Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

UK pilots' union calls off British Airways strike, UK Ryanair strike goes ahead; Jordan's teachers' strike enters second week; union heads off South African auto strike

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Europe

UK pilots' union calls off strike at British Airways

The planned 24-hour strike by 4,000 British Airways (BA) pilots planned for September 27 has been called off by the union involved.

British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) members have been involved in a long-running dispute with BA over pay. The strike began after pilots rejected a paltry 11.5 percent pay offer over three years.

The mandate for the original strike was unsuccessfully challenged by BA in court.

The pilots were in a powerful position to escalate their struggle, with a previous two-day strike last week costing BA around £40 million a day in revenue. A two-day strike held on September 9 and 10 had a big impact on the company with the cancellation of 1,700 flights. BA had already begun cancelling flights due to the planned September 27 strike.

Under these conditions, the union is moving to end the dispute entirely. BALPA General Secretary Brian Strutton said on Wednesday, "Someone had to take the initiative to sort out this dispute and with no sign of that from BA, the pilots [in reality the union bureaucracy] have decided to take a responsible course."

Strutton's comments were part of a statement by BALPA that could have been written by BA's PR department. The union declared that the interests of BA were primary, and "It was now time for a period of reflection before the dispute escalates further and irreparable damage is done to the brand." It added, "BALPA hopes BA will now change its approach and negotiate seriously with a view to ending this dispute.

Strike by UK Ryanair pilots

Pilots employed by the British operation of the Irish-based budget airline Ryanair began a two-day strike on Wednesday. This follows five days of previous action in August and earlier this month. A further five 24-hour strikes are planned between September 21 and 29.

The BALPA members voted by an 80 percent majority on a 72 percent turnout for the action. They are protesting over pension and maternity benefits and the loss of licence insurance. Ryanair went to court in August to stop the strike but was rebutted.

Strike by French professionals over pension reforms

On Monday, around three quarters of a million French professional workers came out on strike against the Macron government's plans to "reform" the pension system. Under the proposals, the current 42 schemes would be replaced by a single inferior scheme.

Doctors, nurses, airline pilots and lawyers rallied and marched in Paris under the banner "SOS Retraittes" (SOS Pension). The number of lawyers taking part was unprecedented, reflecting the depth of feeling over the attacks on pensions.

Indefinite stoppage at UK government office continues

Striking catering and cleaning staff at the UK government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) are continuing their stoppage begun in mid-July.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are demanding to be paid the London Living Wage, currently set at £10.55 an hour. The workers are employed by outsourcing companies ISS and Aramark.

The PCS recently announced the two companies were prepared to pay the living wage, and talks involving PCS, BEIS, ISS and Aramark representatives are under way. The workers' other demands include enhanced holiday and sick pay and to be directly employed by the BEIS rather than be outsourced.

Meanwhile, outsourced workers employed by Interserve providing cleaning, portering and maintenance services at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London were to begin strike action Thursday for a week. The PCS members are seeking higher pay and union recognition.

Strike by addiction service workers in northwest England

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UK workers at the drug and alcohol addiction service Addaction based in Leigh and Wigan walked out for two days last week.

The Unison union members voted by a 100 percent majority for the action. They had previously been employed by the National Health Service (NHS) but were transferred to the London-based charity. They are demanding promises made prior to the transfer that they continue be paid in line with NHS terms.

A third round of talks under the auspices of Acas, the government conciliation service, is due to take place September 24.

Strike by Scottish drinks manufacturer workers called off by unions

A scheduled strike by around 1,000 workers employed by Diageo at 19 sites across Scotland has been called off by the unions. Diageo produces well-known brands such as Johnnie Walker whisky, Gordon's gin and Smirnoff's vodka.

The GMB and Unite members voted by a more than 80 percent majority to strike. The programme of rolling 24-hour strikes was to begin Wednesday and last until September 27.

The company put forward a pay offer of 3 percent this year, up from its initial 2.8 percent, and a further rise in line with the Retail Price Index inflation figure in June next year. A consultative ballot of union members will be held based on the pay offer.

Twenty-four-hour strike called in Greece

Greek seamen and civil servants will take 24-hour strike action on September 24.

The strike by PNO (seamen) and ADEDY (civil servants) union members will hit ferry services to the Greek islands. The strikes are to oppose the Greek government's "growth bill," which workers fear will attack employment rights. In addition to the 24-hour strike, civil servants will also walk out on Thursday and Friday this week and on September 23.

Maltese health care workers' industrial action

Around 1,000 health care professionals, including radiographers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, began industrial action in Malta September 10.

The action included refusing to carry out blood tests and x-rays for non-urgent patients. The UHM union members are calling on the government for the UHM to be recognised as the official union for health care staff. The action was suspended last Friday after the union met with the Maltese prime minister.

Dutch airline ground crew strike

Ground crew employed by Dutch airline KLM at Schiphol airport held a four-hour strike Wednesday. It led to the cancellation of flights. It comes on top of two one-hour strikes held earlier in the month.

The FNV union members are demanding a 4 percent pay rise. An offer of 7 percent over two years and nine months was rejected, as was an offer of 8.5 percent over two years with a cut in the profit-sharing scheme.

KLM ground crew are employed on a three-quarters full-time basis, but due to roster arrangements they are unable to take second jobs to top up their incomes. Other demands include KLM offering more permanent posts and more amenable rosters.

Middle East

Strike by Jordanian teachers enters second week

The strike by more than 100,000 Jordanian teachers has entered its second week. They are demanding a 50 percent pay rise that had previously been promised by the government.

Over a million pupils have been unable to attend school since the beginning of the strike. Currently, teachers earn between 360 and 450 dinars a month. The lower figure is just above the absolute poverty line for a Jordanian family of five. Many teachers take second jobs to survive.

Last week, tens of thousands of teachers protested in the Jordanian capital Amman and in other major centres in support of their demands.

Protesting Iranian workers beaten and imprisoned

On Monday, workers at the HEPCO industrial complex in the Iranian city of Arak held a protest rally and blockaded the main north-to-south railway line. They were protesting working conditions at HEPCO since it was privatised in 2017.

Special security forces called in to end the blockade injured 20 of the protesters and arrested a further 40.

HEPCO workers protested outside the company headquarters on September 7.

Africa

South African car industry strike averted by major union concessions

The threatened strike by South African car workers has been averted by a sell-out deal between the National Union of Metalworkers and car manufacturers.

The workers were demanding a 20 percent annual pay increase, a sliding scale of premium payments on shift work from 10 to 30 percent, an increased travel allowance to R5,000 and six months maternity leave.

The union agreed to a 9 percent pay increase this year and 7 percent or the rate of inflation—whichever is higher—for the next two years. The agreement also included an increase in transport allowance to R2,500, half of the original demand, and a lump sum sweetener of R7,500 gratuity payment for each worker.

Car manufacturers operating in South Africa include Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Toyota, Isuzu, Nissan, Ford and VW. The sector employs 87,777

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people directly and 380,725 indirectly.

The sell-out coincides with a strike by 46,000 car workers at General Motors in the US.

South Africa: Johannesburg Metro bus drivers walk out to demand pay progression

In South Africa, Johannesburg Metro bus drivers went on strike Monday.

Around 300 Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (DEMAWUSA) members walked out demanding salary progression (according to years worked for the company). Also demanded is access to the Metro company facilities for the union as afforded two other unions, the South African Municipal Workers Union and the South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union.

Metro said 80 percent of Johannesburg commuters were affected as it closed down all operations because of intimidation, allegations denied by DEMAWUSA, the minority union.

The strike was approved by the labour court.

South African firefighters in Cape Town work to rule to demand full overtime payments

South African firefighters in Cape Town are planning to work to rule from October and refusing to do their usual overtime. The emergency service workers are protesting short payment of overtime for at least the last two years.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members are to restrict their work to 40 contractual hours a week, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Firefighters work up to 300 hours a month but are not paid the standard overtime rate of 150 percent the normal rate. They receive just 12.8 percent of their hourly rate.

The SAMWU is taking legal action. The work to rule only affects a section of the workforce. The issue has been ongoing for over two years, with action called off last November.

Thousands of South African cheap labour scheme workers demonstrate for stipend increase

Thousands of angry workers on South Africa's cheap labour scheme descended on the African National Congress headquarters in Gauteng on Monday.

Workers on the Community Work Programme (CWP) came not to petition, as one worker put it, but to demand answers as to why the government had not responded to their memorandum delivered after a protest August 12. The memorandum demanded that the CWP stipend be increased from R780 to R1,000 a month plus medical aid cover. Other demands going back to 2012 have also been ignored

The city administration had promised to reply in two weeks.

South African Cape Town university strike over contract labour continues

A strike by 60 contract workers at Cape Town's University South Africa has entered its fourth week.

The University and Allied Workers' Union members provide various services. They are employed by Bytes Document Centre, Protea Boekwinkel, Food and Connect Ltd, Protea Hotel Breakwater Lodge, Protea Hotel Mowbray, Food Vendors and the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation. They demand to be employed directly by the university.

Some students joined the picket line in support.

South African pharmaceutical distribution workers strike against poverty pay

Pharmaceutical workers have gone on strike at Shoprite's distribution centre in Pretoria, South Africa.

Around 400 of Shoprite's Transpharm distribution centre workers walked out Tuesday last week for a more than 100 percent pay rise. They are members of the General Industries and Workers Union of South Africa.

Workers are demanding R12,500 basic monthly pay, up from the current R4,500.

Shoprite Transpharm supplies hospitals, dentists, clinics, vets and general practitioners and 56 Medirite pharmacies in Shoprite stores with around 30,000 products.

The company has applied for a labour court order to make the strike illegal.

South African national park workers plan one-day strike over pay

South African national park employees at SANParks are planning a one-day stoppage on September 20 to protest an inadequate pay offer.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers and the Health and Other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa put in a claim for an 11.5 percent wage increase but reduced it to 8 percent in an agreement with the arbitration services CCMA. SANParks, however, refused to budge from its 6.5 percent offer to the 5,000 staff.

Strikes earlier this year over overtime payments were called off by the unions without resolution.

SANParks employs around 5,000 workers at 21 parks, including field rangers, field guides, petrol attendants, receptionists and hut attendants.

Striking Zimbabwean doctors protest over association leader's abduction

Striking hospital doctors in Zimbabwe staged a demonstration outside Harare hospital on Tuesday to protest the abduction Saturday of their association leader.

The doctors walked out September 3 for an increase in salaries to cover for inflation running at 200 percent. The major public and private hospitals in Bulawayo and Harare are affected.

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Supported by human rights lawyers and nurses, doctors say they will not return to work until President Peter Mugombeyi of the Hospital Doctors Association is returned unharmed. Mugombeyi earlier received threatening text messages for calling for a pay rise.

The medics claim state agents are responsible. Union representatives were abducted and tortured by masked men in a January government crackdown. At least 17 demonstrators were killed in January and many others wounded by state forces.

The government is preparing to outlaw strikes by doctors.

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