

UK rail strikes continue; non-academic staff strikes at three Nigerian universities; Kenyan teachers to strike

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

## Further strikes by UK rail workers at Northern Rail

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at Northern Rail are to hold a series of 24-hour strikes—on Saturday August 25, September 1 and September 8.

The strikes are the latest in a year-long campaign against plans to introduce driver-only operated (DOO) trains—which threaten passenger safety and 6,000 jobs nationally.

The RMT has limited action to regional, short-term strikes to isolate and dissipate struggles, not fundamentally impacting rail operations, and reached a deal with Greater Anglia and other private rail franchises over DOO.

## Financial services workers strike in Crewe, UK

Around 80 workers employed by financial services firm Communis in the northern English town of Crewe voted by a more than three-quarters majority to strike. The Crewe site is responsible for the production of cheque books issued to banks and the UK Inland Revenue service, HMRC.

The Unite union members rejected an eight percent pay offer over three years, arguing it was below the annual rate of inflation and represented a pay cut in real terms.

They will hold a 48-hour strike beginning August 28, followed by a series of six 48-hour strikes each Monday and Tuesday beginning September 3 and an overtime ban.

## Further strike by UK offshore oil workers

Oil platform workers employed by French energy company Total on three platforms off the Scottish coast held a 12-hour strike Monday. It follows a 24-hour strike the previous Monday. A further 24-hour strike is due on August 20.

The Unite union members on the Alwyn, Elgin and Dunbar platforms are opposing Total's proposed changes to the current work rotation pattern from two weeks to three weeks on and three weeks off. They are also seeking a pay rise.

The General, Municipal and Boiler Workers union called off a planned strike by oil service workers in the Mariner oil field off Scotland after an improved pay offer. The 200 workers employed by Aker Solutions were to take strike action between August and October.

## UK: Outsourcing proceeds at Huddersfield hospital, Unison calls off strike at Mid Yorkshire hospital trust

A three-day strike, set to begin Monday by hospital staff providing cleaning, maintenance, catering and IT services to the Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust, has been called off by Unison.

The trust, including Pinderfields hospital in Wakefield, planned to move 900 workers from NHS employment to a wholly owned subsidiary, amending contracts for newly employed staff to create a two-tier workforce. The trust has now temporarily dropped the plans. Similar plans at Bradford and Leeds hospital trusts were also abandoned.

Plans however to transfer the jobs of around 380 cleaners, porters, gardeners and other non-clinical facility staff working at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, run by the Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust Foundation, are going ahead on August 31. A strike vote passed by a 98 percent majority, though the turnout was below the 50 percent threshold for legal strike action.

## Further strike by workers at two TGI restaurant in UK

Unite union members at two of the TGI chain's restaurants in the UK are to strike for three days over the Bank Holiday weekend beginning August. It is the fifth action to hit the chain in Milton Keynes and Covent Garden in London, in protest at TGI's change in tipping policy. Tips to waiting staff will be shared with kitchen staff to subsidise their low wages.

## Strike of Italian migrant workers

African migrant farm workers in southern Italy held a strike and protest march on August 8 in response to two fatal accidents in which 16 African migrants died.

In both cases, vans transporting the workers home crashed into lorries laden with tomatoes. The strikers blamed the accidents on the lack of care shown to them by their gang masters.

They marched from their shantytown homes in San Severo to the nearby city of Foggia. Trade union members joined the march in support.

### **Overtime ban by Portuguese dockworkers**

Portuguese dockworkers have begun a four-week overtime ban due to end September 10. The ports affected are Lisbon, Leixoes, Figueira da Foz, Setubal, Sines, Canical, Praitia da Vitoria and Porta Delgada.

The members of the Stevedore and Logistics Activity Union are opposing union busting by port managers and increasing precariousness of work.

### **Two-month strike by workers at Turkish carton manufacturer plant**

Workers employed by multi-national Austrian-based carton manufacturer, Mayr-Melnhof have been on strike for nearly two months in Turkey.

The members of the Seluloz-Is union began the strike after management turned down their initial 475 Turkish Lira (\$79) pay demand. The union has now reduced this to TL 350 (\$58). 15 percent inflation is rapidly eroding spending power, but the company has refused to make any pay offer.

### **Ukrainian miners' strike**

Coal miners at three state-owned mines in the Donetsk area of the Ukraine walked off the first shift on Wednesday and surrounded the administrative building that serves the three mines. They are demanding outstanding wage arrears.

Middle East

### **Palestinian UN staff stage "mutiny"**

United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) workers took over partial control of the headquarters in Gaza over the last two weeks. The director was unable to operate from his office. The "mutiny" is in response to the threat of 250 job cuts in Gaza and the West Bank resulting from the US threat to cut annual funding by \$300 million.

UNRWA is tasked with assisting impoverished Palestinian refugees in the Israeli-occupied Gaza and West Bank, as well as Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

Africa

### **South African shoe manufacturers' offer goes to secret ballot**

South African footwear workers voted on Thursday in a secret ballot on a final pay offer of 7.5 percent.

The Employer's federation, the South African Footwear and Leather Industries Association (SAFLIA) increased its offer by 1.25 percent to 7.5 percent and agreed to the "extension of family responsibility leave provisions to include spouses in the event of chronic or serious illness."

The original demand was for a 9.5 percent pay increase and time off for responsibility leave. Strikers were shot at by a member of staff during the dispute by 10,000 workers.

### **Namibian workers take union to court over non-payment of wages and subscriptions**

Employees of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) have taken the union to court over non-payment of wages.

NUNW has also failed to pay workers' tax deductions, medical aid, pension funds and social security contributions for the last three months.

The NUNW umbrella federation is claiming affiliated unions have not been paying their 10 percent membership fees.

The federation secretary said the decline in contributions is because of high unemployment and decline in membership. NUNW says it got 10 times more contributions from each union in the past.

### **Namibian country club workers press for pay increase and manager removal**

Namibian employees at the Windhoek Country Club Resort demonstrated for back pay of a wage rise and the removal of the club general manager.

An agreement was signed for a N\$335 (US \$23) monthly increase to be implemented at the beginning of March, although workers initial demand was for a N\$800 increase, N\$400 housing allowance and a N\$700 Christmas voucher.

The luxury resort and golf club is pleading poverty, with the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union prepared to accept its case. The union said, "If we see proof from the company statements, then perhaps we will be convinced that there is no money to make payments."

### **Nigerian electricity picket to get jobs reinstated**

A Nigerian workers' picket at the Ekija Electricity Company was made illegal last week by the National Industrial Court.

Members of the National Union of Electrical Employees demanded the reinstatement of 40 sacked colleagues and the improvement of work conditions, including the uneven salary structure, anti-labour policies, and non-implementation of service conditions.

### **Tertiary workers extend strikes across states of Nigeria**

Non-academic staff at several Nigerian tertiary educational institutions are either about to strike or are already striking.

Last week Abadan polytechnic workers came out over eight months' salary arrears owed by Oyo State government.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnics has withheld a decision until Thursday as to whether they will join the non-academics.

Three polytechnics also came out on strike August 10 in Osun State.

The College of Technology in Esa-Oke, Osun State Polytechnic in Iree and Osun State College of Education in Ila Orangun owe over 18 months of unpaid wages to academic staff, members of the Academic Staff Unions of Polytechnics.

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities at Lautech University, Oyo State, are on a two-week warning strike over 10 months' unpaid salaries and dilapidation of infrastructure.

This university employs 3,000 and 25,000 students are unable to take their exams.

### **South Africa power generator dispute in stalemate**

Members of the National Union of Mineworkers, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and the Solidarity union are threatening further strike action as South Africa's power supplier Eskom is scuppering a wage deal.

Eskom has reneged on a commitment not to discipline workers for previous strike action.

### **South Africa Gautrain unions sells out engineers' strike**

Bombela's Gautrain high speed rail service engineers have returned to work on a reduced pay deal.

United National Transport Union (UNTU) under the supervision of the Federal Union of South Africa accepted an eight percent pay rise after arbitration at CCMA.

The deal also included a R900 (US \$61.5) housing allowance and a 50 percent contribution towards medical cover.

UNTU's original claim was for a 10 percent wage rise R1600 (US \$110) housing allowance, R800 (US \$55) transport allowance, a 55 percent medical contribution from the company and a R20,000 (US \$1400) end-of-the-year bonus.

The engineers complain they cannot afford the rents and/or travel cost to Gauteng where they work, an expensive hub for travelling business commuters.

### **Kenyan teachers set to strike over unacceptable employment conditions**

Members of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) are proposing to strike on September 1, which would interfere with the exam period.

Employer TSC is demanding teachers undergo a punitive training programme on their own time and at their own expense.

The programme consists of training repeated every five years, spending holiday time locating computer cafes to carry out demanding assessments.

Teachers would be expected to travel out of the county, which would disrupt family life.

Over 100 teachers have left their jobs because of the unacceptable demands.

KNUT is calling for further consultations with the TSC and asking the government to finance the scheme. School head teachers oppose the strike and are advising staff to accept the training for career progression.

### **Firestone rubber workers in Liberia strike over lack of pay rise**

Firestone rubber tappers were fired on by security guards at the Firestone concession in Liberia last week during their two-week strike. The dispute is over minimum pay and the lack of a pay increase. The assault took place at Wilson checkpoint at Division 43.

The strike ended when the government and judiciary promised to represent their interests.

Workers disagree with Firestone's definition of the minimum wage. Firestone claims it is \$5.50 per day, whereas workers say it shows on their statements as \$8.36 to \$12.50.

They are also demanding first aid kits and first aid training for two workers at each divisional office.

Division supervisors received an increase from \$400 to \$1,100, while the company insists there is no money for the lowest paid.

Firestone referred to the strike as "the misconduct of employees" and threatened to pull out of Liberia after 100 years, if the government and union are unable to restrain the workforce.



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