

Workers strike in Finland, UK rail strikes continue, Nigerian unions call off general strike

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 October 2018

### Workers strike in Finland over employment law changes

Finnish workers held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. They were protesting government plans to remove protection rights against dismissal at firms employing 20 people or fewer.

Members of JHL welfare sector union, PAM service sector union, PRO, the union for professionals with 5,000 members, the Finnish Electrical Workers' union with 1,000 members and 4,500 members of the Finnish food workers union, SEL, took part. They were joined by 22,000 members of the industrial union. It was estimated that around 30,000 workers were on strike.

Most of Finland's food industry employees work in companies of 20 or fewer workers.

Public transport, schools, social services and health care provision were hit, as most workers are members of the JHL union.

The PAM and Pro unions also began an overtime ban, due to last until October 23.

### German Amazon workers strike

German Amazon workers began a two-day strike on Monday. The members of the Verdi union at the company's fulfilment centres in Bad Hersfeld, Koblenz, Leipzig, Rheinberg and Werne are demanding a pay increase, having rejecting a 2-2.7 percent pay deal offer from Amazon.

### Further strikes scheduled on Arriva North UK rail franchise

Rail staff working for the Arriva North rail franchise serving the north of England are holding a 24-hour strike tomorrow, followed by additional strikes on October 13 and 20. Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have been in dispute for over a year over plans to extend the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards jobs nationally.

According to the RMT, Arriva North is planning to run half its services without guards, which together with unstaffed stations will put passengers at risk.

RMT rail guards at South Western Railway will hold a 48-hour strike

beginning Friday over DOO.

The RMT has limited action against DOO 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.

### Drivers on UK London Underground line to strike

Drivers on the London Underground Central Line will begin a 24-hour strike after midnight tonight. The members of Aslef are protesting unsafe working practices, unfair disciplinary measures and failure of management to follow agreed procedures.

A further strike is planned for November 7, with RMT members expected not cross Aslef picket lines.

### Scottish rail staff vote for overtime ban

Around 2,000 ScotRail staff, guards and station staff have voted by a big majority to begin industrial action October 10. The RMT members will refuse to work overtime or on rest days. They are seeking parity with drivers paid £300 for working rest days.

### UK fast food employees strike

Employees of food delivery service UberEats in Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, London, Newcastle, Plymouth and Southampton were to strike between 5pm and 9pm on Thursday. Members of the Industrial Workers of the World are demanding £5 per delivery plus £1 per mile. Recently the company reduced its delivery payment from £4.26 to £3.50.

Staff at some McDonalds fast food outlets, and at some Wetherspoon pubs and TGI Fridays branches were also to strike. Workers at two Wetherspoons in Brighton were to take part. The members of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union were expected to be joined by McDonalds staff in Cambridge, London and Watford along with TGI Fridays staff in London and Milton Keynes. A rally was planned in

London.

Fast food workers in some parts of America, Europe, South America and Asia were also due to take part in strikes and protests.

### **Strike by water treatment equipment workers in northern England enters third week**

This week marks the third week of strikes by 25 GMB union members working for water treatment equipment manufacturer Premier Tech Aqua. The company's factory is in Peterlee in County Durham, northern England. The low-paid workers are seeking a rise after a decade of no pay rises.

### **March by head teachers in England**

Thousands of head teachers marched from Parliament Square in London to Downing Street on September 28. The march was organised by campaign group WorthLess? They were demanding extra funding for schools to overcome overcrowded classes, staff shortages and poor working conditions. They handed in a letter to Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates spending for schools has been cut by 8 percent in real terms since 2008 while pupil numbers have increased by around half a million.

### **Strike at UK London pub over zero hours contracts**

Staff at the community-owned pub, the Ivy House, in Southwark, south London, went on a wildcat strike last Sunday. The strikers were protesting the sacking of four colleagues and against their zero hours work contracts.

The Bakers and Allied Food Workers Union members were demanding the management recognises their right to belong to a union. Following a three-day strike management agreed to reinstate the four sacked staff, recognise the union and offered fixed hours contracts.

### **Strike at Irish food packaging plant suspended**

A planned 24-hour strike on Tuesday at the Rapid Action Packaging (RAP) food packaging plant in city of Donegal on Tuesday was called off. Around 90 members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) held a 16-hour strike on September 24. They were pushing for union recognition as recommended by a Labour Court and protesting poor working conditions.

SIPTU has accepted RAP's agreement to begin negotiations over the next two months.

### **Strike at Italian Douwe Egberts plant**

The members of FAI-CISL, FLAI-CGIL and UILA-UIL unions at the Douwe Egbert coffee manufacturer's plant in Andezeno, Italy held a one-day strike on September 28. They were protesting the company's plans to make 57 workers at the plant near Turin redundant.

### **Hunger strike by Russian firefighters**

Fourteen firefighters in the Far East Sakha republic of Russia are on hunger strike over working conditions. They previously held a hunger strike in April to protest crumbling premises, low pay and lack of equipment. They resumed the hunger strike after the local authority failed to address their concerns.

### **Strike by Spanish school children**

Spanish school children in schools in Seville and Huelva held a strike on Wednesday to protest the heat in classrooms. The temperature in many classrooms has been higher than the 27 degrees Centigrade laid down in law. Many schools in the area have no air conditioning. A protest was held in Seville on Sunday to highlight the issue.

### **Strike by Iranian truck drivers**

A strike of Iranian truck drivers is in its second week. They are protesting low wages, wage arrears and the high cost of spare parts. Many strikers have been arrested, with around 150 detained in custody. The Iranian attorney general, Mohammad Jaafar Montazeri, has suggested initiators of the strike could face the death penalty.

### **Strike by Palestinians across occupied territories**

Monday saw a strike by Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. They were protesting Israel's enactment of the nation state law and the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar Palestinian village in Jerusalem.

The strike was supported by workers in factories and shops as well as teachers.

### **Strike of Palestinian UN workers**

Palestinians working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza began a two-day strike on Tuesday. They are protesting sackings and threats of further job losses, including making 500 full-time posts part-time. Around 1,000 UN staff have been dismissed following cuts to its funding. The Trump government, which had been the main financier, has cut its more than \$350 contribution.

UNRWA provides education, health care and nutritional services to five

million Gaza residents.

### **Kenyan clinical officers put strike back on the agenda**

Members of the Kenyan Union of Clinical Officers (KUCO) are threatening strike action to demand the authorities complete a four-year Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The 20,000 workers want risk and callout allowances raised tenfold and sevenfold respectively, an increase in health workers allowances from Sh20,000 (US \$200) to 30,000 (US \$300), and the employment of 4,700 more clinicians.

A seven-day strike notice extended to 28 days was given by KUCO in April over the ongoing dispute, which the union then called off.

### **Namibian workers bring national rail transport to a halt**

Namibian train drivers brought rail transport to a standstill last week in a strike for an increase in pay and allowances. The drivers have not had a pay increase for the last two years.

Although the whole industry is not out, the strategic workers with the support of their assistants and shunters stopped fuel dispersal and other vital commodities including mining products.

TransNamib management have refused to negotiate and suspended seven workers who took unofficial action on Tuesday, threatening to dismiss the rest of the strikers.

### **Namibian broadcast workers strike over overdue pay rise**

Broadcast workers at Namibia's Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) walked out on strike last Friday demanding a 6 percent pay increase, agreed in April last year.

National broadcasting was switched off last Friday, but a scab crew enabled coverage of the Land Conference (a major political event) on Monday.

The government has agreed a \$2 million payment to NBC to fund back pay and the 6 percent wage increase, but some workers were reluctant to return to work until the money was in their accounts.

### **Police scab on teachers' pay dispute in eSwatini**

Police officers in eSwatini (formally Swaziland) have taken over the overseeing of exams, in place of teachers engaged in a work-to-rule.

The members of Swaziland National Association of teachers have refused to carry out duties in school after their three-day pay strike was banned by the courts. Teachers are demanding a 6.55 percent pay rise. The government has offered zero percent.

Five hundred police officers were trained to oversee exams from Monday this week.

### **More Gambian teachers join strike after over sack threats**

A sit-down strike in Gambia organised by Teachers For Change is spreading. Threats by the country's vice president to replace striking teachers with retirees if they refused to return to work by September 28 have galvanised more to take action.

Over a thousand teachers are on sit-down strike for a pay increase, receipt of identity cards, and immediate payment of allowances including provincial hardship allowances.

### **Unions call off Nigerian general strike**

A general strike begun September 27 has been suspended after four days by Nigeria's three labour congresses.

The warning strike was called to demand the federal government negotiate a minimum wage rise. The labour congresses proposed an increase in the minimum wage of N18,000 (US \$50) to around N50,000-N65,000 (US \$153-178) a month.

On the second day of the strike, all 36 states were paralysed.

The National Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress called off the strike after the government agreed to talks on October 4 and 5.

Nigerian public sector workers have been striking and protesting for months, in many cases years, to be paid any wage.

### **South African firefighters protest unpaid and underpaid working hours**

Off-duty South Africa firefighters at 30 Cape Town stations carried out a lunchtime picket on September 26. On-duty firefighters stood in line in uniform to support the picket.

The workers are protesting having to work 240 hours a month for 160 hours' pay. On-duty firefighters operate the stations on 24-hour shifts but are only paid 22.8 percent of the hourly rate when on stand-by waiting for a call-out.

Firefighters do not get danger money, or Sunday and holiday time premium rates. The fire brigade authorities do not acknowledge training qualifications when it comes to pay and promotions. Their fire agreement has also expired so workers are without a contract.

### **South Africa gold mine strike threat**

Members of the National Union of Mineworkers and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union are threatening strike action over pay. The two biggest mining unions received strike certificates at two of South Africa's largest gold producers--Sibanye Gold and Harmony Gold.

Sibanye, the largest producer of gold (responsible for half of all South African mining deaths in 2018), is accused by the Solidarity union of reducing its pay offer to skilled workers from 5.2 percent to 5 percent.

The offer for entry-level pay (for unskilled workers) was an increase of R644 (US \$45) at Sibanye and R1000 (US \$70) at Harmony.

The Harmony Gold offer of a 6.3 percent increase for skilled workers will be put to members of the Solidarity union.

Workers at AngloGold were offered a 6.5 percent offer this year and the next two years, depending on inflation.

Gold mining industry negotiations take place at company not industry level, to divide the workers and drive down pay.



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