

UK and Spanish Ryanair pilots continue strikes; first-ever national strike by Dutch care workers; South African Bank workers to strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 September 2019

Europe

UK Ryanair pilots strike

UK-based Ryanair pilots began a 72-hour strike on Monday. They are seeking a pay rise, improved benefits, pensions and restoration of lost licence insurance. Ryanair lost a legal challenge launched to prevent the strike.

The pilots' union BALPA also announced a further seven 24-hour strikes, on September 18 and 19 and then on alternate days between September 21 and September 29.

Fewer than half of Ryanair's pilots are members of BALPA, and according to the *Independent*, "On all five days [of strikes in August and this week] Ryanair crewed services to and from the UK using volunteer pilots, and passengers were unaffected."

A five-day strike at Spanish Ryanair is planned later this month. Talks between the Spanish pilots' union SEPLA and Ryanair broke down this week. The 900 pilots would be striking in opposition to plans by Ryanair's Spanish operation to shut four bases with the loss of 500 jobs.

SEPLA has named the strike days as Sept 19, 20, 22, 27 and 29. Some of those dates coincide with planned strikes already announced by the Irish airline's cabin crew in Spain.

Spanish Ryanair cabin crew took strike action Sunday and Monday this week over the same issue, forcing Ryanair to cancel some scheduled flights to and from Spain. It avoided any cancellations during recent strikes in Portugal and Britain.

First-ever strike by Dutch youth care workers

Around 30,000 Dutch workers offering care and support to youth and young people went on strike Monday. This marked the first-ever national strike by this group of workers.

The FNV and CNV union members are protesting heavy workloads resulting from staff shortages. Youth services have been the responsibility of Dutch municipal authorities since 2015. Previously, they were administered by the central government.

The association representing Dutch municipalities, VNG, says they are being asked to meet the needs of growing numbers of youth while at the

same time having their budgets cut. Last year, the youth care services had to deal with nearly half a million referrals.

Postal workers in Finland hold strike

Finnish postal workers walked out Sunday and were due to return to work Thursday. The PAU union members are opposing plans by Posti, the state-owned postal service, to transfer around 700 postal workers to a contract with lower pay and worse conditions.

Those affected are responsible for the delivery of online orders. According to PAU, workers on average will suffer a 30 percent cut in wages.

While official action began Sunday, some workers in Tampere, Vantaa and Jyvaskyla took unofficial action two days prior.

Rail workers in northwest England strike

Rail workers employed by Merseyrail in northwest England walked out on Tuesday and Thursday this week. The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are opposing the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, which threatens passenger safety and the loss of 6,000 jobs.

Merseyrail plans to replace its 40-year-old rolling stock with a new fleet of DOO trains by 2020. The RMT had attempted an agreement 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—which fell through.

In this long-running dispute, the RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed deals with several rail franchises.

Workers at UK government department office begin two-week strike

Security, portering, post room and reception staff at the Department for

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) office in Westminster, London, began a two-week strike on Monday. They joined cleaning and catering staff at BEIS already on strike.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are employed by outsourcing companies ISS and Aramark. They are demanding to be paid the London living-wage figure of £10.55 an hour.

Strike by UK science museum staff

Science museum staff at five sites across the UK including the Railway museum in York and the Film and Media museum in Bradford, held a one-day strike on August 30.

The Prospect union members were protesting a 1.5-percent-below-inflation pay offer. According to Prospect, museum staff have suffered a 13 percent cut in pay since 2010.

University support staff at Birmingham UK university strike

Around 300 support staff including caterers, cleaners and security workers at Birmingham University in Edgbaston in the UK walked out on Monday and Tuesday this week.

The Unison union members took the action over low pay and poor working conditions. They are demanding the University pay the living-wage figure of £8.21 a week. Pickets were held at three University locations and rallies each day.

Road maintenance staff at UK authority vote to strike

Road maintenance workers employed by Hertfordshire county council in south east England have voted by a 93 percent majority to strike.

The 57 Unite union members are striking in opposition to proposals by their employer, Ringway Infrastructure Services, that they move to a new contract. According to Unite, the workers could lose up to £12,000 a year.

The workers are based at depots in Ware, Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage, Kings Langley and South Mimms. The union has not set a date for action and is calling on Ringway to reconsider its plans for the new contract.

Scottish drinks production workers to strike

Around 1,000 workers employed by alcoholic drinks manufacturer Diageo have voted by more than 80 percent to reject a 2.8 percent pay offer.

The GMB members decided a 10-day rolling strike between September 7 and 17, hitting Diageo's production of whisky, gin and vodka at its sites across Scotland, including the Blair Athol distillery, plants in Cameronbridge, Fife and Shieldhall, near Glasgow.

According to the GMB, Diageo's latest financial figures show the company made £4 billion in pre-tax profits, with a share buyback plan worth £4.5 billion. CEO Ivan Menezes's annual pay was £11.7 million,

which included a 30 percent rise.
Middle East

Moroccan academics hold demonstration

Hundreds of Moroccan academics holding professorships held a march and demonstration in the Moroccan capital Rabat on Sunday. They marched from the historic Bab El-Elou to parliament, demanding to be made permanent employees rather than being on temporary contracts.

Africa

South African bank workers prepare all-out strike for September 27

South African banks will be shut down on September 27 to oppose mass redundancies.

Thousands of the jobs are under threat in an industry that employs 73,000, due to the introduction of online banking.

The bank workers' union Sasbo is calling on banks to finance a retraining scheme and relocate workers into jobs in banking and outside it. The Congress of South African Trade Unions has planned a national day of action on October 7.

Unemployment in South Africa is at its highest level in 10 years, at 29 percent, while some bank executives take home R280,000 a day.

South African West Rand municipality strike called off by unions

The public sector strike in South Africa's West Rand municipality, begun August 20, was called off last Saturday by the South Africa Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU).

None of the workers' demands—for pay increases in line with new upgrades after two municipalities merged in 2016—were resolved.

SAMWU began talks Monday with management over this demand among others, and a spokesman said they were prepared "to make compromises where necessary."

South African taxi drivers strike over killing of colleague

South African taxi drivers across Pretoria went on strike on Tuesday protesting the murder of a fellow driver, blocking all roads.

A spokesman for the cab drivers said that Jabu Baloyi was murdered by drug lords in a shoot-out with drivers in Pretoria last week. His killing kicked off a spate of looting of shops.

South African farm workers protest over dangerous pesticides

A delegation of South African women farm workers marched on parliament to demand the banning of pesticides.

Around 200 protesters of the Women on Farms Project came from across the Western Cape to demand the Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries and the Department of Labour ban 67 pesticides. They are banned in the Europe Union.

Farm workers are not provided with protective clothing. Crop spraying takes place metres away from where they work, and the spray often enters their homes.

Tax workers to strike in the Ivory Coast

Workers in the Ivory Coast tax office have filed a notice to strike with the government.

The Federation of Trade Unions of the Directorate General of Taxation members will walk out of the Tax Directorate for three days starting September 18. They are demanding the unblocking of promotions and improved wages and working conditions.

Namibian security workers' unofficial strike for better pay and conditions

Security workers went on unofficial strike throughout Namibia last Friday demanding a wage increase and improved working conditions

The Namibia Security Guard and Watchmen Union (NASGWU) denounced the strike of 200 workers at G4S—declaring it illegal and organised by someone who has not been a union member since 2016.

The strike leader said managers and supervisors are receiving pay increases while guards are not and that overtime payments are being cut alongside working hours.

A worker explained she had not had a pay rise since 2014 and could not afford her children's school fees or even buy food.

Zimbabwe mine workers put in for third pay rise this year

Zimbabwean mine workers are demanding a third pay increase this year to keep up with runaway inflation—now 200 percent.

The Chamber of Mines agreed to a miserly 35 percent increase a few months ago. A previous rise of 80 percent was conceded in March.

The Associated Mine Workers' Union of Zimbabwe members alongside workers throughout Zimbabwe are demanding payment in US dollars.

Workers are being forced into working night shifts with negligible unsocial hours payments as it is the only period electricity is supplied. For 18 hours each day there is no electricity, in the worst power shortage crisis since 2008. Industry complains it is losing US\$200 million a day.

Zimbabwe public-sector hospital doctors walk out

Hospital doctors in Zimbabwe walked out on Tuesday in demand of a pay increase to keep up with inflation.

A Hospital Doctors Association spokesman said doctors cannot afford travel to work and will not return until their demands are met.

Patients are being turned away from public hospitals and directed to the private system, which most workers cannot afford.

Zimbabwe's public health sector is funded by the European Union and U.S. Agency for International Development, excluding wages. The International Monetary Fund warned President Emmerson Mnangagwa not to increase pay.

Workers face a 900 percent annual increase in fuel prices and 500 percent increase in food prices. The government has offered a 50 percent to 76 percent pay increase to the public sector.

The government declared the strike illegal, saying hospital staff are a part of essential services.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact