

Ryanair cabin crew to strike five European countries, Nigerian teachers walk out

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Ryanair cabin crew across five European countries set to strike

On Friday, unions in five countries announced that cabin crew employed by Ryanair are set to strike September 28. The strikes will involve Ryanair employees in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The decision follows a 24-hour strike by German Ryanair staff Wednesday, involving 400 members of the VC (Cockpit) union and 1,000 cabin crew in the Verdi union. The strike led to the cancellation of 150 out of a scheduled 400 flights.

Cabin crew and ground staff are seeking a pay increase, improved working conditions and for Ryanair to offer agency workers the same conditions as permanent staff. The unions are calling for an end to the situation in which German employees, along with all other non-Ireland-based Ryanair staff, are employed under Irish legislation rather than in the country where they are based.

Further strikes by rail workers at two UK rail franchises

Rail conductors at Arriva Rail North will hold a further 24-hour strike on Saturday with two further strikes planned for the next two weekends. Arriva North runs services in northern England. Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposed to plans by Arriva to introduce driver operated only (DOO) trains, which would downgrade the role of guards and threaten jobs.

On Saturday, RMT members at South Western Railways will hold the last of three 24-hour strikes over the DOO issue. They recently voted by nearly 90 percent to continue taking action over DOO.

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

Rally in support of care workers in Birmingham

A rally and demonstration are set to be held tomorrow in Victoria Square in the UK's second largest city, Birmingham, in support of striking care workers.

The 250 care workers employed by Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council have staged 17 days of strikes so far. Workers are opposing the council's workforce reductions and plans to cut working hours and privatise parts of the service.

The Unison members work for the enablement team, which supports vulnerable people newly discharged from hospital. They are due to strike for five days from September 24 and again from October 5.

Estates staff at three hospitals in southeast England to strike

Around 50 estates staff working at three hospitals in the county of Kent are due to strike for five days beginning September 24. Members of the Unite union voted by 85 percent to oppose the plans by hospital management to shift their employment from the National Health Service to a wholly owned subsidiary. They fear the move, which will give the subsidiary a tax advantage, will lead to the erosion of pay and conditions.

Demonstration outside Amazon fulfilment centre in English midlands

Workers took part in a demonstration outside the Amazon depot in Rugeley in the English midlands on September 6. The facility is known as one of the most dangerous places to work in Britain, with 115 ambulance calls recorded over the last three years for major traumas, pregnancies, strokes, electric shocks and other emergencies. According to the GMB union, a pregnant worker was required to stand for 10 hours after being refused a reassignment to a more appropriate role.

Strike by food couriers in Glasgow, Scotland

Around 60 couriers working for food delivery service Uber Eats in Glasgow struck Monday. The couriers are members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union, and are protesting changes to the calculation of payments for deliveries, which has left some of them earning below the national minimum wage. Further strikes have been threatened.

Strike threat by migrant camp staff on Greek island of Lesbos

Staff working at the Moira migrant camp on the Greek island of Lesbos have threatened to strike from September 17 to oppose overcrowding and other inhuman conditions. Built to house around 3,000 migrants, Greece's most notorious camp now holds more than 8,000 men, women and children. The migrants, many who are refugees from the Syrian civil war, are held in squalid conditions for many months while their asylum claims go through the bureaucratic process.

A statement released by a committee representing the staff about the conditions faced by migrants read, "The situation is fraught with dangers, whether it be risk of epidemics, of deaths caused by inclement weather, suicides or mutinies." Several NGOs and the UN High Commission for Refugees have criticised conditions in the camps.

Protests at staff shortages at two Irish hospitals

Hundreds of nurses held protests outside Cork University Hospital and University Hospital Limerick on Tuesday to oppose the lack of plans by management to cope with expected patient increases over the winter and staff shortages.

The Irish Nurse and Midwives Organisation claims CUH has 50 nursing vacancies, while Cork University Maternity Hospital has 30. This is part of 2,000 nationwide nursing and midwife vacancies.

Strike threat by Irish medical consultants

Irish medical consultants are being polled on strike action. The vote, organised by the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO), is in response to growing pay inequities depending on when consultants were appointed.

In 2012, the Irish health service (HSE) introduced a two-tier wage system as part of the government's austerity measures, which followed the bailout of the financial elite in the wake of the global economic meltdown.

The gap in pay between consultants appointed before and after 2012 has grown to as much as €50,000. The IMO claims this has led to recruitment problems, with around 500 consultant posts currently unfilled.

Workers at Irish food packaging plant to strike

Workers at the Rapid Action Packaging (RAP) plant in Gweedore, in County Donegal, have voted to strike for 16 hours on September 24. The workers are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

SIPTU called the strike in response to factory owner's refusal to recognise the union in collective bargaining negotiations, despite the Labour Court's recommendation to do so. Workers at the plant, which employs around 200, produce specialised packaging for food products. SIPTU said it would mount pickets but remains available for discussion.

Maltese disability support staff industrial action

Beginning Monday, staff comprising social workers, care staff and occupational therapists, working for Aġenzija Sapport on the island of Malta, took industrial action. The agency provides support to physically and disabled people and those with mental health problems at 12 centres across Malta and Gozo.

The UHM union members are refusing to work with clients, attend meetings and file reports. The job action takes place after talks between the agency and UHM failed to agree on a new collective agreement after the old one expired in 2016. One of the disagreements is over 12 workers who, UHM says, should be on a higher pay grade.

Nigeria labour congresses call warning strike over unpaid wages

Nigeria's labour bodies have announced a further seven-day strike notice for Osun state, after a previous three-day warning strike elapsed. Public sector workers have been protesting over 35 months of unpaid wages, pensions and other agreed allowances. These go back beyond December 2017, when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the state government.

The co-signers of the 2017 agreement, the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, are asking for half payments of the outstanding wages to be paid immediately together with all pension debts.

Nigerian oil union threatened by military calls off strike

On September 9, the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG) called off a strike begun three days earlier. NUPENG brought its members out in the Delta oil-producing area over union rights and the intervention of the military.

Armed soldiers were dispatched by the Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Producing Company and its drilling partner, British Oil and Gas Limited. The military expelled workers from the rigs and workplaces and compelled them to sign papers rejecting union membership. Three thousand workers were sacked after demanding the constitutional right to be in a union, a demand the companies have consistently opposed.

The government was brought in to oversee a deal—claiming the companies had accepted workers' rights and agreed on union organisation. In exchange for this worthless promise NUPENG called off the strike.

Nigerian teachers in Edo begin strike

Primary school teachers in Edo state will begin an indefinite strike Friday over the state's refusal to pay the minimum wage of N25,000, which was approved for all state employees last May. The state government has already ignored one 21-day strike notice issued by the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT).

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As in every country, school teachers have been using their meagre salaries to buy instructional materials like chalk, markers, diaries, registers for their students.

Nigerian polytechnic staff rebuffs management council threats

Academic workers at Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Saki, Oyo State, are continuing their strike, which began on August 28. Staff are striking for payment of almost two years of unpaid wages and many months of unsubmitted remittances.

Polytechnic managers, who are calling for the suspension of the Academic Staff Union of the Polytechnic, threatened the workforce with the sack if they had not reported for work by Monday. Workers, however, say they will not be intimidated by the polytechnic counsel and are demanding an upfront payment of all the money owed to them while they continue to strike. Workers at other polytechnics in the state and across country are on strike for similar reasons.

Three killed as South African fire fighters pay price of austerity

Three South African firefighters died on September 5, attempting to put out a fire at the Bank of Lisbon Building in Johannesburg city centre. The building houses the departments of health, human settlements and cooperative governance. The fire was the third this year at the building.

South Africa's National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) claims shop stewards were sacked when they raised safety issues going back to 2014. It was also reported that the building was only 21 percent compliant with safety regulations. NEHAWU instructed its members to stay at home until the government provides another building.

Other firefighters have been suspended in Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng, over complaints about their working conditions. Forty-eight female firefighters, members of the South African Municipal Workers Union, (SAMWU), were suspended for demonstrating in their uniforms.

The workers were protesting the disparity between the time they work and the hours they are paid, an ongoing complaint in the fire service. Workers are paid for an 8-hour day, although they are in attendance for up to 13 hours. The suspended firefighters are not being replaced, management said, regardless of the impact this will have on the fire brigades' ability to respond.

Vanadium miners strike over changed conditions in South Africa

South African Vanadium miners held a wildcat strike at Bushvelt Minerals Limited (BML) last week, causing a shutdown of operations. Production at the mine has increased 20 percent since being taken over by BML, but working conditions for the miners have steadily deteriorated. Management are in discussions with unions and say they want an immediate return to work.

South African steelworkers strike

Workers at Fortune Steel in Ekurhuleni Municipality South Africa have been out on strike since September 7 over wages and conditions. A blast furnace exploded in April injuring seven workers who had no medical coverage.

The National Union of Metalworkers accuses the Indian company of flouting health and safety regulations and the country's labour laws.

Workers have come out for a R50 (US\$3.34) basic hourly rate as opposed to minimum wage rate of R20 (US\$1.34). They also want a 40-hour week and 70 percent company-paid medical coverage. The union says the company is refusing to consider their demands, with workers saying they will strike until they do so.

Ethiopian air traffic controllers arrested for striking

Nine Ethiopian air traffic controllers were arrested for joining a strike that ended last week. Some of the striking workers were only being allowed back to their jobs if they submitted a letter of apology to the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority.

The controllers work at the Bole International Airport and are demanding a pay increase, overtime payment and improvements in their working conditions.

Bole International Airport is Ethiopia's busiest hub. The Kenyan Air Traffic Controllers Association commented on the risk to neighbouring countries' air space, saying, "aircraft operating in and out of Addis Ababa are in grave danger as the situation continues to deteriorate."

Teachers and nurses strike and demonstrate in Eswatini over pay adjustments

Around 400 teachers across Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) ignored threats from the minister of education and attended union meetings to plan a strike rather than providing instruction in their classrooms. The strike is proposed for September 19, according to the Swaziland National Association of Teachers.

The principal secretary, who had issued the threat, said schools in the Lubombo region were being monitored to assess which teachers had stayed away. As the teachers prepared to strike, 500 medical and psychiatric nurses were demonstrating in Mbabane last Wednesday, where they submitted a petition to the government demanding a cost-of-living adjustment.



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