

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

31 May 2019

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

Public Transport strike in the Netherlands

Dutch train drivers and public transport workers in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague carried out a nationwide strike May 28 in a campaign to have the state pension age frozen at 66 and to ensure pensions rise in line with inflation.

The government is to increase the state pension age in three-month increments to reach 67 years and three months by 2024. The FNV trade union federation is calling on the cabinet to “commit” to keeping the state pension age at 66.

The engineering and construction workers unions also staged an all-out strike on May 29, and the FNV has called on other sectors to join the campaign.

Louvre Museum workers strike in France

Security and reception staff struck Monday at the Louvre Museum in Paris, protesting “unprecedented deterioration of conditions” amid record crowds. A record 10.2 million visitors attended last year—a 25 percent increase over the year before.

In a statement Sunday, the Sud Culture Solidaires Union said: “While the public has increased by more than 20 percent since 2009, the palace has not grown. ... Today the situation is untenable.”

Crowds had risen from 2009 to 2018, but staff headcount declined in that period from 2,161 to 2,005, according to the union.

UK DWP workers take further strike action

Public and Civil Service (PCS) union members at the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Universal Credit sites in Wallsall and Wolverhampton took two more days of strike action from May 28 for more staff and better working conditions.

This follows two previous strike days in March. PCS has five demands: 5,000 new staff; permanency for fixed term staff; limit the number of phone calls per case manager; limit the size of the national telephony hub; improve consultation; a quality-focused approach—no more management by statistics.

PCS is currently consulting members in other Universal Credit sites over strike action. The DWP has refused to meet its demands since the strikes in March.

London Deliveroo riders wildcat strike and blockade

Deliveroo riders struck Deliveroo Editions kitchen in Swiss Cottage, in northwest London, May 25-26 in wildcat action over wages and working conditions. It was organised by the London International Workers of the World (IWW) branch.

They are demanding £4 per drop and £8 per double drop, a maximum two-mile radius for deliveries and double deliveries, a maximum 5 minutes waiting time and restaurants to call drivers only when deliveries are ready, and all delivery zones should be free zones.

Workers set to strike Bromley borough libraries in London over staffing and pay

Staff at Bromley’s 14 libraries in London have voted by 98 percent to strike over pay and staffing, from June 6. The 50 members of the Unite union, employed by social enterprise leisure services’ giant Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), are to strike over unfilled vacant posts, the management rate not being paid to staff asked to fill such roles, and for wages owed.

The union is campaigning for a 6 percent increase in basic pay from April 2019 for hundreds of its members who work for GLL in over 140 leisure centres and libraries in 16 London boroughs and in Belfast.

In return for the contract from Conservative-controlled Bromley council, GLL “promised” to make more than 25 percent cuts to the library service, said the union, which was looking to avert the strike through negotiations.

Metrolink workers in Greater Manchester, England to strike over pay

Over 200 workers have voted by 96 percent to strike on Greater Manchester’s Metrolink tram and light railway system from 21:00 on June 7 until 05:59 on June 10.

The company’s pay offer of 1 to 5 percent varying between three different groups of non-driver workers—customer support who check tickets, engineering and business support—was rejected by the Unite union

as divisive, and tied to a worsening of unsocial hours working and new rosters.

The union called for urgent talks for a pay rise for all its members and to avert travel disruption across the 62-mile system. The strike could affect the popular Parklife Festival and a series of music concerts.

Scotland, Glasgow and Aberdeen airport workers to strike

Strikes postponed from April, to allow talks over pensions and pay, are set to resume June 7-10 at Glasgow and Aberdeen airports.

The dispute by Unite union members employed by AGS Airport Limited includes firefighters, airfield operations workers, security staff and taxi marshalls.

A pay offer of 3 percent, raised from 1.8 percent, was rejected by Unite, which said the company, despite posting near double profits, also claimed the final salary scheme pension was unaffordable.

Guernsey public service strike

Public service employees including cleaners, waste porters and sewage workers took strike action up to midnight on May 29 over a below-cost-of-living pay offer and the dismissal of a Unite union representative.

Some airport and hospital staff included in the strike walked out, though “essential manning” was agreed to ensure no disruption at these locations.

A work to rule by some was to follow until the end of the week.

The Unite members are one of a number of groups currently in negotiations with their employer, States of Guernsey.

DHL warehouse strike in Thurrock, England

A 24-hour strike by 51 Warehouse workers at DHL Services in West Thurrock, Essex is to take place on June 5. It is over a “serious and permanent” erosion of pay and employment conditions upon their transfer from DHL Services to NFT Distribution on June 6.

The members of the Unite union voted 100 percent for strike action. Unite regional officer Mary Hackwood said the new terms would mean “no union recognition ... different shift patterns; increased travelling time to the new Tilbury site eight miles away; poorer pension provisions; and failure to guarantee pay, terms and conditions for the rest of the contract.”

The strike would mean disruption of supplies to current customer, Upfield, a leading producer of plant-based spreads.

Children’s nursery staff in Wrexham, North Wales to strike

Nursery workers voted unanimously to strike over three days at Peter Pan Children’s Nursery in Wrexham. The strike is over the refusal of employer SHAP Ltd to recognise the Unite union and negotiate terms and conditions, including pay.

The union said it was regrettable the strike would disrupt childcare arrangements of employees of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board,

but was still open for discussion to resolve the dispute and waiting for SHAP to respond.

Delivery drivers strike warning in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, England

Delivery drivers and drivers’ mates began balloting for strike action May 12 over unmanageable loads and unrealistic planned delivery times. The ballot closes on June 12.

The Unite union members are employed by drink logistics company Tradeteam Ltd at depots in Immingham, Lincolnshire and Tinsley, Sheffield.

Industrial action, if it goes ahead, will hit drinks deliveries to pubs, bars and restaurants in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and north Midlands owned by Greene King, Mitchells & Butlers, Wetherspoons and Whitbread. Carlsberg and Coors’ deliveries might be affected.

Planned delivery times were revised in 2018 after a previous dispute, but employers failed to adhere to them, making a demanding job in all weathers impossible to carry out safely. The union claimed the threatened strike and a possible summer drinks drought could be avoided with a return by Tradeteam to negotiations, realistic timings for delivery loads and a serious acknowledgement of health and safety issues.

Scottish Borders Council ballot for industrial action

Around 60 workers in the roads department at Scottish Borders Council (SBC) will begin balloting for industrial action from June 4. The ballot closes on 25 June. The Unite union members are opposing detrimental changes to terms and conditions announced April 15 and imposed from May 1, without meaningful consultation or negotiation by the SBC.

The “rip-up” of long established contractual arrangements includes reduced pension accrual due to cuts to pensionable overtime rates, and removal of paid travel time. If the ballot is successful, industrial action is expected to take place from mid-July 2019 to mid-October 2019, in addition to a possible overtime ban and call-out ban during the same period.

Unite said it will act to pursue claims for illegal deduction of wages in the event the changes were not reversed.

South African farm workers strike over pay and against apartheid work conditions

South African farm workers at Oak Valley Estate farm are continuing their strike begun May 6. The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) members want a pay increase from R160 a day to R250, an end to labour agencies and apartheid work conditions.

The workers say three categories still exist of white, mixed-race and black on the farm as under apartheid, which determines the quality of housing provision—reasonable for white workers, poor for mixed-race workers and single-sex hostels for black workers.

They have obtained a strike certificate from the Arbitration services, but labour laws mean they must picket a mile away from the farm entrance,

allowing scabs free passage.

The CSAAWU is urging a campaign to boycott Oak Valley products, including wine and flowers. The Oak Valley Estate employs 233 permanent workers on a farm covering 1,786 hectares.

South African maritime workers threaten to bring ports to a standstill over wage differentials

South African maritime ports are threatened with closure on Thursday as 300 workers prepare to strike over pay.

The South African Transport and Allied Trade Union (SATAWU) members are protesting pay differentials between black workers and their better paid white counterparts doing the same job, in some cases by as much as R500,000 a year.

Negotiations have stalled and SATAWU have obtained a certificate to strike by the CCMA arbitration services, threatening to extend the strike on June 3.

Though employer Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) admit paying discrepancies, they rejected the union's proposal for an independent inquiry.

TNPA operate ports in Durban, Richards Bay, Cape Town, East London, Port Elizabeth, Saldanha Bay and Mossel Bay. They have plans to bring in agency workers to scab on the strike and keep the ports open.

South African wine producing workers threaten strike over pay

Wine producers in South Africa are threatening a pay strike. The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) members are demanding employer Robertsons Winery pay a minimum wage of R8,500 a month, a guaranteed annual bonus and provision of transport to and from work.

Entry-level workers paid R4,300 a month take home R3,700 after deductions and are spending R300 a month on transport—more than 8 percent of monthly pay.

The CSAAWU demanded the same pay increase in its last wage negotiations three years ago but accepted a 6 percent rise or R258—half the original demand—after ending a 14-week strike. There are 85 union members at the winery out of 341 employees, including management.

South African miners below-ground sit-in ends

South African gold mineworkers at China Africa Precious Metals (CAPM) in Orkney returned to work last week after a five-day sit-in strike in the mine.

The 69 miners resurfaced after a deal was struck on pay and conditions between the National Union of Mineworkers and management.

CAPM agreed to an eight percent wage increase, a joint exercise to grade wages, a R900 living-out allowance and an extra payment when working above workmen's grade.

Nigerian aviation workers denounce union sell-out

Workers at Nigeria's Civil Aviation Authority went on strike on May 22. The airline workers were striking over a condition of service plan, which will lead to redundancies.

Leaders of the four unions—the National Union of Air Transport Employees, Air Transport Senior Staff Services Association of Nigeria, Association of Nigerian Aviation professionals and the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers—were summoned by the Minister of State for Aviation the same day and immediately called the strike off.

The next day, some workers demonstrated and denounced the unions. According to online news source *Leadership*, demonstrating workers told union members not to join the march as staff no longer have faith in their activities.

Nigerian state workers strike suspended by labour court

Unions in Nigeria's Oyo State have suspended a public sector strike called last Friday to "force" the outgoing government to resolve demands going back at least two years. At the top of the list of workers' grievances are unpaid wages.

The National Labour Congress sent workers back on Monday, claiming that the new governor is a "man of honour and well-bred."

The state's primary school teachers, on strike since May 20, are continuing their action over promotion arrears from 2011 to 2016. The National Union of Teachers members in secondary schools are threatening to join the strike.

Strike by Kenyan county health workers banned

A planned strike by Kenyan health workers in Kirinyaga County over lack of facilities and conditions in its hospitals was banned by the courts.

Workers are demanding that 346 casualised health workers, sacked to save money, be reinstated, and four doctors taking master's degrees be paid their salaries.

The governor stopped union funds being deducted by the check-off system to the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union, Kenya National Union of Nurses, Kenya National Union of Clinical Officers and Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory.

A union spokesman said that equipment at the hospitals is not working and reagents needed for laboratory tests are unavailable. Four nurses, the unions claim, had contracted hepatitis B and suffered from diarrhea due to unclean conditions.

Zimbabwe union federation renounces general strike

The Zimbabwe trade union federation has quashed rumours that it has called a general strike. Zimbabwe's Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) came out against social media reports that it was calling a general strike from May 27.

ZCTU is supporting a Tripartite National Forum of government, employers and unions to discuss a "mutual" solution to the state of workers' salaries and skyrocketing inflation.

It put out to its affiliated unions a proposal to discuss the date of a

general strike only if the government “refuses or neglects to deal with the crisis collectively with social partners.” The Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association split from the ZCTU last week.



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