppose the council's decision to privatise rubbish collection.

Italian refrigeration workers announce strike

Nearly 200 workers at the German owned GEA refrigeration factory in Bologna are to strike for four hours on July 10, followed by a subsequent further four-hour stoppage. The members of the Italian metal workers union, Fiom-Cgil, took the decision after GEA announced it may sell the business.

Union calls off Netherlands transport strike

The strike of 12,000 Dutch regional public transport workers, begun on June 27, was called off at the weekend by the FNV union. FNV said they had reached an agreement with the employers' body, VWOV.

The strike affected most regional bus routes and some regional train services. Workers were demanding a 3.5 percent pay rise, extra breaks and other measures to relieve work stress. Among the companies hit were Arriva, Connexxion and Hermes.

Slovenian steel workers strike in Celjie

Around 150 workers at the Store Steel mill in Celjie in Slovenia held a two-hour strike on June 29. They are demanding a 23 percent pay rise. The union was due to meet with management on Monday to discuss workers' demands.

Underground protest by Ukrainian miners in Novovolynska

On Monday, miners from the first shift at the Number 10 mine in the town of Novovolynska refused to come to the surface when their shift ended. They were later joined by miners from the second shift. The 50 workers are protesting non-payment of wages. Miners from across the country were due to hold a rally on Thursday in Kiev over the current state of the mining industry.

Work-to-rule by Ukrainian train drivers enters second month

Ukrainian train drivers are continuing their work-to-rule action that began May 14. The drivers are refusing to take out trains that do not comply with safety standards. The action has led to the disruption of freight services across the network.

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Pension protests in Russia

Protests took place across Russia on Monday against government plans to raise the retirement age for men from 60 to 65 and women from 55 to 63. Around 3,000 attended a rally in Omsk, with other cities hosting smaller rallies. Life expectancy for men is less than 65 years and 76 for women.

Africa

South African train maintenance workers strike Gautrain

Train maintenance workers at South Africa's Gautrain rail company struck on June 29 after the firm reneged on a deal reached with the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa last year.

Seventy-one workers responsible for signing off trains for safe operating and signal control joined the strike. Despite over half the maintenance staff striking, Gautrain says it will keep the trains running and not "compromise" safety. Gautrain operates in the northern province of Gauteng.

South African bus drivers wage agreement abandoned by employers

Bus workers who recently returned to work after a four-week national strike in South Africa may return to the picket lines. Five of the bus operators—members of the South African Road Passenger Bargaining Council (SARPBC), who agreed with the unions to a wage increase of 9 and 8 percent over the next two years, have approached SARPBC to pull out of the deal.

After the signing, bus company Putco purged 380 employees, with 220 jobs already eliminated, to cut running costs. On July 1, bus fares were increased by 5 percent, bringing a total rise of between 8 and 14 percent this year, affecting hundreds of thousands of commuters.

South African Telecom and Post Office workers strike over pay

South African Telecom and Post Office workers began industrial action on Monday after negotiations collapsed with their employers over pay. The workers mounted a three-hour picket at various workplaces on Tuesday, followed by a rally at provincial offices of the Communications Workers Union on Wednesday.

A go-slow was proposed from Thursday and a protest in Keisergracht Street, Cape Town on Friday. A union spokesman said staff levels in the Telecom industry have been reduced from 67,000 to below 12,000 and post office workers had been offered zero pay increases for the last two years.

South African textile and footwear workers strike ballot for pay increases

Textile workers in the South African cloth and shoe industries are being balloted for a strike this week for pay increases. Members of the National Union of Leather and Allied Workers Union (NULAW) are demanding a "living wage" and the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union are demanding a 9 percent rise. The footwear and textile employers' body—the Southern African Footwear and Leather Industries, have offered 6.25 percent.

Johannesburg Uber drivers demonstrate for representation and increased share of fares

Uber taxi drivers began strike action Tuesday for increased share of fares. They want the company to reduce their 25 percent take on fares to 15 percent and are demanding representation on the Uber board of directors.

An anonymous driver explained he only earned the minimum wage last year—R3,500 (US $255) after expenses. He said pay can be as low as R500 (US $36) a month for a 12-hour day, particularly since fuel prices increased.

Around 400 taxi drivers rallied at the Uber office in Kramerville, Johannesburg to present their demands. Drivers demonstrated with a go-slow on the carriageways and stopped fellow Uber drivers working. Uber operates in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth.

Thousands of social service workers strike in South Africa

Thousands of public servants at the South Africa Social Security Agency (SASSA) struck from Monday to demand a 13 percent pay increase and other benefits. Social Development Minister, Susan Shabangu, immediately applied for a court ruling outlawing the strike.

The PSA union accepted a 7 percent increase last month without consulting the workers. The PSA members are employed under a different parliamentary act and negotiate their conditions separately.

Welfare payments to the most needy are also suffering the impact of changes in payment methods in the SASSA system.

Ghanaian pharmaceutical workers locked out in Accra

Ghanaian workers were locked out of their workplace last Thursday at the Kinaphama Limited pharmaceutical company in Accra. They were protesting an attempt by the company to renegotiate a pay deal. Management has opposed workers forming a union and is attempting to recruit a new workforce.

Civil servants strike in Guinea Bissau over wage increase

Public sector workers went on strike in Guinea Bissau last week demanding an increase in pay and improved working conditions. The National Union of Guinea-Bissau Workers said the strike was for three days. Ministries and public offices were vacant and there was minimum

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cover at the hospitals.

Thirteen thousand civil servants who administer services to a population of 1.8 million are demanding a 200 percent increase from the first government budget in three years.

Lesotho workers protest late pay increase

Thousands of workers took to the streets last week because the Lesotho government is three months overdue in its announcement of the new annual minimum wage increase. Workers want an initial 15 percent pay rise, with a living wage target of US $200 a month. Basic pay for the textile industry is presently US $89 a month.

Members of eight unions participated in the demonstration, including miners. More than half of Lesotho's 2 million population live in poverty, while just under half of all working age youth are unemployed.

Nigerian oil and gas union call for reinstatement of 300 sacked workers

Nigerian workers at the Port Harcourt Zone have threatened an indefinite strike from next Monday to demand the reinstatement of 300 workers illegally discharged. The workers were sacked because they would not agree to have their jobs degraded to casual status.

Members of the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) at filling station forecourts, oil drillers and tanker drivers will also strike. NUPENG's leadership is calling on the government to intervene.

Nigerian teachers strike to have agreement implemented

Nigerian teachers in public primary and secondary schools began a five-day warning strike June 28 in Cross Rivers State. The members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) are demanding the state government honour agreements signed in 2016 over pay arrears, promotions and salary increases. Teachers have been instructed by the NUT to stay at home indefinitely if the state government does not implement its promises.

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