

National strike by Finnish postal workers continues; stoppages at UK colleges; South African Airline workers strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 November 2019

National strike by Finnish postal workers continues

Talks on Tuesday to end the Finnish postal strike failed and the strike continues. Around 9,000 postal workers at the state-owned postal service, Posti, walked out on November 11. It had initially been planned as a two-week strike, but was extended to four weeks.

The PAU union members are opposed to plans by the company to create a tier of around 700 lower-paid workers, increase working hours and amend shift patterns.

Prior to the strike, the PAU said it wanted to negotiate rather than call a strike, but the negotiations broke down. Striking postal workers were angry that Posti management had cut a hole in a fence at the Posti logistics centre in Lieto in south-west Finland. The hole enabled scab labour to enter the facility without running the gauntlet of pickets.

PAU announced that from November 25 an additional 1,000 Posti workers employed at post offices and other facilities will join the strike.

Other sections of workers are due to join the action. Services Union United members at 750 Post-in-Shop service facilities will stop handling letters and parcels beginning November 25 in an action to last until December 8.

Public sector workers union JHL and rail union RAU members were to stop handling postal freight on November 19 and 20. Finnish Electrical Workers union members say they will begin strike action in sympathy with the Posti workers.

Rail and road transport workers in the AKT transport union were to impose an overtime ban on Tuesday and Wednesday in support of the postal strikers, while AKT members in the docks were due to have an overtime ban on Wednesday.

Transport workers at the Helsinki Regional Transport Authority, AKT members, are to hold a 24-hour strike on November 25 if the Posti dispute has not been resolved.

French postal workers' stoppage

Postal workers in 15 out of France's 95 regional departments walked out Tuesday. Sorting centre and delivery workers are protesting the reorganisation of their working patterns. They are members of the Stalinist CGT FAPT union.

The strike is part of a series affecting different regional departments since October. In view of changing workloads as letters decrease and

parcels increase, the employer, La Poste, is seeking to change the work start time from 6am to 9am. Postal staff at 20 departments are to join the planned mass strike by French workers on December 5.

French teachers to join mass strike against pension changes

French teachers are to join a mass strike and protest called for December 5. The SNUipp-FSU members are protesting pension changes being brought in by the Macron government.

They will join railworkers who have vowed to begin an indefinite strike that day. Other workers involved are Metro drivers, lorry drivers, bus drivers, postal workers and airline ground staff.

Bus drivers in German state of Hesse strike

On Tuesday and Wednesday, around 3,000 bus drivers throughout the German state of Hesse went on strike. The Verdi union members are seeking an increase in their current basic pay from €13.50 an hour to €16.50, more paid breaks and a holiday allowance. Frankfurt was among the cities affected.

Planned walkout by metro staff in Greek capital

Greek workers employed on the Athens metro are to strike for 12 hours from 9am on November 28 and four hours from 12 noon on November 29. The dispute is over wages arrears accrued over the last six months after the conservative New Democracy and previous pseudo-left Syriza government reneged on wage contracts signed with the metro workers.

Teaching staff strike at UK sixth-form colleges

Teaching staff at 34 UK sixth-form colleges walked out on Wednesday.

The NEU members teach 16-19-year olds. They are protesting the lack of funding for sixth-form colleges and the resultant erosion of wages. Teachers have suffered a 16 percent cut in real pay since 2010.

Previous strikes took place at 23 colleges on October 17, and 25 on November 5. Following reballots, an additional 11 colleges joined Wednesday's action, having met the 50 percent threshold limit for a strike to take place.

Teaching staff at UK college hold three-day strike

Teaching staff at Salford City College, a further and higher education institute in northwest England began a three-day strike on Tuesday. The National Education Union (NEU) members are striking against the refusal of the college to implement a national pay agreement struck last year. The teachers have struck previously, with further dates to be announced. As well as the Salford City College site other sites involved in the dispute are Pendleton Sixth Form College and City Skills.

Health visitors in Lincolnshire, England, begin month-long strike

Around 70 health visitors in Lincolnshire, eastern England began a month-long strike on Monday. The Unite union members are protesting the loss of income since transferring from the National Health Service to Lincolnshire County Council in October 2017. According to Unite, the workers have lost around £2,000 a year since their employment was transferred.

Health visitors have already taken around 30 days of strike action and held protests in their campaign.

Further strike by museum and library staff in Bradford, England

Around 70 Bradford library and museum staff walked out again this week. On Monday, staff struck at Keighley library, on Tuesday at Shipley library and at Baildon library Wednesday. Workers at all 14 sites were to strike on Thursday and hold a demonstration outside Cartwright Hall Art Gallery.

The workers held a two-day strike beginning October 21. They also held a demonstration in the city centre, carrying a coffin effigy bearing the slogan "No cuts to culture."

The Unite regional organiser said he was realistic about job losses and that the union would accept voluntary redundancies.

Bradford council workers face a 65 percent budget cut over two years to 2020 amounting to £760,000—threatening the existence of prestigious sites such as Bradford Industrial Museum, Cartwright Hall Gallery and the Bolling Hall Museum. The ancient Bolling Hall building is registered in the Domesday Book.

While the Labour Party-run council is slashing spending on culture, it is spending £1.4 million on its application to be considered the City of Culture—an accolade that brings in investment from big business.

Strike by Spanish women football players hits matches

Eight matches due to have been played in the Spanish women's top football league were called off at the weekend due to a strike by the women players. Two games on Saturday and six on Sunday involving the teams at Atlético Madrid and Madrid CFF were cancelled. Around 200 players voted by a 93 percent majority in October to strike.

The players are demanding a minimum wage of €20,000 a year, improved conditions and maternity rights.

Irish airline staff lodge pay and conditions claim

Staff at the Irish airline Aer Lingus have lodged a demand for a pay rise, additional leave and enhanced flight concessions. The Siptu, Unite, Connect and Forsa union members are seeking a four percent pay rise from July 2020, followed by further four percent rises in July 2021 and July 2022. Negotiations between the unions and Aer Lingus are scheduled to begin soon.

Lebanese bank workers end strike

Lebanese bank workers ended their week-long strike on Monday and returned to work Tuesday. They were promised increased security measures. Bank staff have come under pressure as banks restricted people's access to money in the month-long protests against the Lebanese government.

South African airline workers strike over pay and jobs

Workers at state-owned South African Airlines (SAA) went on strike last week for a wage increase and job guarantees. The South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members are demanding an eight percent pay increase. SAA is offering 5.9 percent.

The unions met the Enterprise Minister on Tuesday who told them there was no money for a pay rise, saying the government had bailed out SAA over the last three years to the tune of R20.5 billion (\$1.4 million).

Negotiation by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration was boycotted by the SAA, who called on the courts to rule the strike illegal.

The workers are also seeking job guarantees for the next three years and an end to outsourcing contracts. SACCA said it would reduce its pay claim to 6 percent if the "corrupt" SAA board resigns. The unions claim the airline management have brought in untrained staff to scab on the five-day-old strike. There is a threat to 944 jobs under proposals to restructure the bankrupt airline.

The two unions said they are approaching workers in SA Express, Mango, SA Airlink and other airline employees to join them in secondary action. A third union, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, has refused to join the strike.

The strike affects around 3,000 of SAA's 5,146 employees.

South African bus workers in Tshwane continue strike

A strike by bus workers in Tshwane in the South African province of Gauteng began on Monday. The workers at the A Re Yeng Mamelodi Bus company are demanding equal pay and conditions for temporary and permanent staff.

Those on temporary contracts are paid R7,500 while permanent staff are on R11,000. They are also seeking a pay rise, not having had one since 2016.

The workers want to scrap a contract signed between management and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Unions. Instead they want a new contract signed with the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, the majority union. A picket line has been maintained at the Belle Ombre offices in Pretoria.

South African street cleaners in Port Elizabeth demonstrate over underpaid work

Around 40 street cleaners in Port Elizabeth, South Africa demonstrated outside Noninzi Luzipho building on November 15. They work for the Senzeni Cleaning Co-operative and are demanding wage arrears. The local authorities employed them on a trial basis for a month without pay and continue to underpay them by 75 percent.

A spokesperson for the Co-operative said they had cleaned 4,000 properties but the council only paid for 1,000. The cleaners are now taking go-slow action.

South African shop workers demonstrate for an equal pay increase

Shop workers picketed outside the Premjee cash and carry store in Louis Trichardt town, Limpopo province, South Africa on November 11, demanding a pay rise. The 40 were promised a pay increase in line with workers in the South African Commercial Catering Workers Union (SACCWU), who have a closed shop deal with the company.

The South African Retail and Allied Workers Union members are striking for the implementation of R400 a month pay raise agreed in April.

The majority union SACCWU which represents 78 percent of the retailer's workforce is satisfied with the agreement and is not supporting the strike.

Academics boycott Nigeria university work over unpaid wages

Academics at Nigeria's Ladoko Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) have begun a boycott of lectures and other academic activities. They have not had their wages for the last three months. They are threatening to walk out if the arrears are not paid.

Zimbabwe teachers solidarity action in school exam boycott

Teachers at Mosi oa Tunya high school at Victoria Falls, Matabeleland—one of Zimbabwe's largest schools—only worked Monday last week. They stayed away the rest of the week and refused to invigilate

history exams taking place. Eight classes each with 40 pupils were affected by action.

Teachers from other schools refused to invigilate the exams and it fell to head and deputy head teachers to do the invigilating.

Other teachers, doctors, nurses and most civil servants are carrying out similar stayaway forms of action as part of a campaign to have their salaries paid in US dollars.

With inflation running at between 350 and 500 percent, the spending power of wages paid in Zimbabwean dollars is being eroded.



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