

Italian and French dockers refuse to load ship to protest Saudi Arabia war in the Yemen; UK Bridgend Ford workers strike vote against closure

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Italian dockers refuse to load ship bound for Saudi war in Yemen

On Monday, Italian dockers in the port of Genoa refused to load generators onto a Saudi ship bound for the Yemen. The ship had been loaded with arms in Antwerp earlier but had to forgo loading further arms in France due to protests. Dockers refused to load the generators even though they were classed for civilian use, fearing they could be reassigned to the military.

This international solidarity follows similar action by dockers in May.

The Saudi-led US-backed war on Yemen is now in its fifth year, launched after Houthi rebels drove out the corrupt government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, a puppet of Riyadh and Washington. The war has caused high casualties and brought Yemen to the brink of famine, with 10 million people surviving on emergency food relief.

Strike by Italian metal industry workers

Italian metal industry workers took part in a one-day general strike June 14. They marched through the cities of Milan, Florence and Naples. The FIM CISL, the Stalinist FIOM-CGIL and the UILM union members demand a pay increase, job security, improved pensions and better workplace safety conditions.

Workers at Ford plant in Bridgend, Wales, prepared to strike to oppose closure

A consultative strike ballot of more than 1,000 workers at the Ford plant in Bridgend in Wales have voted by a majority of 83 percent to oppose the closure, and to take industrial action if required. They are members of the Unite union.

The plant is slated for closure in the autumn of 2020 with the loss of 1,700 jobs. The closure is part of Ford's international strategy to ramp up exploitation and create super-profits.

Ford workers cannot trust their future to the unions, which have a record of collaboration with the company to impose job cuts. In response to the vote, Unite announced no form of industrial action and called for further discussions with the company instead. Prior to the vote it declared, "There are a number of avenues that we may pursue and at this time nothing has been ruled out."

Following the vote it stated, "Unite's objective is to save this plant and secure the maximum amount of Ford jobs for future generations. Ford must now engage in meaningful discussions with Unite and government at both Welsh and UK level, to put together an alternative plan for the Bridgend site."

Strike by rail workers at South Western Rail in England

Rail guards working for UK rail company South Western Rail (SWR) began a five-day strike Tuesday. It caused substantial disruption and affected journeys to the Royal Ascot horse race festival beginning the same day.

The action was over the long-running dispute against plans by SWR to extend the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, aimed at downgrading the role of the guards and cutting jobs.

In February, the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union suspended action over DOO. However, after months of delays, the RMT said the company had "dragged their heels" and called further action.

Similar action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at the private train operating companies. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis while accepting various forms of DOO on a number of franchises.

Strike by bus drivers in southwest England

Bus drivers employed by Bluestar buses in southwest England held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The RMT union members voted by a near 90 percent majority to strike in support of a pay rise and improved working conditions. Dozens of drivers marched through the city of Southampton to publicise their case.

The drivers are to undertake a one-week overtime ban commencing July 1 and again on July 22.

Hospital workers in Birmingham, UK, to walk out over privatisation

UK porters, housekeepers, maintenance staff and health assistants at the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation voted to strike from June 24 till June 26. The 150 Unite and Unison union members oppose plans to move them from employment with the National Health Service (NHS) to Summerhill Services Limited.

Though still under NHS control, the company can amend pay, working conditions and pensions for its staff. The workers fear the move paves the way for privatisation.

Strike by staff at government business department office in London

Contract workers providing catering and cleaning services at the offices of the UK government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in central London began a five-day strike Monday. They are employed by contractors ISS and Aramark. They were joined by portering and security staff on Tuesday, who began a three-day strike.

The low-paid Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are struggling to survive financially and demand to be paid the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour.

The dispute has been ongoing since January with previous stoppages.

On Monday, striking caterers cooked and served food to work colleagues and passersby in exchange for donations to their strike fund.

Protest and strike by Nottingham College in the UK

Workers at Nottingham College were to hold a protest teatime Thursday in Nottingham city centre to protest proposals by the college to impose new contracts. The contracts would leave more than 80 staff at least £1,000 worse off, with eight days less leave and cuts in sick pay. The University and College Union members also voted by more than a 95 percent majority to hold a strike on Monday July 1.

Further strikes planned at Scottish airports

Workers including firefighters, security, engineering technicians and operations staff held a third strike day on June 14 at Scotland's Glasgow airport. The workers want a pay rise and the shelving of plans to close the

pension scheme.

The Unite union members are due to strike again for several hours on June 21, 24 and 26. Two additional strike dates have been set for June 28 and 30.

Glasgow airport is run by the AGS Airports group, which also runs Aberdeen airport. Strikes have taken place at Aberdeen by around 150 firefighter and security staff over pay and changes to the pension scheme. Further strikes are planned for June 27 and June 28. The Unite members will be balloted on a new pay offer following talks. AGS has offered an improved pay increase but is still intent on pushing through the pension changes.

Scottish local authority workers vote to strike

Around 500 workers at Scotland's Dundee council in the construction and environment departments have voted to strike and impose an overtime ban.

They voted by an over 90 percent majority on a near 70 percent turnout in opposition to the council's plans to change pay and conditions and bring in a compulsory redundancy policy. The Unite members will walk out on Monday, July 1, and then every Monday and Tuesday until further notice.

Unite says it will begin balloting staff in the parks, leisure, culture and housing departments over the same issue.

Scottish school exam board staff to strike

Workers at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) are to hold one-day strikes on June 26 and July 22 and carry out an overtime ban in the week up to August 6—the day school exam results are released.

The Unite union members are taking action following restructuring by the SQA, which included a "voluntary" redundancy option taken up by 62 workers (8 percent of the workforce). However, some staff were moved to unsuitable or ill-defined roles, and the redundancy agreement was not adhered to.

Irish health support staff to strike

Around 10,000 health support staff working for the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) were to hold a 24-hour strike Thursday across 38 hospitals and health facilities. The workers are responsible for feeding patients and moving them around hospitals.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union members are protesting the failure of the HSE to impose the findings of a job evaluation analysis, which would mean staff being paid up to €3,000 a year extra. A further five strikes are planned. Talks under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission on Monday failed to reach agreement.

Middle East

General strike by Syrians in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights

Syrians living in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights area held a general strike Tuesday against the building of a wind turbine by the Israeli authorities. They held a protest near the village of Majdal Shams. There is concern that the turbine would negatively affect farming and tourism in the area.

Strike by Lebanese judges is suspended

A six-week strike by Lebanese judges was suspended this week. The stoppage was in opposition to planned budget cuts to the judicial services and was suspended pending discussions.

Africa

South African autoworkers and miners issue strike warnings

Strike threats have been issued by South African autoworkers and platinum miners on the eve of new wage-deal negotiations.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa's negotiations with the auto industry employers have broken down.

The South Africa platinum miners' majority union has put forward a demand for R17,000-a-month basic wage claim. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) claim represents a 48 percent increase on the present average wage paid by the major platinum producers. The platinum workers struck in 2014 in pursuit of a R12,500 pay deal, but this has still not been achieved.

In March, the AMCU threatened to call out workers at all of South Africa's platinum and coal mines alongside striking gold miners but caved in when a court banned the action. In April, the AMCU sold out the almost five-month pay strike of its 15,000 members at the Sibanye Stillwater goldmines.

According to the World Economic Forum, South Africa has the worst worker-employer relations of any country in the world.

South African domestic workers demonstrate over lack of industrial law coverage

South African domestic workers protested outside parliament in Cape Town on Monday demanding to be covered by the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act. They work with dangerous materials in their places of employment and are subject to related illnesses.

A court ruled in favour of the domestics, but there has not followed a change in the law.

The 50 demonstrators also complained about wages, which are well under the minimum wage (MW), and sometimes as low as R1,200 a month. The MW is R20 an hour or R3,500 a month. One protester said she was drowning in debt and unable to pay her children's school fees.

South African Zoological Gardens staff strike over unequal pay and conditions

Striking workers protested at the gates of the National Zoological Gardens of South Africa in Pretoria to demand equal pay and improved working conditions.

Since taking over the zoo, the new employer, the South African National Biodiversity Institute, has not been paying workers their housing allowance and medical aid.

Affected staff work in the cleaning, conservation and feeding, finance and landscape departments. A National Trade Union Congress (TUC) member said that only some employees get paid overtime for a seven-day shift.

A TUC representative said they are approaching the Department of Environment, Forestry, and Fisheries, as the Zoo CEO claims he has not got the authority to pay up.

Zimbabwe power workers threaten strike over lack of contract negotiations

Zimbabwean power workers have given the government notice of their intention to strike.

The Zimbabwe Energy Workers Union and the National Energy Workers Union of Zimbabwe members are planning industrial action, as their employers refuse to negotiate a new contract. The industry employer's organisation, the Zimbabwe Energy Industry Employers' Association, should have convened negotiations with the unions by May 31.

The unions have yet to announce a strike date.

Zimbabwe nurses threaten to renew strike over decimated pay

Zimbabwe nurses are to work only two days a week as they cannot afford travel expenses. Wages have been eroded by inflation, at almost 100 percent.

The Zimbabwe Nurses Association said if the situation has not changed by June 23, they will call an all-out stoppage.

The nurses went on strike last year and were sacked by the interim president, Constantino Chiwenga, but then reinstated by President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was installed in a coup.

Kenyan lecturers walk out over unpaid allowances

Lecturers walked out on Monday at Kenya's Moi University School of Medicine over unpaid allowances.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union members, who teach at the College of Health Sciences, have not been paid enhanced clinical allowances since 2017.

University management ignored a June 6 strike warning, and since then, exams, lectures and registrar work have been halted.



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