

UK postal strike looms; British Airways pilots and Spanish Ryanair staff to strike; South African national truck strike call on social media

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 August 2019

Europe

UK postal staff to be balloted for strike action

Around 100,000 UK postal workers employed by Royal Mail and Parcelforce will be balloted for strike action from September 17 until October 8.

Royal Mail management are accused by the Communications Workers Union (CWU) of renegeing on the “four pillars” agreement reached last year over pay, pensions and the gradual reduction of working hours from 39 to 35 a week by 2022. The deal was agreed between management and the Communications Workers Union (CWU) on the basis of productivity increases.

Workers fear that up to 20,000 jobs could be lost in Royal Mail’s restructuring agenda. At Parcelforce, the parcel delivery arm of the postal service, management is proposing changing the legal basis of the company, separating it off as a private limited company. It would then be run along the lines of private delivery firms DPD and Hermes, meaning threats to terms and conditions.

The union also claims that Royal Mail management maintains a bullying culture.

The CWU said it wants to avoid industrial action and is prepared to negotiate in the run-up to the ballot.

Strike of IT support staff at UK vehicle standards agency

IT support staff at the UK Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) headquarters in Nottingham in the English Midlands began a four-week strike last week.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members’ grievances include overtime, out-of-hours payments and lack of consultation by management. The issues have been long-running over the last three years. Other PCS members may be called out in September.

DVSA IT staff at the Swansea office are also on strike over excessive workloads and staff shortages.

Strike at UK welfare benefits office in northwest England

Staff administering Universal Credit (welfare benefit) claims at the Stockport office in northwest England walked out on Tuesday and Wednesday. They are protesting excessive workloads and staff shortages.

The PCS union members voted by a more than 90 percent majority on a 70 percent turnout for action.

Strike at UK government office in London to widen

Staff who provide reception, security and portering services at the UK government’s Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) department in Westminster, London will begin a five-week strike on September 2.

The PCS members will join cleaning and catering staff on strike since mid-July.

Both sets of workers are employed by outsourcing firms ISS and Aramark. They are calling for their jobs to be brought back in-house and to be paid the London living wage of £10.55 an hour.

British Airways pilots’ strike dates announced

The British Airline Pilots Association (Balpa) has announced strike dates—September 9, 10 and 27—outside the busy summer holiday period, when a strike would have had more impact.

In June, around 4,000 pilots working for British Airways voted in a consultative ballot to reject BA’s pay offer of 11.5 percent over three years.

In a full ballot at the beginning of August, the pilots voted by over 90 percent to strike. BA’s parent company International Consolidated Airlines Group (IAG) went to court to have the strike ruled illegal but failed.

Spanish Ryanair pilots and cabin crew to strike

The Spanish section of Ryanair has announced plans to close four of its Spanish bases, three on the Canary Islands and one on the mainland in Gerona, with the loss of around 500 jobs.

Spanish cabin crew, USO and SITCPLA union members, have announced 10 strike dates throughout September to oppose the cuts. The dates are September 1, 2, 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27 and 29.

Sepla, the pilots' union at Spanish Ryanair, announced five strike dates in September, some of which will coincide with the dates for strike action by the cabin crew in opposition to the planned closures. Around 120 pilot jobs are threatened. Sepla said it is still open to further talks to avoid taking strike action.

Further action planned by Portuguese fuel delivery drivers

Portuguese fuel delivery drivers will take further industrial action between September 7 and 22. The action will include a ban on overtime, no work at the weekends or on public holidays.

The previous week-long strike was called off by the unions in favour of talks. The SNMMP and the Independent Freight Drivers' Union, SIMM, and employers' organisation ANTRAM failed to agree, however, over the drivers' demand for a pay rise from the current €600 a month to €1,000 a month by 2025.

The unions went along with reactionary laws which enforced a minimum fuel delivery service, helping to undermine the strike. However, the strike had a big impact and the government was forced to impose fuel rationing.

French professional firefighters to vote to extend symbolic strike

France's 40,000 professional firefighters are considering extending their two-month-long symbolic dispute.

They voted in June by an 85 percent majority to strike. The strike, which began on June 26, is scheduled to end August 31. Because of French law prohibiting strike action by emergency personnel, the action was confined to displaying banners and wearing armbands, with occasional protests.

The firefighters are protesting lack of resources and staff shortages. They are also demanding to be paid a "risk bonus" in line with the police. France has about 250,000 firefighters, of whom 40,000 are professional. The majority of France's more than 200,000 volunteer firefighters operate under the auspices of the Civil Defence and Security Directorate and are not part of the protest.

Middle East

Iranian heavy equipment workers protest

On August 25, workers at the Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO), based in the northwest Iranian industrial city of Arak, held a protest. HEPCO manufactures road building equipment.

They marched into the city centre and protested outside the offices of local Iranian Assembly members against several months' wage arrears

and mismanagement at the company. The company was privatised in 2007. Workers have mounted protests on a regular basis over ongoing issues at the company.

Africa

South African truck drivers use social media to call for national strike

An unofficial national strike by South African truck drivers has been called on social media for September 2. The South African News Agency confirmed the announcement. The drivers are calling for better working conditions.

The Zambia High Commission in Pretoria told Zambian truckers not to travel into South Africa on the day and to park up if they are in the country. The South African government in Pretoria informed Zambia that tight security measures would be in place.

Legal Aid South Africa ends lawyers' stoppage

Legal Aid South Africa suspended the legal aid lawyers' strike on August 19 after one day, with no reason given for the return to work.

The lawyers, who defend the poor, were protesting budget cuts to their department of 5, 6 and 7 percent over the next three years, cuts to allowances and increased workload. Criminal prosecution cases have ballooned fivefold between 2017 and 2018.

The dispute has been ongoing since December, when lawyers were awarded a certificate for this unsettled dispute.

South African glass industry workers strike for wage increase and direct employment

Workers employed in the South African glass industry walked out on Monday to demand an 8.5 percent pay increase and permanent employment for casuals.

About 1,000 General Industries Workers Union of South Africa members rejected an industry offer of 6.75 percent over two years.

Transition to permanent employment is legally mandated after three months unbroken service as a casual.

University of Cape Town workers strike for direct employment

Fifty strikers demonstrated on August 19 at the South African University of Cape Town demanding to be insourced.

The University and Allied Workers' Union members are contracted to several companies which work at the university's business properties. Contract labour have fewer rights than workers on the university's payroll.

One casual worker said he cannot afford to pay to educate his three children on R5,500 a month.

Pay-to-view workers strike in South Africa over job losses

Workers at the South African television service provider MultiChoice walked out on August 23 against restructuring and redundancies.

The company, which employs 2,194 workers, claims severances are due to customers moving away from voice calls and visits to walk-in centres to using new self-service and digital technologies to contact the company. MultiChoice says the strike is illegal because the Information Communication Technology Union has not gone through arbitration .

MultiChoice is facing competition from Netflix.

South African petrol attendants threaten strike for better pay and conditions

Petrol attendants at garages across South Africa are threatening strike action over pay.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members are demanding a 12 percent pay increase against the Motor Industry Bargaining Council (MIBC) offer of 5 percent. They are also demanding a nightshift and transport allowance.

Negotiations were planned on Thursday between NUMSA and the MIBC. The union said if the talks fail a strike will follow.

Paramedics demonstrate over pay and work conditions in Bloemfontein, South Africa

Hundreds of paramedics marched in Bloemfontein, in South Africa's Free State, to the government offices to hand in a memorandum.

The Democratic Nursing Organisation members are calling for a pay increase, outstanding overtime payments, safety provisions against assaults at work, and more resources.

A government representative accepted the memorandum with a promise to reply in seven days.

South African special needs teachers strike over working conditions

Teachers at the Johannesburg School for Autism, South Africa, walked out on August 21 to protest poor work conditions.

This second strike in two weeks was provoked by nepotism, maladministration, ill treatment of staff and deteriorating working conditions.

The Gauteng Department of Education threatened to discipline those who took action. The school caters for 319 pupils.

Zimbabwe public sector workers reject government pay offer

Zimbabwean public sector workers have rejected a government pay offer. The Emmerson Mnangagwa government had offered a 76 percent pay increase.

With inflation raging at almost 100 percent, the Apex Council (public sector union) estimates a necessary basic wage to be Z\$4,750. At present it is Z\$582. The employers' offer would bring it to Z\$1,023.

Even though the union said the increase was worth nothing, it did not reject it and put it to workers to vote on.

A demonstration by Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe members over pay was attacked last week by the state. Workers were beaten, arrested and hauled before the courts. Teachers are threatening to strike before the commencement of the school term.

Doctors are also threatening to walk out on September 3 after they rejected the government offer. The International Monetary Fund has warned Mnangagwa against increasing wages.

Botswana miners strike over pay and conditions

Coal miners at the newly opened Masama Coal Mine (MCM) in Botswana went on strike last week over a pay cut and a demand for a wage increase.

The miners are employed by contractor Jarcon, a joint venture between IPP of South Africa and Giant Plant, a Botswana company.

The workers are in dispute after their hourly rate was cut from Pula19 to P17. They are also demanding a doubling of their hourly rate from P19 per hour to P40, an 80 percent company-financed medical scheme and increased housing and other allowances.

Jarcon threatened workers with dismissal if they did not return to work.

Workers are represented by Shift Representatives, which ended the strike pending talks on Tuesday after being informed the strike was illegal.

Libyan oil workers' strike threat over outstanding pay increase

Libyan oil production workers have given notice of an impending strike if an agreed pay increase from 2013 is not implemented.

The Union of Oil and Gas Workers in Libya has informed the Presidential Council, the National Oil Corporation, the Audit Bureau, and the Ministry of Finance that if their members' demands are not met in one week from August 24, they will down tools.

Ugandan nurses threaten strike over losing hospital lodgings

Nurses working at Uganda's Masaka Regional Referral Hospital are warning they may strike over the threat of losing their lodgings.

The Uganda Nurses and Midwifery Union (UNMU) says management at the hospital demanded the nurses reapply for their staff houses or they would lose them. Around 20 nurses are threatened with eviction, but say they were not notified.

The nurses are also protesting the expensive lodging fees which they do not agree they should pay.



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