Rail stoppages continue in Britain, as Croatian shipbuilders strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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UK rail workers strikes

Rail conductors at South Western Railway will hold a 72-hour strike beginning midnight Thursday. Twenty-four strikes are also planned for September 8 and 15. The strikes by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are against the introduction of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains on the network. DOO threatens the role of guards and would lead to the elimination of the role and the loss of thousands of jobs.

RMT members employed on Arriva Rail North trains will hold the second of a series of six 24-hour weekly strikes Saturday to protest DOO in an ongoing dispute.

The RMT has limited action to regional, short-term strikes to isolate and dissipate struggles, without fundamentally affecting rail operations. It has sealed deals with some private rail franchises such as ScotRail and Greater Anglia over DOO.

Croatian shipbuilders strike in pay dispute

Around 4,500 ship builders working for the Uljanik shipyard in the port of Pula came out on strike on August 22 demanding July's outstanding wages.

On Monday, around 1,000 of the strikers went to the Croatian capital, Zagreb, where they marched to the government building. A delegation met with Prime Minster Andrej Plenkovi?, who made promises the workers would receive their wages by the end of the month.

They also demanded the resignation of management board member Gianni Rossanda. The government and workers are minority shareholders in the company along with banks and insurance companies. On Tuesday, Rossanda resigned his position as president of the board.

Home care staff in Birmingham continue their struggle

Around 250 staff working for the Birmingham City Council home enablement team began a five-day strike Tuesday. This follows nine days of strike earlier in the month. The team provides six-week intense support to people discharged from hospital to help them retain their independence.

The workers, members of the Unison union, are opposing plans by the council to cut around 50 full-time posts and cut hours for remaining staff. Some would see their hours reduced from a full-time week of 37 hours down to 14 hours. The effect would be to plunge the workers below the poverty line.

Labour-controlled Birmingham council wants to save around £2 million on the service and line it up for privatisation.

Northern Irish local authority staff ballot for strike

Around 1,000 local authority staff working for the Newry, Mourne and Down Council are to be balloted over the next 10 days beginning today. The staff are represented by the GMB, NIPSA, SIPTU and Unite unions. Alan Perry, chair of the Joint Trade Union umbrella group, told the *Belfast Telegraph*, "Senior management in the council have adopted a heavy-handed approach in negotiations around job matching and restructuring around the establishment of the new Super-Council under the Review of Public Administration. They have also failed to engage through the formal negotiating structures with the trade unions."

Workers are due to hold a protest outside the Downshire Civic Centre on Monday to push their case.

Italian-based Ryanair pilots sign deal

ANPAC, the union representing around 300 pilots working for the Italian operation of low-cost budget airline Ryanair, signed a collective labour pact with the company this week.

Reuters reported an ANPAC statement saying the union "is very satisfied with the result, which gives greater protection and guarantees—on top of an appropriate economic compensation …" The union has not disclosed details of the compensation. ANPAC said "The contract was submitted for approval by the more than 300 pilot members and after a tallying of the results (Monday night) the contract received a very large majority" of votes.

The Italian deal followed a deal reached last week between Ryanair and the Irish pilots union, Fórsa. Fórsa said after the deal was reached, "The proposed agreement will now go to ballot, with a recommendation for acceptance from Fórsa and its Ryanair pilot representatives."

On August 10, Ryanair pilots based in Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands held the biggest one-day strike against the company.

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Rally by Polish supermarket workers to oppose poor pay and working conditions

Workers employed by the Polish Makro cash and carry supermarket held a rally on August 19 in Warsaw.

Many of the workers are members of the NSZZ TU Solidarity union and are demanding a pay increase, better working conditions and for management to listen to their concerns. Workers also demand extra staff be taken on to overcome staff shortages that lead to overwork.

Strike call by Portuguese nurses

An August 22 meeting held under the auspices of the General Workers' Union (UGT) called for a nationwide nurses strike on September 20 and 21. The strike call is in response to the government's lack of commitment to promote nursing careers.

Strike by workers in Turkish-aligned North Cyprus

Workers in Turkish-aligned northern Cyprus are striking after the northern Cyprus government brought in measures that have hit employees, because of the fall in the value of the Turkish lira. Parliamentary workers began an indefinite strike Monday. They are represented by the MEC-SEN union, which cited fuel rises as the spark for the action.

Teachers were due to hold a protest outside parliament Wednesday. Some civil servants have threatened an overtime ban, as have air traffic control staff.

Northern Irish hospital staff protest

Health and Social Care (HSC) staff in Northern Ireland held a protest outside the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast Tuesday.

The Unison union members were protesting the huge pension deductions taken from their wages, leaving many in financial straits. According to a BBC news report, one worker had his entire August wage deducted. The pension arrears deductions were supposed to have been imposed on an incremental basis but instead were taken in one lump sum, leaving many staff struggling.

The HSC apologised and is to meet with unions in an attempt to resolve the dispute.

Middle East

Iranian sugar workers continue strike

Workers on strike since August 18 at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane plant are continuing their struggle. The latest strike is one of a series in a long-running dispute over non-payment of wages at the privatised sugar production company. The workers are demanding the company be taken back into state ownership.

Tunisian airline seeks to cut more than 1,000 jobs

Tunisair is seeking to cut around 1,200 jobs out of a total of around 8,000 in an attempt to resolve the Tunisian airline's financial difficulties. The company, with a fleet of 30 aircraft, has been having problems maintaining regular flights because of a lack of spare parts.

Heavy police presence covers South African hospital demonstration

Members of several unions demonstrated at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa, as hospital staff held a one-day strike.

An online publication, *City Press*, described police cover of the demonstration as a large army of police.

The demonstrators were protesting the non-payment of overtime, demanding improved working conditions, and pushing for the results of an investigation into alleged corruption by the hospital chief executive to be published. They are calling for his removal.

Workers were sent back to work at Africa's largest hospital, the third-largest hospital in the world, after the CEO was suspended, but no date was given for the publication of the investigation.

Another investigation is to take place while the issue of workers' overtime payments is kicked into the long grass, with the Health Department saying it would soon announce when the workers would be paid their overtime.

Unions involved were the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, the Democratic Nurses Organisation of South Africa, the Public Servants Association, the Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South, the Network of Professional Social Workers and the National Union of Public Services and Allied Workers.

South African plastic workers demand employment rights

Workers at South Africa's ITB plastics are continuing their four-week strike to demand full employment rights.

ITB's workforce is composed of a large number of labour agency employees. A recent high court ruling stated decreed that those working for three months or more must be given full employee rights.

Workers are demanding ITB conform to the ruling, particularly as they are very poorly paid. The National Union of Metalworkers, running the strike, are credited for the ruling of the court, enforcing 2015 legislation affecting large sections of industry.

State employed cleaners in Lagos, Nigeria demonstrate over unpaid wages

Nigerian workers employed under the Cleaner Lagos Initiative (CLI) demonstrated at the governor's state office over unpaid wages.

Workers are owed wages for July and August and are also complaining

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they have not been issued with employment letters and ID cards confirming they have the jobs.

According to its website, the publicly funded initiative provides funding for 27,500 workers in waste management and cleaning operations in Lagos State.

Work is often precarious. An example was given of an employee who was knocked down by a vehicle while working and taken to two hospitals where she was refused entry. She died en route to a third hospital.

Nigeria's labour and union body declares a three-day strike

Members of trade unions affiliated to Nigeria's Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress and the Joint Public Device Negotiating Council declared a strike Tuesday.

The three-day industrial action strike was called when the Osun State government refused to negotiate with labour leaders over deplorable conditions for workers and pensioners. A 21-day ultimatum to the state government ended on August 28 with no reply, sparking the strike.

Kenyan teachers union calls off strike at eleventh hour

Kenya's National Union of Teachers (KNUT) has called off its threatened strike slated to start September 1.

Calling off the strike, KNUT joined with the teacher employers' body—the Teachers Service Commission (TSC)—in an eight-person team to look into the teachers' well-documented grievances.

The TSC is demanding teachers carry out a training programme on their own time and at their own expense every five years.

Teachers are also expected to accept deployment to other counties, affecting family life and causing breakups. Over 100 teachers have quit their jobs under pressure of the unacceptable demands.

Any threat of disrupting the October/November exam period has been postponed by the unions until October, when a team report is to be handed to the TSC on the teachers' grievances.

Kenyan nurses oppose union's back-to-work call

Kenyan nurses are opposing a return to work deal signed off by the Nyamira County government and the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN).

Although the county KNUN secretary ordered the nurses back after a two-month strike, the health committee executive complained he did not understand a report of August 26 citing a lack of health workers.

There was no mention in the report of the deal resolving the chronic understaffing at the Nymira hospitals, the reason nurses came out and stayed out for over two months.

The back-to-work resolution was mainly based on wages being paid while striking, and no victimisation of strikers.

Namibian port workers reject company union

Workers employed at Namibia's Namport facility at Walvis Bay were given a warning notice on their return to work on August 23.

Around 100 strikers are reported to have been charged with misconduct. Port workers went on strike because management was ignoring their demand opposing representation by the company-favoured National Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU).

Walvis Bay management claimed that striking workers did not go through the procedure signed with NATAU and consequently deemed the strike illegal.

Workers are demanding the right of freedom of association and to be members of a union they choose—reported to be the Miners Union of Namibia.

In rejecting NATAU, port workers said, "We see it as an attempt to impose a union we as workers have condemned; a union which continues to disrespect our rights and interests."

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