

Rail workers to continue strikes at UK franchises, Gaza UNWRA workers strike; police attack Swaziland strikers

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 September 2018

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Rail workers to continue strikes at UK franchises

Rail staff employed by Arriva Rail North, which runs services in northern England, will hold another 24-hour strike on Saturday.

It will be the latest in a series of nine strikes for Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) guards opposing the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. They will also hold 24-hour strikes for the following three Saturdays. Talks arranged by the government conciliation service Acas broke down with no agreement.

RMT members on South Western Railway are due to hold a 48-hour strike over the same issue beginning October 5.

The RMT has limited action to regional, short-term strikes to isolate and dissipate struggles, without fundamentally affecting rail operations. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia over DOO, which threatens passenger safety and 6,000 jobs.

## Train drivers on London Underground Piccadilly line strike

RMT drivers working on the Piccadilly underground line in London began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. The action is set to continue until Friday afternoon. The strike is on one of the busiest underground lines and has had a widespread impact, with services to Heathrow Airport hit.

The dispute centres on an abuse of procedures by the employer and a breakdown over industrial relations. Talks with Acas broke down on Tuesday after employer, London Underground, offered no new proposals to end the dispute.

The BBC reported that, "Some drivers say they were threatened with the sack for taking time off after people had killed themselves on the tracks while they were working." A leaflet produced by the union stated, "London Underground are working drivers on the line into the ground."

"We are striking to be treated with dignity and respect at work and not to be threatened with the sack for taking time off following issues such as suicides in the course of our work."

RMT union leader Mick Cash warned that the treatment of workers by management threatened a situation where they would be out of control. He

said management at Acas were "wrecking the planned Acas talks" by "refusing point blank to make serious progress on the core issues that have reduced industrial relations on the Piccadilly Line to a powder keg".

## Strike by staff at southeast England hospital trust

Around 70 estates staff working at three hospitals in Kent began a five-day strike on Monday. The Unite members are protesting plans to transfer their jobs to a wholly owned subsidiary company called 2together Support Solutions. The estates staff, who are responsible for building maintenance, fear the transfer will lead to cuts in pay and conditions and represents a step towards privatisation.

## Further strike by care workers in Birmingham: UK

The 250 care workers employed by Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council continued their fight with a five-day strike on Monday—beginning with a lobby of the Labour Party conference in Liverpool.

They are opposing the council's workforce reductions and plans to cut working hours and privatise parts of the service, as part of plans to slash £2 million from the service's budget.

The Unison union members work for the enablement team, which supports vulnerable people newly discharged from hospital. They are due to hold another five-day strike beginning October 5.

## Protest and strike by food delivery workers in UK capital

Couriers working for UberEats protested outside the organisation's London headquarters on Monday, while some workers took strike action.

Last week saw wildcat strikes by UberEats staff in London, Glasgow, Plymouth and Cardiff. They were responding to the company's plans to halve their current £5 delivery fee.

Reports claim UberEats may take over rival food delivery service Deliveroo for £2 billion.

## **Strike by support staff at school in South Yorkshire, England**

Dinner ladies at Ladywood Primary school, Grimethorpe in South Yorkshire walked out on strike Wednesday. It was the sixth day of action.

The stoppages are in response to plans by the school to make all nine dinner ladies redundant and for their duties to be performed by teaching assistants. A ballot of dinner ladies and teaching assistants by Unison produced a near 95 percent strike vote. They have threatened all out strike if the plan is not withdrawn.

## **Irish food packaging workers strike**

Around 90 staff working for the Rapid Action Packaging (RAP) food packaging plant in the Irish city of Donegal held a 16-hour strike Monday. Members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) are protesting over working conditions and a union recognition recommended by a Labour Court.

## **Protest by Irish nurses**

Members of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation held a protest outside Connolly hospital in Dublin on Tuesday.

They are protesting staff shortages and overcrowding of wards and demand increased pay and better working conditions to address this. Previous demonstrations have taken place in Cavan, Cork, Galway, Kilkenny and Limerick.

## **Dutch postal workers strike**

Postal delivery staff employed by the Dutch postal service, PostNL struck on September 20. They are protesting demands by PostNL that delivery staff sort some mail on their rounds as well as plans to fully automate sorting that threatens the loss of hundreds of jobs.

## **Pay protest by Polish public sector workers**

Around 15,000 public sector workers, including teachers, fire fighters and health workers marched through the Polish capital, Warsaw, on Saturday.

The members of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions demanded a pay rise for millions of low-paid workers, many in the public sector. The majority of the 700,000 public sector workers have not had a rise since 2010. The ruling Law and Justice party proposes a paltry 2.3 percent increase.

## **Slovenian medical device workers strike**

Workers at the medical device maker Tik, in the Kobarid area of Slovenia held a four-hour strike on September 21 for higher pay and improved conditions.

## **Protest by Turkish Migros supermarket staff**

Employees and former employees of supermarket chain Migros demonstrated outside one of its stores in Istanbul on Sunday. They were protesting non-payment of wage arrears and other benefits. The protest was broken up by police who reportedly arrested 14 people.

## **Protest by taxi drivers in Portuguese cities**

Hundreds of taxi drivers in Lisbon, Porto and Faro held their eighth day of strikes Wednesday. They were due to protest outside the Portuguese parliament later in the day against legislation to be enacted in November.

The legislation will allow the use of ride-hailing mobile phone apps such as Uber and Cabify in Porto, Lisbon and the Algarve.

## **Gaza United Nations Relief and Works Agency workers protest job losses**

Around 13,000 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza came out on strike Monday. Nearly 1,000 UNRWA workers have been dismissed after the US government cut its \$364 million contribution. The jobs of thousands of other UNRWA workers are at risk. Around 5 million Palestinians depend on the agency for education, healthcare and nutritional services.

## **Ghana tanker driver unions call off strike**

A national stoppage of Ghana's 4,000 tanker drivers was called off by the unions barely 24 hours after an initial strike call.

The workers are protesting the non-implementation of an outstanding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) determining work conditions, low wages, faulty flow meters at the Bulk Oil Storage and Transportation Limited and short deliveries. Drivers are being surcharged for losses or discrepancies in their deliveries to fuel depots.

The members of the Ghana National Petroleum Tanker Drivers Union (GNPTDU) were attacked by police early Monday morning when protesting with placards outside the offices of the Tema Oil Refinery.

Rubber bullets and teargas were used against the demonstrators and several union members were arrested, including the union general secretary.

After meeting with officials of the National Petroleum Authority, the General Secretary of the Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers Union of the Ghana Trades Union Congress declared the strike over. Also present at the meeting was the GNPTDU, the BOST Drivers Union and the GOIL Drivers Union.

The strike ended with an agreement by employers to look into the

grievances and revisit the MOU.

### **Nigerian unions agree to inadequate pay deal in Kogi state**

Unions in Kogi State, Nigeria have agreed a pay settlement with the state government that only increases workers' wages from 30 percent of what they should be getting to 53 percent.

Kogi public sector workers in the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria, Nigeria Union of Teachers and the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees have not been paid in full for the last three years, receiving between 20 to 30 percent of their wages. Some workers are not paid at all because they are not on the payroll.

### **Nigerian insurance workers strike over non-implementation of agreement**

Nigerian workers employed at the National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) began a three-day warning strike on Monday and are threatening indefinite action.

The members of the Association of Civil Servants of Nigeria are demanding employers honour an agreement on staff welfare and working conditions. The agreement following a September 2017 strike was to introduce technology, to improve working conditions, change staff relations, implement promotions and introduce a training programme for redeployed staff.

### **Nigerian Chevron oil workers plan strike against end of contracts**

Nigerian oil workers are planning industrial action after Chevron Nigeria Limited announced it would end all manpower industry contracts in October 2018.

The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria called on the government and the oil industry to intervene.

### **National strike threat in Nigeria over minimum wage**

The Nigerian United Labour Congress, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria are planning to call national strike action to demand a minimum wage of N65,000 (\$178) a month.

The government refused to respond to the figure compiled by the unions, prompting a 14-day strike notice ending this week.

### **Swaziland striking workers attacked by state forces**

The Swaziland Industrial Court has ruled teachers must postpone a strike planned to start on Tuesday and banned one by public service

workers.

Last week public sector workers struck for three days to demand a 6.5 percent pay rise. The government has offered the members the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland nothing.

Swaziland's second city, Manzini, was likened to a war zone after state forces used stun grenades, tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and other potentially lethal force against strikers.

Armed police were called out across the country as schools and businesses were being severely affected. Strikers and suspected strikers were barred from entering the city centre and bus drivers, who were unable to work, joined the strikers. The drivers also suffered police brutality. Striking teachers were attacked by armed police and arrested while the Swaziland National Association of Teachers were holding a meeting at their headquarters.

### **South Africa Social Service workers threaten strike**

Employees of the South African Social Services Association (SASSA) are threatening a national strike. The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union have given the state employer until October 10 to resolve workers' grievances over low wages.

SASSA pays out welfare payments to millions of South African workers and has implemented changes in payment methods—depriving recipients of much needed allowances for long periods.

### **South African police attack striking aeronautics workers**

South Africa's police force fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at striking Denel Aeronautics workers who were demonstrating for a 15 percent pay increase. The company is offering the 95 workers a below-inflation four percent.

A female worker was injured and had to be taken to hospital. One striker held a poster saying, "You might not be killing us with explosions but you are killing us with hunger."

### **South African miners' union agrees clampdown on unofficial strikes**

Vanadium miners at Bushfeld Minerals Vametco plant in South Africa have returned to work after an unofficial dispute broke out September 5. Bushfeld had reneged on an agreement to pay workers a bonus in lieu of an employee-shared options scheme (ESOP).

Workers went back to work last week with a R15,000 (US \$1,050) half-year bonus payment. According to Alliance News, the Associated Miners and Construction Union agreed workers who take unofficial strike action would forfeit participation in ESOP.



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