

Italian and Portuguese public sector workers strike; UK rail strikes continue

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 November 2018

Italian public sector 24-hour strike

Public sector workers in Italy held a 24-hour strike on October 26. The strike was called over pay, working conditions, pensions and the threat of privatization of public services.

Services affected included hospital, education, transport, waste collection and postal services. Transport services in Rome and Milan were particularly hit by the strike. Nationally some rail services were affected.

Strikers held a march in Turin with banners targeting the labour and interior government ministers.

Portuguese public sector strike

Portuguese public sector workers in hospitals, schools and museums, as well as municipal services held a nationwide strike October 26.

Several unions coordinated by the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) called the strike to oppose the 10-year freezing of public sector pay that has cut purchasing power by 20 percent.

Services affected were refuse collection, social security and tax offices. Hospitals provided only emergency cover. According to the CGTP, over 80 percent of service provision was hit by the walkout.

A further one-day strike has been called for November 15.

Continuing strike action by UK rail franchise staff against driver only operated (DOO) trains

Rail guards and other staff working for the South Western rail franchise are to hold a 24-hour strike on Saturday, with a further 24-hour strike on November 17. A planned strike for November 10 has been cancelled, with no reason given by the union.

The strikes are part of the long running dispute over the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains on the franchise. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

Workers at Arriva Northern Rail are to hold 24-hour strikes on Saturday and the following Saturday against DOO.

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. The union has agreed a sell-out deal "in principle" with Merseyrail and the Labour Party-led Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, whereby "door control and dispatch of the trains will transfer to the driver" on new trains.

March by "precarious" workers in UK capital

On Tuesday, around 500 "precarious" workers including those working for the taxi hailing app firm Uber, food delivery staff at Deliveroo and outsourced cleaning workers demonstrated in London. The members of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain marched to the Royal Courts of Justice, where Uber is appealing an earlier ruling that classed Uber drivers as employees rather than self-employed workers. The latter category are not entitled to minimum wage and other protections.

The marchers continued to nearby University of London, where 100 university cleaners, porters and security staff are on strike. The outsourced workers are demanding to be employed directly by the university and be entitled to its pay and working conditions.

Cable company strike in southern England

Around 160 workers at the Hampshire firm of Prysmian Cables and Systems began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday. The Unite union members rejected a below inflation pay increase offer of two percent.

A second 48-hour stoppage is due to begin November 7. The government conciliatory service, Acas, may be involved in talks next week between the company and Unite.

Teachers at school in Salford, UK begin strike

Teachers at Moorside High School in the Swinton district of Salford began five days of planned strikes Wednesday. Further stoppages are scheduled for November 6, 7, 13 and 14.

The members of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of

Women Teachers are demanding school leaders stop ignoring their concerns over unfair pay decisions. They have described an “adverse management culture” affecting work conditions and their well being.

Port logistics staff at several UK ports to strike

Workers at MacGregors, the logistics company at Portsmouth, Newcastle and Aberdeen ports, are set to strike on November 9 and 12 over a pay claim. The RMT members will also impose an overtime ban on November 10 and 11.

Strike by University support staff in Bradford, England

Administrative and support staff at Bradford University, began a three-day strike Wednesday. The Unison union members are protesting university plans to cut around 250 administrative and support staff jobs, as part of restructuring.

The university employs around 1,600.

Wildcat strike at Royal Mail delivery centre in Wigan, England

A near total unofficial walkout of staff at the Royal Mail Hallgate depot delivery office in Wigan, Greater Manchester, took place on Monday October 22.

The members of the Communications Workers’ Union took action in support of a colleague who was sacked over the previous weekend. The worker had been employed for Royal Mail for over 30 years.

Rail catering workers strike in Scottish capital

Rail caterers working for Edinburgh based Rail Gourmet held a 24-hour strike Tuesday. They provide catering services on the LNER East Coast mainline service between London and Edinburgh. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union accuse the company of bullying, harassment and refusing to pay due bonuses.

Strike by Belgian airport baggage handlers

Baggage handlers working for the Aviapartner Company at Brussels International airport struck October 25.

They are demanding improved working conditions. The strike continued into the beginning of this week. Around 20 percent of scheduled flights were cancelled. Talks at the weekend between union representatives and management failed to resolve the dispute.

Polish airline strike ends

A strike at Polish state airline, Lot, begun on October 18 ended last Saturday.

LOT, which employs 3,000 staff members, wanted to transfer some of its workers to self-employment contracts and dismissed 67 strikers. Members of the OPZZ union rallied in protest outside LOT’s headquarters in Warsaw.

Following seven hours of talks the airline agreed to reinstate the sacked workers.

Further strikes by Swiss construction workers

Around 1,500 construction workers in the Swiss cantons of Freiburg, Neuchatel, Valais and Jura came out on strike Tuesday. The strikers are protesting the increased use of casual labour, against proposals to raise the retirement age and for an improved contract when the current one expires at the end of this year. This follows stoppages by construction workers in Ticino and Geneva earlier in the month.

Around 400 striking workers in Valais marched to the Builders’ Association employers’ body. A strike by construction workers in Bern was due to take place Thursday with other strikes elsewhere scheduled for next week.

Ukrainian miners continue underground protest

The underground protest by 15 Ukrainian miners in the Luhansk region has now lasted for two weeks. The protest is taking place 600 metres underground.

They are demanding wage arrears for June to September this year as well as arrears from earlier years.

Slovenian judiciary workers announce industrial action

The Trades Unions of Judiciary Workers representing Slovenian judiciary workers have announced go-slow action to begin November 5. The strike is for improved wages and working conditions.

Members of other Slovenian public sector trade unions, including the Healthcare and Social Care union, announced they will strike on December 5.

Teachers in republic of Ireland vote to reject pay deal

Irish primary school teachers have voted by a small majority to reject a government proposal to end the two-tier pay system. Currently new starters begin on a lower pay scale compared to teachers with seniority.

The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) says the government offer will leave some teachers, who took up post since 2011, worse off. The union’s executive committee will be delaying organising any struggle

against the cuts. They are to meet next week to consider the ballot result and will then consider whether to ballot for industrial action.

Heating company workers at Northern Ireland firm strike over poverty pay

Around 80 workers the Glen Dimplex factory, in Portadown, Northern Ireland held a 24-hour strike Monday. The Unite union members are seeking a 27p an hour pay rise to bring their wages up to £8.75, the so-called national living wage level.

The company, which makes heating devices, is owned by billionaire Martin Naughton.

Protesting Iranian workers imprisoned

Fifteen employees of the Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO) in Markazi province have been sentenced to prison for 12 to 30 months and flogging for protesting against the company. HEPCO was privatised last year.

Workers are protesting over unpaid wages, redundancies and the loss of health and pensions benefits.

Israeli construction workers strike threat

Over 30 Israeli construction workers have been killed so far this year.

Israeli labour federation, Histadrut, were due to meet Thursday to discuss calls for industrial action by construction workers. The strike would be to protest the lack of health and safety at Israeli construction sites.

Jordanian municipal workers resume strike

Jordanian municipal workers belonging to a newly formed trade union announced Tuesday they would resume their strike action Wednesday.

They have rejected a pay deal put forward by the heads of 26 municipalities over wage rises as insufficient. The municipalities agreement ignored workers' demand for Saturday to be designated a day of rest.

Workers previously took action in September.

Nigerian workers continue demand for improved minimum wage

Workers marched through many of Nigeria's states on Tuesday to demand a new minimum wage, threatening an indefinite general strike from November 6 and a boycott of next year's general elections.

Some of the 36 states said they will pay the three labour congresses' demands for N30,000. However, a state governor's forum said that they

would not increase their offer of N22,500.

The Nigeria Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress of Nigeria and United Labour Congress of Nigeria reduced their initial call for a minimum wage of between N56,000--N65,000 to N30,000. The present minimum wage of N18,000 has never been fully implemented. The pump price of petrol rose 85 percent in 2016 and the naira devalued by 100 percent, vastly increasing living costs.

Cape Town bus drivers continue strike for full-time positions

MyCiTi bus drivers are continuing their unprotected strike for a third week in Cape Town, South Africa. Some of the wildcat strikers have been sacked from their jobs and new recruits have been brought in to scab.

The drivers are employed by the Vehicle Operating Companies which provides agency workers for the MyCiTi Durban transport system.

Agency drivers complain they only get around half the wages and benefits of full-time employees and are demanding an end to outsourcing.

Five strikers were arrested last week for defying a court order and bailed for R1,000. Demonstrators gathered in support outside the city hall.

University of Namibia workers strike in demand of a pay rise

Staff at the University of Namibia (Unam) voted by 61 percent and began a strike to demand a six percent wage increase backdated to January. Unam management refused to offer anything.

The Namibia Public Workers' Union declared the university was trying to break the strike by using student and management scabs to invigilate at exams. Union members are denied access to the university to check on the scabbing operation.

Locked-out Zimbabwe explosive workers demand unpaid wages

Workers protested at their former workplace, Croatian explosives company GML, over unpaid wages going back to 2008 and a lockout. The company closed without informing the workforce leaving a wage debt of around US \$1 million.

GML is now partially back in production. Workers who protested are outside the gates. They accuse the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions of siding with the employers.

Kenyan airline workers forced back to work

Kenyan airlines workers voted to strike on October 17—the inaugural flight of Kenyan Airlines to the US—but the Labour courts put a ban in place.

Workers are demanding a Collective Bargaining Agreement and new roster for flights to America. Cabin crew are protesting that they are being required to work more than 15 hours flight time.

Kenyan teachers strike over lack of security

Three Kenyan union leaders were arrested Tuesday on charges of

disturbing the peace at the Kenyatta National Hospital--including Kenyan National Union of Nurses general secretary Seth Panyako.

A strike was called after a nurse at the hospital was attacked by a patient due to lack of security for staff.

Malawi College of Health and Science workers strike over missing pension funds

Employees at Malawi's College of Health Sciences are into their second week of a strike to demand a new salary structure and up to date payment of their pension contributions. Retirees receive no pensions as contributions have not been fully paid by the employers since 2015.

Students have protested to demand management resolve the issues. They cannot access the cafe and library and exams are due next month.

South Africa Works Programme workers protest unpaid wages

South African workers on Durban's Expanded Works Programme (DEWP) protested at the City Hall over late payment of wages and to demand permanent employment. Their wages should have been paid on October 25.

The city's treasurer blamed a mistake in the department saying they would be paid Monday. He said some corrections may take longer.

Cape Town fire fighters' demonstration supported by bus and taxi drivers

A demonstration of hundreds of fire fighters took place outside the Cape Town city hall last Thursday demanding increased pay and shorter working hours. Uber and Taxify taxi drivers and MiCiTi bus drivers who are involved in an unofficial strike joined them.

The workers have been on a work-to rule to demand a 40-hour week and no more than two hours a day overtime. They currently work an average of 60 hours a week. They also want paid overtime. Staff shortages have led to excessive overtime. They lack adequate fire-fighting equipment and in the dry season untrained staff are employed.



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