

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 August 2019

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

Portuguese truck drivers' strike ends but dispute continues

After a week-long strike, Portuguese truck drivers voted Sunday to end their walkout after the trade unions agreed to government-sponsored talks with the employer Antram.

As the strike began to hit petrol supplies, the Socialist Party government called in the army to break the strike and issued civil requisition orders to force the strikers back to work.

On Tuesday, however, the talks broke down and the 750 drivers announced they will refuse to work overtime, weekends or public holidays for the period September 7-22.

The National Hazardous Goods Drivers Union members are demanding a pay rise from the current €630 a month to €900 by 2022.

In the first half of the year, the unions shut down a strike wave of port, refinery, education, and state administration workers demanding wage increases.

Ground staff at Spanish airport announce further strikes

Ground staff at Spain's Barcelona airport working for the airline Iberia have announced a series of further strikes—for August 24 and 25 followed by August 30 and 31.

This follows a stoppage on July 28 and 29, over lack of permanent contracts, indiscriminate use of forced overtime and staff shortages.

Traffic at Barcelona airport is increasing by 5 percent annually, with 50 million passengers last year.

Two UK private rail companies face strikes over role of guards

Rail workers at the UK South Western Railway company are to strike for four days from August 30 until September 2. This follows a five-day walkout in June, after the breakdown of talks initiated when action was suspended in February.

Rail workers employed by Merseyrail, in north west England, will also strike on August 24, September 3, 5 and 30 and October 2 and 4.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are striking to oppose the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens

passenger safety and 6,000 jobs of guards (conductors).

Merseyrail intends to replace the current 40-year-old rolling stock with a new fleet of DOO trains to be introduced in 2020. The RMT had agreed with Merseyrail to eliminate the role of guard, but have a second person on trains, while the driver took over the guard's job controlling the doors. This has now fallen apart.

Similar action against DOO has taken place nationally by guards over the last three years at the privately run train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

Pharmacy workers at Scottish hospital group begin indefinite strike

Pharmacy support workers at the National Health Service Tayside hospital trust in Scotland began an indefinite strike on Monday. The two main hospitals involved are in Dundee and Perth.

The Unite union members voted unanimously on a 90 percent turnout earlier in the year for strike action. A job evaluation exercise had left many of the workers worse off. The trust admitted it had been a flawed process but were not prepared to overturn the outcome.

Following the ballot result in June, the trust entered talks with Unite which ended in deadlock on August 9.

Road staff at Scottish authority announce strike

Around 130 road maintenance staff working for the Scottish Borders Council (SBC) voted to strike by an 86 percent majority on a 78 percent turnout. A one-day strike has been called for August 29, along with a protest outside SBC's headquarters.

The workers are protesting changes to their terms and conditions, including pensions and paid travel time. The SBC propose to change the summer standby shift system from a voluntary to mandatory one.

Strike of migrant workers in France in third month

Around 40 undocumented migrant workers have been on strike in France since June 11. They have set up a camp outside the warehouse of the courier delivery firm Chronopost, in a Parisian suburb where they are employed.

Chronopost is a subsidiary of the French post office. The striking

migrant workers' grievances include long hours, unpaid overtime and the threat of being sacked if they fall ill. One of the strikers reported in *France 24* that the company "treat us like slaves."

Further strikes by Moroccan doctors

Following a strike on Monday and two days of strikes last week, Moroccan doctors were to strike Thursday and today. The Independent Union of Public Sector Physicians' (SIMSP) members are demanding a pay increase, improved benefits and enhanced security in the workplace.

The doctors said that emergency and resuscitation services will be exempted. Doctors held a previous five-day strike at the end of July.

South African legal aid lawyers strike over cuts to pay and conditions

South African legal aid lawyers went on strike Monday opposing wage and benefit cuts and work overload, leading to suspension of bail hearings and trials.

The lawyers represent the poor, defined as those paid below R8000 a month. Criminal cases represent 87 percent of their work, a total of 371,202 cases in the previous financial year.

The dispute has been ongoing since December, when lawyers were awarded a certificate for this unsettled dispute. In May, they held demonstrations to highlight their demands.

Legal Aid South Africa lawyers are calling on the national membership not to carry out court work in its 64 branches and six provincial headquarters. It has now been reported that the strike has been suspended.

Workers and pensioners demonstrate over unpaid benefits on Marikana day

Sixty former miners supported by the Unpaid Benefits Campaign (UBC) marched to the South African parliament on Marikana Day, August 16.

This is the third year they have demonstrated to raise the plight of pensioners and others over unpaid pensions, provident fund savings and benefits to families of those who died at work, particularly in the mines.

UBC Western Cape coordinator Lunga Guza said money owed to ex-miners is in investment funds "where it generates profits, not for the workers but for the fund managers who are already rich and earning very high salaries."

They attempted to deliver a petition to the ANC government led by Cyril Ramaphosa but were told there was no one to receive it. Ramaphosa was a director at Lonmin when 34 striking miners were shot dead by police at Lonmin's Karee mine at Marikana, on August 16, 2012.

Kenyan county hospital workers come out on strike as part of public sector strike

Hospital staff in the Kenyan Coast region walked out August 16.

The 800 staff at Coast Provincial General Hospital in Mombasa are

striking alongside 4,000 public sector workers over non-payment of wages for July.

Patients had to be discharged at the weekend as the stoppage severely affected the maternity and accident wards, leaving volunteers looking after patients who remained.

A meeting Friday between the county government and the County Government Workers Union (CGWU) failed to reach an agreement.

The CGWU responded by saying their members would not return to work until wages were paid, but then invited scabbing by saying anyone willing to work was free to do so.

Nigerian university staff begin national strike

Nigerian university staff began a five-day national stoppage this week.

A 14-day strike warning issued August 5 expired Friday, committing the university Joint Action Committee (JAC) to call its members out on Monday.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members are also out, resuming a two-month strike suspended in February.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities members are demanding payment of earned allowances valued at N30 billion and funding of staff schools, ratified in the labour court in December 2017.

Promises by the government to ASUU members to fund the allowances in 2018 with N8 billion were not followed up on.

Mauritania gold miners threaten strike for equality and a new contract

Mauritanian miners at the Tasiast Mauritania Limited gold mine are threatening indefinite strike action. A 10-day strike notice was issued this week by workers' delegates.

The miners want a new contract and equality in the workforce, as they claim expatriate employees have privileged wages and conditions.

The mine is a subsidiary of the Canadian group Kinross. Over the last six years, the workforce has been reduced by about 2,000 employees.



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