

UK hospital in week-long strike; National strike threats on South Africa's railways and Nigeria's public sector

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Hospital workers in northern UK city strike

Around 300 hospital workers responsible for portering, cleaning and security services at the Bradford hospital trusts began a week-long stoppage Monday.

The trust runs Bradford Royal Infirmary and St Luke's hospitals. The Unison union members voted by a 97 percent majority to strike against plans to move them from direct National Health Service (NHS) employment to a separate company, run by the trust. The new company, due to come into existence on October 1 this year, will be called Bradford Healthcare Facilities Management Ltd. Around 600 staff employed would be moved.

The strikers fear the move—which is nothing but privatisation by the back door—will be used to undermine their existing working and pay conditions. The trust says that transferred staff will maintain their current pay and working conditions. The workers are skeptical of such promises and mounted an enthusiastic and determined picket on the first day of their week-long strike.

Half the NHS hospital trusts ended the last financial year with deficits amounting to £991million, due to year on budget cuts since the banking crisis of 2008.

One of the strikers, Karamat, said Unison had suggested the strike should be postponed but that workers pushed to extend the strike to five days, saying any less would have little impact on the service. Karamat explained that the blood analytic section in Bradford was transferred to Airedale as part of a joint venture with Integrated Pathology Solutions, a limited liability partnership.

Mark, another picket and an ex-businessman, said he was shocked when he came to work at the NHS at the way they treat their workers. He also said that when he attempted to speak to the union it was like speaking to management.

UK East Midlands rail workers to strike

Senior conductors working for East Midlands Trains (EMT) are to hold three 24-hour strikes—on Saturday July 20, 27 and August 3.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are taking action over EMT management's refusal to address concerns over pay discrimination and contract issues such as compulsory Sunday working.

UK strike at rail rolling stock cleaners at Great Western

Cleaning staff contracted by UK outsourcing company ISS went on strike Tuesday and were due to strike again Thursday. The cleaners work night shifts on the Hitachi train fleet run by train operating company Great Western Railway.

They voted unanimously to oppose the imposition of new shift patterns, which means workers will be required to work an additional 60 shifts a year.

British Airways pilots balloted for strike over pay

Pilots working for British Airways (BA) are being balloted for strike action. The ballot will close July 22 and any subsequent action is likely to begin on August 5. The British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA) members have rejected BA's 11.5 percent pay offer over three years.

BALPA held two days of talks with BA representatives under the auspices of the government mediation service ACAS at the beginning of the week. However, according to the *Independent* newspaper, talks could be resumed. With BALPA representing 4,000 out of BA's 4,500 airline pilots, a strike in the busy summer period would have a massive impact.

Lobby of UK parliament by Manchester firefighters

Around 30 Manchester firefighters lobbied the UK parliament in London on July 2. They were protesting plans by the city's Labour Party Mayor, Andy Burnham, to cut the city's fire service.

Among Burnham's proposals are a plan to cut firefighter numbers by 194, reduce the number of fire engines by nine and fire engine crews from five to four. A reduction in the number of fire stations is also proposed. Over 12,000 Manchester citizens have signed a petition in opposition to

the cuts.

Protest by Cambridge University academics

Academics at Cambridge University staged two days of protests last week coinciding with open days for prospective students.

The University and College Union (UCU) members, supported by the Graduate Union and the Cambridge Defend Education group, were protesting the levels of gender pay discrimination at the university. According to the university, the gap is 19.7 percent, higher than the national average of 15.1 percent. They were also protesting the casualization of teaching roles.

A recent UCU report reveals that 70 percent of the total 49,000 university research staff nationally are on fixed-term contracts. Of those contacting the UCU prior to the report's publication, more than 70 percent said casual work affects their mental health, while 40 percent said it affects their physical health.

UK workers at London Newham council set strike dates

Around 50 UK carpenters, electricians and plumbers working for the London borough council of Newham have announced a series of strikes. They work for the council's maintenance and repair (RMS) department.

The Unite members are taking the action over safety issues, alleged bullying by management and plans by RMS to change the payroll system that will mean pay cuts. The strike dates are August 2, 5, 23, 27 and September 11. Unite made it clear they were open to further discussions to prevent the strikes taking place.

Bus strike threat in Scottish capital

A strike by 1,700 bus drivers at Lothian Buses in Edinburgh, Scotland seems likely as talks sponsored by the government mediation service ACAS broke up.

The Unite union members voted to walk out by a more than 90 percent majority over claims of bullying by management. A driver was sacked in December for a post on an internal Facebook group lampooning a manager. A further 10 were suspended for making criticism of management, also on Facebook.

The ACAS talks came up with a resolution of an issue relating to union facility time but did not address the wider issues—and was rejected by the drivers at meetings on Sunday and Monday by a two-thirds majority. The Unite union said it would continue talks with management to head off the strike.

Strikes at Scottish airport end

Staff at two Scottish airports have held a series of strikes over plans by their employer AGS to end the current pension scheme, negotiated in an ACAS-mediated agreement in 2016. The workers were also seeking

higher pay.

The Unite union members work in security and firefighting operations and technical posts.

Last week, the 300 staff at Aberdeen airport voted by a 60 percent majority to accept an offer from AGS to end their strike. This week 400 staff at Glasgow airport also accepted an offer from AGS. In both cases no details of how the deals will affect pensions appear to have been made public.

Spanish rail workers due to strike

Spanish rail workers at the state owned Renfe rail company are to hold a 24-hour strike on Monday July 15. Renfe employs over 13,000 staff.

The CCOO trade union members are taking the action after talks broke down. Among the issues are pay and conditions as well as staff shortages. A strike would cause widespread disruption as it is the beginning of the busy holiday season.

Ukrainian miners underground protest

Miners at the Ukrainian state-owned Girska mine in the eastern province of Luhansk ended their underground sit-in on Monday after five days. They had been protesting the lack of electricity to the mine that threatens it with flooding. They ended the sit-in after officials agreed the mine would resume power supplies to enable normal working.

Miners at the Lvivvugillia mine in the Donetsk province threatened to stage an underground protest over the same issue.

Strike by Cypriot accident and emergency doctors

Doctors working in accident and emergency (A&E) units across Cyprus held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The Pasyki union members are protesting staff shortages in A&E units, whereby doctors must work without breaks. The shortages have been exacerbated by A&E doctors leaving to join a newly established GP healthcare system.

Middle East

Moroccan doctors announce further strikes

Moroccan doctors have announced a series of strikes on August 15, 16, 19, 22 and 23. They are members of the independent public doctors' union, SIMSP. Doctors across all public sectors will take part, except for those covering in emergency A&E units.

They are demanding more government money for the public health service to improve working conditions for doctors and provide better facilities for patients. They are also seeking higher pay and better personal security for medical staff.

Moroccan medics have taken action over the last two years to highlight the problems they face. This year the protests have escalated and April 29 saw hundreds of doctors demonstrating outside the Moroccan parliament

in Rabat.
Africa

South African railway workers threaten to bring national rail system to a halt

A national rail strike is threatened on South Africa's railways, to begin July 26, to protest the dilapidated state of the railway system.

There are many accidents, including fatalities, due to signal failures and disrepair. A long-promised modernisation of the sixty-year-old infrastructure is overdue.

The United National Transport Union is demanding the government of Cyril Ramaphosa deploy the army to protect the rail network from vandalism. The labour department has issued the union with a protected strike certificate.

Court rulings on criminal negligence by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa responsible for Metrorail throughout the country are ignored.

Zimbabwe union federation organises a national stay away

With workers being left destitute by runaway inflation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) is organising a national stay away from work on July 22-23. The press leaked the action, which is being planned in secret for fear of a state backlash.

The purpose, according to the unions, is to "register disgruntlement" because the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa has replaced the use of multi-currencies with the Zimbabwe dollar, the equivalent of what they are calling slave labour. The Zimbabwe dollar has fallen in value by 100 percent.

In January the government turned riot police on strikers demonstrating in Harare, murdering seventeen, while many more were wounded or arrested. The workers had stayed away from work because they could not afford travel costs.

South African Gauteng province nurses demonstrate over uniform allowance

Nurses in South Africa's Gauteng province are protesting the renegeing of financial support for uniform allowances. They are coming to work in normal clothing.

The uniform payment of R2,900 was established in 2005, but payment is consistently delayed and inadequate. Nurses work a 12-hour day and are expected to turn up for duty every day in a clean uniform.

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa says nurses, like the police and army, perform emergency services and so should be guaranteed free uniforms.

Nurses took similar action in August last year after hospital management complained of torn uniforms even though staff had not been paid their allowances.

Nigerian workers demand implementation of minimum wage

agreement

Nigerian public sector workers are threatening a general strike over delay of the new minimum wage. The minimum wage, agreed in parliament in April 2018 raising it from N18,000 a month to N30,000 a month, has still not been implemented.

The National Labour Congress, an umbrella of 40 unions, denied there had been a strike call by the Trade Union Side (TUS) of the Joint National Public Service Negotiating Council, including eight Nigerian public service unions.

A spokesman for the TUS said, "[I]t is quite clear now that some fifth columnists in this Administration are hell-bent on pushing President [Buhari] to enter into a collision course with millions of Nigerian workers in the Public Service."

Nigerian port workers' union ends strike without wages resolution

The Nigerian dockworkers' union has suspended a national strike for payment of wages after one day.

The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) members walked out on July 4 to demand the international oil companies (IOC) pay contract labour their wages. The MWUN called on the government led by Muhammadu Buhari to intercede.

Talks are due this week, including two ministries, the Port Authority management, IOC representatives and the MWUN bureaucracy.

Kenyan Kinnyaga county health workers sacked for striking

Kenya's Kinnyaga county health workers were sacked en masse on Monday for continuing their strike.

Workers walked out on 29 May to demand improved working conditions, promotions and a doctor's right to be paid while studying for a master's degree. The strike has paralysed the hospitals and dispensaries throughout the county.

The labour courts proscribed the strike on July 4. All health workers in the county who refused to return to work were instructed to collect their termination letters from their workplaces and consider themselves sacked. The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union said they will contest the governors' strike ban in court.



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