

UK workers to hold two-week strike at two hospitals against privatisation; South African public sector pay strike brings Pretoria to a standstill

## 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.

### Hospital workers in northern England to hold two-week strike over backdoor privatisation

Around 300 UK hospital workers at Bradford Royal Infirmary and St. Luke's Hospital in Bradford were to begin a two-week strike on Thursday.

The Unison union members are opposing plans by the Bradford Hospital Trust to transfer around 600 facility staff such as security workers, porters, cleaners and clinical engineers to a wholly trust-owned company called the Bradford Healthcare Facilities Management Ltd.

Workers fear the move would mean an attack on their pay and conditions and open the way for backdoor privatisation.

The two-week strike follows a weeklong walkout that began July 8. The strike was well supported and featured enthusiastic picket lines at the two main sites.

### Further strikes against DOO by rail guards in northwest England

Rail guards working for the Merseyrail train company in northwest England are to hold a series of 24-hour strikes—on August 24, September 3, 5, and 30 and October 2 and 4.

Merseyrail workers held previous strikes over the company's plans to extend the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. Under DOO, the train driver would have responsibility for opening and closing the doors, eliminating the safety role of guards.

Action against DOO took place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at the different train operating companies. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union isolated the disputes, with token strikes on a regional basis, and accepted the extension of the use of DOO trains.

The previous strikes at Merseyrail ended when the RMT began talks with management. The RMT now says, "[T]he company has failed to deliver on the crucial issue of a safe method of train dispatch."

### British Airways loses legal attempt to prevent pay strike

British Airways (BA) has lost its legal appeal to prevent its pilots going on strike over pay. BA's parent company IAG went to court last week, but its application was dismissed. After its appeal was also dismissed, the strike can go ahead.

The British Airline Pilots Association's (BALPA's) 4,000 members voted by a 93 percent majority to strike, rejecting an 11.5 percent pay offer over three years. The Unite and GMB unions representing other BA staff accepted the offer.

Last year, IGA made pre-tax profits of £2.6 billion. It is estimated the dispute could cost BA £40 million a day.

BALPA has not yet given a date for the strike to begin. Under trade union legislation, BALPA has until January to take any action but must give two weeks' notice. It is likely, though, that it would be in August to coincide with BA's busy summer schedule.

### Staff at UK government business strategy department continue strike

The indefinite strike by catering and cleaning staff at the UK government's Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), which began July 15, is continuing. The Public and Commercial Services members are demanding subcontractors, ISS and Aramark, pay them the current London Living Wage figure of £10.55 an hour.

Last week, security, portering and post room staff, also employed by ISS, held a five-day strike over the same issue.

### UK local government workers submit pay claim

Unions representing local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have submitted a 10 percent pay claim to begin next April. The lowest-paid workers would get a minimum of £10 an hour. Around 1.4 million local government workers are represented by the Unison, Unite and GMB unions. According to Unite, local government workers have suffered a 22 percent cut in pay since 2010.

subsidiary, Malta Air, will threaten the viability of Air Malta and lead to job losses.

### **Shipyard protests in Northern Ireland**

Shipyard workers at the iconic Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, Northern Ireland, have staged a series of protests over the future of the yard. A large banner hanging from one of the giant cranes says, "Save our Yard." The shipyard, where the ill-fated ocean liner Titanic was built, is threatened with closure.

The yard currently repairs oil rigs and undertakes marine engineering projects. The present Norwegian-based owner wants to sell the yard to overcome its parent company's financial problems.

On Monday, the 130 workers closed the yard gates and vowed to fight until a satisfactory solution could be found. The Unite and GMB union members are calling for the yard to be nationalised if no buyer comes forward. On Tuesday, they staged a mass protest. Some workers protested outside the Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont on Wednesday when newly elected British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was visiting. At 5 p.m., the window closed for any bids to be received.

### **Spanish train strike over new contracts and staff shortages**

Rail workers employed by Spanish state-owned Renfe walked out on Wednesday. The Stalinist CGT union members were protesting new contracts and staff shortages. Renfe employs around 14,000 workers. The strike took the form of a four-hour stoppage between noon and 4 p.m. and a further four-hour stoppage beginning 8 p.m.

Further strikes are planned for August 14 and 31 and September 1. Coinciding with the busy summer holiday period, the action led to the cancellation of nearly 500 passenger trains, over 200 high-speed long-distance AVE trains and over 400 freight trains. Under Spanish law, a minimum service must be maintained during a strike.

### **Turkish workers' picket at packaging company enters ninth week**

Workers at the Spanish-owned Saica Pack packaging company in Sogutlu have been maintaining a picket since the end of May. The company has refused to recognise the Seluloz-I? union even though it was given official certification by the Ministry of Labour in April. The workers began their picket after six members of the union were sacked.

The union says the sackings were an attempt to intimidate workers from joining. The majority of the workforce joined in April. Saica maintains the six were sacked as a result of falling orders.

### **Air Malta pilots boycott company events**

Pilots working for Air Malta are boycotting voluntary events organised by the company. Their union, ALPA, organised the action to protest a legal injunction against the pilots banning industrial action.

The pilots are seeking a guarantee of two thirds of their salaries until retirement age should the company fail. They fear a new Ryanair

### **Moroccan trade unions campaign against proposed union legislation changes**

Last week, Moroccan trade unions announced they would launch a campaign against Moroccan government proposals to bring in legislation that would restrict the right to strike. Part of the campaign would include gathering signatures opposing the bill. They accuse the government of proposing the changes without consulting the unions.

### **Strike by Jordanian nurses ends**

Nurses working at the University of Jordan hospital ended their strike on Sunday. The Jordan Nurses and Midwives Association members began their strike on July 23 for higher pay and improved working conditions.

The strike ended when a committee was set up to address their demands. One demand granted was for associate nurses to be appointed as registered nurses and to recommence pay incentives in advance. The other demands will be discussed by the committee. It was also agreed that some nurses dismissed in the course of the dispute would be reinstated.

### **South African public sector workers bring Pretoria to a standstill**

South African public employees went on strike and demonstrated in Pretoria, the municipal central district of Tshwane, on Monday. Workers are demanding an 18 percent pay increase, the same as the city's top managers and executives received.

The pay rise should have been awarded to all the public sector employees due to the city status being raised from a category 9 council to 10. Top bosses received the increase plus backpay from 2017. City Manager Dr Moeketsi Mosola received a R7.5million pay-off to end his contract, due to expire in 2022.

Around 3,000 workers were involved in the action. Bus drivers blocked the roads with their vehicles and walked away with the keys as the stoppage continued into the week. The South African Municipal Workers Union members laid rubble in the streets in Pretoria's main business district, bringing traffic to a standstill.

The police complained that no strike warning was given. The provincial government has threatened bus drivers with the sack.

The unions are demanding an allowance while a new wage agreement is concluded.

### **South African health workers strike in Limpopo**

South African health workers walked out and demonstrated in Limpopo Province Wednesday.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union members marched to the Executive Council offices to protest staff shortages, lack of

pharmaceuticals and other equipment and the use of casuals. They are also demanding the resignation of the health secretary.

The protest was on the anniversary of a similar walkout last year, for the same demands.

### **Swaziland nurses threaten to paralyse the health system**

Nurses have given the government of eSwatini (Swaziland) a month to change conditions in the health service or they will bring the system to a standstill.

The Swaziland Nurses Association said patients were dying from lack of food and medicines in the hospitals, with medical facilities in disrepair.

Drugs for HIV-infected patients are non-existent in most hospitals and clinics in a country with the highest infection rate in the world. Other lifesaving drugs are not available, while some have passed their use-by date.

Suppliers have stopped deliveries, as they are not getting paid. The country has only 12 ambulances in operation, as those that breakdown are not repaired.

A nurses' march delivered a petition to the government June 21 that has been ignored.

### **Zimbabwe union congress shelves general strike, appeals to bankers**

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has abandoned plans for a secretly organised general strike in favour of appealing to employers.

The Zimbabwe Banks and Allied Workers Union wrote to South Africa's Nedbank branch to say they plan to picket their offices. Union president Peter Mutasa, who is also president of the ZCTU, complained that other banks have conceded pay increases.

The letter says, "We had no one else to approach than you our sister in the struggle and dependable comrades. We would be grateful if you could assist with all the legal processes that are necessary for our picketing to proceed. This could be advice, material support, applications required in terms of public gathering laws."

It has become extremely dangerous for workers to demonstrate or take industrial action under the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. In January, riot police attacked strikers demonstrating in Harare, murdering 17. Many more were wounded or arrested. Workers have been impoverished by an annual inflation rate of 170 percent.

### **Malawian judicial workers' wildcat pay strike ends**

Judicial support workers employed by the Malawian courts ended their sit-in at Blantyre High Court this week. They acted last week to demand a pay rise in line with other judicial staff such as magistrates and judges.

The workers received letters calling them to disciplinary hearings. The sit-in was declared illegal because it was not supported by the union and regulatory measures had not been followed.

Support workers want their conditions of service approved by parliament like the judicial staff, and not by the Judicial Services Commission. They are calling for the removal of the chief justice and the registrar of the High Court and Supreme Court of Appeal for ignoring

their demands.



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