

Greek civil servants strike; UK postal workers strike ballot; South African bank workers to walk out

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 September 2019

Greek civil servants and transport workers hold 24-hour strike

Around half a million Greek civil servants held a 24-hour strike Tuesday.

The ADEDY trade union members were protesting plans by the newly elected right-wing New Democracy (ND) government to impose changes to labour law and privatisation plans.

Part of the proposed changes would mean the government keeping a record of trade union members and for strike ballots to be conducted online. Workers fear this would compromise secrecy and privacy. Other changes would make collective bargaining more difficult.

Government department offices were closed along with schools, while hospitals operated a skeleton service. Bus and metro services were hit in Athens leading to gridlock on the roads. Airline flights were affected for three hours. Seamen came out on strike despite a legal ruling forbidding it.

The civil servants' union was joined by some private sector trade unions representing banks, retailing, construction and telecommunications.

In July, ND defeated Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) in the elections, ending four years of a government which betrayed its electoral promises to end European Union austerity measures imposed following the 2008 Wall Street crash.

Strike ballot of UK postal workers begins

A strike ballot of 120,000 UK postal workers began this week. The ballot closes October 15.

Due to a previous agreement between Royal Mail and the Communications Workers' Union (CWU), mediation would follow a yes vote, delaying any strike action until at least November. Around 1,000 gate meetings took place in the lead up to the ballot.

A major grievance is over the implementation of the four pillars agreement signed last year—covering pay rises, pension contributions and provision and a reduction in weekly hours from 39 hours to 35 hours a week dependent on productivity increases. Allegations of bullying by management are also an issue according to the CWU.

Other areas of dispute include plans by Royal Mail to split the company into a parcel delivery firm and letter delivery service, the latter being run down. Up to 20,000 jobs are threatened.

Before Royal Mail was privatized in 2013, the CWU ended strikes and agreed to closures under the guise of modernisation.

Employees of Royal Mail chief executive Rico Back's European parcels company, GLS, work up to 13 hours a day.

Strike by Scottish pharmacy workers enters fifth week

Pharmacy workers employed by the Tayside NHS trust in Scotland began their fifth week of strike action this week.

The Unite union members took action after a job revaluation exercise left many on lower pay. The Scottish government terms and conditions committee (Stac) has become involved after talks between Unite and Tayside NHS were deadlocked.

The pharmacy workers have stayed out on strike while talks take place.

Strike by French power workers

French power workers at the state-owned EDF Cattenom nuclear plant began a 24-hour strike Monday evening. The strike led to a nine percent drop in power output.

The CGT union members were protesting the Macron government's pension reform plans.

Last week, EDF workers carried out a 48-hour strike. The CGT and members of three other unions were protesting plans to restructure the EDF, in which the nuclear plant sector would become a separate entity. The company would also be opened up to private investors.

Strike by German public broadcasting staff

Around 3,000 German public broadcasting workers held a strike on September 18. They work for the public broadcasting bodies, ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio.

The Verdi union members want pay and working conditions to remain tied to those of German civil service workers.

Campus support services strike at Liverpool University, England

Around 30 campus support services staff at Liverpool University in the north west of England held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday, following one on Saturday.

The Unite union members are protesting changes in terms and conditions relating to overtime payments imposed on them, which could lead to an average £3,000 annual loss in pay.

They will hold further 24-hour strikes Friday and on October 19 with a 48-hour strike planned December 2.

UK: College staff strike at Nottingham College

Staff at Nottingham College in the Midlands, England are striking for 15 days. This week they were on strike Monday through until Wednesday following three days of previous action. A further nine days of strikes will take place over the next two weeks.

The University and College Union members are protesting the imposition of new contracts that will leave them £1,000 a year worse off. College management has threatened to sack staff refusing to sign the new contracts.

Lecturers at over 147 universities across the UK are currently balloting for strike action over pay and casualisation.

Industrial action at Irish hospital over staff shortages continues

Staff at two hospitals in Drogheda in north-east Ireland are continuing their industrial action, refusing to cover for unfilled posts.

Clerical and administrative workers, along with health and social care professionals (HSCPCs), voted by a near 90 percent majority for action which began on August 29.

The Forsa trade union members are demanding two unfilled posts are filled and 12 posts currently filled on a temporary basis be made permanent.

Forsa met with health service representatives on Monday under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission in talks aimed at resolving the dispute.

Further strike by airline ground staff at Barcelona-El Prat airport

Ground crew working for Spanish airline Iberia began a four-day strike Saturday at Barcelona-El Prat airport. The UGT union members were protesting heavy workloads resulting from staff shortages.

They previously held two day of strikes in July and a further four in August, leading to delays and flight cancellations.

Protest by Estonian rescue workers

Estonian rescue workers, including firefighters, held a protest outside

the parliament building in Tallinn last week.

The protest coincided with a cabinet discussion on the budget. It was organised by the EPTAU rescue workers union against low wages, which make it difficult to recruit new staff. They were also protesting cuts in service provision leaving the public at risk.

Israeli mobile phone company staff picket CEO

On Sunday, employees of the Pelephone mobile phone company picketed outside the house of the company's CEO. It followed a one-day strike on September 19.

Workers are demanding a new contract as the current contract ends this December. Pelephone employees are currently on a go-slow. They are also not responding to any reports of network malfunctioning. The company is seeking to reorganize and streamline its operation, which would include losing a third of the current 2,500 workforce.

South African Bank workers' in national strike

South African Bank workers are set to strike on Sept 27. The South African Society of Bank Officials (Sasbo) members' one-day stoppage is to oppose large scale redundancies, as the banking industry adapts to the digitalization of banking systems.

The 73,000 workers are also demanding their employers, Business Unity South Africa (BUSA), provide retraining for within and for outside the industry.

BUSA is challenging the legality of the strike. Sasbo has held a certificate to strike since 2017 but not acted on it

One of South Africa's leading banks, Nedbank, is in the process of shedding 3,000 jobs and closing many of its branches. Standard bank is planning 6,000 job losses.

South African Metro bus drivers' strike continues despite union treachery

South African bus drivers at Johannesburg Metro are continuing their week-long strike despite two unions sending their members back to work. The dispute is over the demand for pay progression based on length of service and union rights.

The Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (DEMAWUSA) members are also demanding union access to company facilities, as afforded the South African Municipal Workers Union and the South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union.

The latter unions sent their members back to work, leaving them isolated. Although DEMAWUSA was awarded a strike certificate, Metro Bus are appealing to the courts to have the authorization nullified, citing the bargaining agreement settled with the other unions.

Last week, the strike affected 40,000 commuters on 330 scheduled bus routes and school bus services.

South African firefighters in Johannesburg defy court order, continue

strike

Firefighters in Johannesburg, South Africa, are continuing their stoppage over health and safety rules.

The workers came out initially on September 20, and 127 out of the 230 strikers defied a Labour court ruling to return to work on the grounds that the strike is illegal.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union and the Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union members claim the Emergency Services Management are not complying with the National Health Act, saying work passed to them is not part of their duties. They are also demanding security cover when going to dangerous areas.

The six districts of Johannesburg have only 12 fire engines, five of which are out of service undergoing repair. The fire service is plagued by staff shortages.

In October, firefighters in Cape Town will begin a work-to-rule in a two-year dispute relating to overtime pay.

South African pharmaceutical company hires paramilitaries to use against striking workers

Four hundred South African pharmaceutical distribution workers are continuing their national walk out at Shoprite's Transpharm distribution centres.

The strike began at the Pretoria outlet on September 12 and spread to Cape Town on Tuesday. Last week, strikers protested outside company headquarters in Pretoria.

The General Industries and Workers Union of South Africa members—who were contract workers until a recent strike—are demanding R12,500 basic monthly pay, up from their current R4,500—the same as other permanent employees.

The company has hired a private security company TSU Tactical Response Team armed with Rottweilers, shotguns and bullet proof jackets to intimidate strikers. The company has also applied to the courts to make the strike illegal.

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

The new permanent employees cannot afford the medicines they distribute.

Zimbabwe hospital doctors continue pay stoppage

The Zimbabwe doctors' pay strike begun September 3 is now into its fourth week.

The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association (ZHDA) walked out for a pay rise to compensate for Zimbabwe's runaway inflation rate of 200 percent.

They also demonstrated each night from September 16 outside at the main Parirenyatwa Hospital in the Harare until the release of abducted union leader, Dr Peter Magombeyi. Mugombeyi was found unharmed on September 20 after being kidnapped by three unidentified assailants. He had earlier received threatening text messages after calling for a pay rise.

The demonstrations were supported by members of most of the public sector unions organised in the Apex council.

Other public sector union leaders say many of them have also received threatening texts and have, in some cases, been kidnapped by unidentifiable masked men.

Doctors are demanding a salary review. On current pay they cannot afford to travel to work. The only sector of the economy that pays its employees above the Poverty Datum Line is banking.

The Bulawayo councils' proposed budget will increase council rates by 300 percent this year and a further 416 percent next year.

Kenya hospital workers strike

Kenyan hospital staff walked out at the Taita Taveta County hospitals on September 20.

Around 1,000 Kenya Medical, Pharmacists and Dentists' Union, Kenya National Union of Nurses, Kenya Union of Clinical Officers Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers, Kenya Health Professionals Society and Kenya County Government Workers Union members are demanding the resolution of longstanding grievances.

The staff want an end to salary delays, poor conditions of work, staff shortages and late payment of statutory deductions. Other grievances include casuals not being paid, lack of health insurance and lack of drugs and other resources.

County residents, dependent on public hospitals, were turned away by guards at private hospitals if they could not pay.

A meeting between county officials and unions was planned for Tuesday.

Liberian health workers strike over pay and conditions

Around 1,000 Liberian health workers walked out Monday demanding a wage increase. The National Health Workers' Union of Liberia members also want wages paid in full and on time and for adequate facilities so hospitals can function.

Some health workers have not been paid since February under conditions where the cost of living has increased threefold since 2011. Also, wages are paid in Liberian dollars as opposed to a promised payment scheme of 65 percent in US dollar and 35 in Liberian dollars.

Employees in the health service cannot afford to send their children to school.

Bus drivers' strike in Somalia over tax

Public transport bus drivers went on strike in Mogadishu, Somalia September 19 bringing traffic to a halt. The drivers blocked off traffic at Mogadishu's Four Corners intersection, protesting a government annual tax of \$100,000 levied to make up for a fall-off in international aid.



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