UK Heathrow airport strike continues as pilots vote to strike; South African national rail strike; unions denounce South African dockers' unofficial go-slow

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Fire and rescue workers join strike at UK's Heathrow airport

Around 4,000 workers will begin a two-day strike today followed by two further two-day strikes. The strikers include security staff, engineers and passenger service staff. The Unite union members have rejected a 2.7 percent pay offer, which would see some low paid staff only receive an extra £3.75 a day while last year the salary of their boss, John Holland-Kaye, doubled to £4.2 million.

A further 90 fire and rescue workers at the airport are also due to strike after voting by a near 98 percent majority on a 90 percent turnout. The Unite members are taking action over a derisory pay offer. The firefighters will join the already scheduled two-day strikes by the 4,000 Heathrow staff on August 5 and 23.

British Airways pilots vote overwhelmingly to walk out

The majority of British Airways' (BA) 4,000 pilots have voted to strike. In the ballot of British Airline Pilots Association members, a 93 percent majority on a 90 percent turnout voted for action.

The pilots rejected an 11.5 percent pay offer over three years. Last year BA's parent company International Consolidated Airlines Group SA made pre-tax profits of £2.6bn. It is estimated the dispute would cost BA around £40m each day of strike action.

BA went to court this week to get a ruling to prevent the strike arguing the ballot did not comply with trade union law. The judge dismissed BA's application but has allowed BA to appeal, which could be heard today or early next week. The action would likely be in August, coinciding with BA's busy summer holiday period.

Strike suspended at London Stansted airport

The strike by 43 passenger service staff at Stansted airport due on Thursday has been suspended to allow a vote on a new pay offer.

The Unite members work for Stobart Aviation Services, which provides passenger check-in services for EasyJet at the airport. The new pay offer has not yet been publicly announced. If the offer is rejected, the strikes planned for today until Monday July 29 will go ahead.

The company has agreed to recognise the Unite union.

More staff join stoppage at London government office

Catering and cleaning staff at the UK government's Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) began an indefinite strike on July 15.

They were joined by security guards, porters and post room staff on Monday, who came out on a five-day strike. They are employed by outsourcing company ISS, as are the cleaning staff. The catering staff are employed by outsourcing company Aramark.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are protesting low wages and demanding to be paid the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour.

UK government social security office workers balloted for strike action

Staff dealing with Universal Credit claims at social security offices in Stockport, Walsall and Wolverhampton are being balloted for strike action. The PCS members want more staff and workloads to be reduced. The ballot closes on August 9.

UK nuclear plant workers end pay dispute

Nearly 200 workers at the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant in northwest England have ended their pay dispute. Employed by

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outsourcing company Mitie, the workers provide security, cleaning and catering services at the site.

The Unite union members have accepted a pay rise of 55p an hour, bringing their wage up to £9 an hour. This was the offer accepted by the GMB union members on the site. Mitie only recognises the GMB.

Irish peat cutters protest over job cuts

Hundreds of protesters marched through the town of Lanesborough in the Irish midlands on Monday. They were protesting the plan to lay off 72 permanent staff at the town's Bord na Mona peat cutting facility. Seventy-eight seasonal staff have already been let go.

The threat to jobs is because the Irish Electricity Supply Board has decided to close its peat burning power station at Lough Ree. The plant supplied peat to the power station.

Bord na Mona says it may be able to redeploy the remaining 72 permanent staff, but this is not guaranteed. Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union sector organiser, Willie Noone, told RTE news, "We need an orderly wind down if a wind down has to happen. We have accepted long term peat is not the answer."

Irish Psychiatric nurses resume overtime ban

Around 6,000 Irish mental health workers resumed their overtime ban on Wednesday. They had originally initiated the ban to protest low pay, which has led to staff shortages and retention issues.

The Psychiatric Nurses Association ended the first overtime ban to allow for talks under the auspices of the Irish government mediation service, the Workplace Relations Commission. However, talks broke down.

Ryanair pilots in Ireland being balloted for strike

Pilots working for the airline Ryanair in Ireland are currently being balloted for industrial action. The ballot closes on August 9. The pilots are members of the Irish Air Line Pilots Association.

The ballot was rolled out after talks over pay stalled. The union is due to meet Ryanair management for further talks on July 30.

Protest by Ukrainian rail workers

Rail workers at the Ukrainian rail company JSC protested outside its Kiev offices on July 17. The Ukrainian Free Trade Union of Railway Workers members are pushing for a pay increase, improved health and safety measures and a weeding out of unprofessional managers. They also raised concerns over the dilapidated rolling stock and network system.

Israeli foreign ministry employees' planned strike cancelled

A planned strike by foreign service staff due to have begun Monday was called off. The Foreign Ministry staff were to take action to protest cuts in the service's budget of $333 million, closing diplomatic services on a different continent each day. They had previously refused to make travel arrangements for Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu's overseas trips.

The Finance Ministry agreed to increase the Foreign Ministry's budget and only tax half the diplomatic stipend rather than the full amount.

South African national rail strike called

A strike and demonstration have been called throughout South Africa's rail passenger transport system for July 26.

The one-day strike has been called by the United National Transport Union, (UNTU), a member of the Federation of Unions of South Africa. It was awarded a strike certificate by the National Economic Development and Labour Council.

Strikes and demonstrations are planned in several South African cities including Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria with the slogan "fix our trains."

UNTU's main demand is for the South African Defence Force to be deployed on the Metrorail network to combat high levels of vandalism. The system is in a state of structural breakdown through 60 years wear and tear and poverty-driven vandalism.

The system is contracted out by the government to the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa.

The strike call is being boycotted by COSATU, the state aligned union confederation, with affiliated unions advocating caution in bringing the military onto the rail system, but they are not proposing any alternative to defend its endangered members.

South African unions denounce dockworkers' unofficial action

South African transport unions are complying with a labour court ruling demanding dockworkers end their two-week unofficial go-slow and increase productivity.

The trade union organisations, the South African Transport and Allied Trade Union and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) denounced the go-slow. The United National Transport Union said the port authorities should sack the workers.

Dockers are continuing their unofficial action, which has spread to other ports along South Africa coastline.

Hardest hit has been the Ngqura Container Terminal in Port Elizabeth, which deals with imports for the Volkswagen plant and the export of citrus fruits.

At least thirteen of the strikers have been suspended as the go-slow caused enormous disruption to the regional and national economy, estimated at around one billion Rand.

The powerful section of mainly non-unionised contract workers is demanding payment of bonuses, work incentives and promotions, among other demands.

Their limited action brought the Volkswagen plant to a standstill, and fruit and meat products were laid up at the docks and beginning to perish, with other exporters' goods held up.

Port Authorities are said to have agreed to pay workers their biannual bonuses.

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South African wildlife preservation parks set for all-out strike

Workers at South Africa National Parks are planning to close all the country's parks in a dispute over pay and conditions.

HOSPERSA, the Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers representing 5,000 employees at the parks have applied to the arbitration services, CCMA, for permission to call a strike.

HOSPERSA has been in dispute for months about overtime payments for Sunday and holiday work and is now joined by the two other unions to demand better working conditions and a pay increase of 11.5 percent.

SANParks management's final offer was a 5.5 percent wage increase.

South African public sector workers oppose 30,000 job losses

Workers in South Africa's municipalities are considering striking to oppose massive job losses. The councils are considering 30,000 job losses to save R20 billion ($1.4 billion).

The NEHAWU said it will oppose the cuts by striking and legal action.

South African, Pretoria hospital workers demand inoculations

Casual workers in South African hospitals are demanding inoculations in line with permanent staff. Around 60 workers on the cheap labour programme, Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), contracted infections at the Kalafong hospital in Pretoria.

The EPWP workers, who carry out cleaning, kitchen work and other general duties, demanded action from the management of the programme but have been ignored.

A spokesman for the casual workers has taken their case up with the South African Human Rights Commission, based on the right to work in a safe environment.

South African trade unions oppose new essential service classifications

South African trade unions are opposing a whole raft of changes to the essential services definitions, which threatens to take away the right to strike.

An Essential Service Commission has been established bringing forward a new list of work sectors banned from striking.

Strike threat at South Africa Road Accident Fund

Workers employed at South Africa's Road Accident Fund (RAF) are demanding a nine percent annual wage rise and bonus.

RAF initially offered a seven percent offer, which was rejected by NUMSA. The RAF has now refused to offer any rise or bonus proposal.

The union says management are provoking a strike and is seeking a strike certificate from the arbitration service CCMA.

Zimbabwe unions hold back national public sector strike

The Zimbabwe rural teachers' union is presenting an early break for school holidays as the beginning of an indefinite "work stay-away."

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) say teachers have heeded the call for early closure of schools after government failed to raise their wages.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) claim they are preparing a mass stay-away but are keeping the date secret until they get an across the board agreement with their affiliates.

The ZCTU is appealing to the government for US $500 monthly pay. The government has offered a one-off payment across the public sector of Zimbabwe dollar 400 ($45) cushioning allowance.

The unions are reluctant to call strikes but are faced with an increasingly militant workforce facing starvation in many cases. The president of the ZCTU in a recent interview said. "We are actually being pushed by the workers who feel that they have no choice than to protest in order for their voice to be heard."

The Apex council (federation of public sector unions) was reported to have accepted the Zimbabwe dollar 400 one-off payment, effectively scuppering the ZCTU's planned general strike.

Zimbabwe miners denied inflation-linked pay rise

Demands by Zimbabwe diamond miners for a massive pay increase have been rejected by the Chamber of Mines.

Although the miners had an 80 percent pay increase earlier in the year, the annual inflation rate of 170 percent reduced real wages to levels prior to the 80 percent pay hike.

Zimbabwe's finance minister addressed a Captains of Industry breakfast meeting on the economy, asking them to take note of the government's US $45 one-off cushioning payment saying, "(I)ndustry, can you please follow suit. Some of these companies have been making fantastic profits, you are looking after your shareholders but also look after the employees as well by adjusting their wages so that they can cope with the inflationary pressures."

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