

Historic strike vote by Bank of England staff; Kenyan doctors' union signs agreement to end dispute

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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### Bank of England staff vote to strike

Around 90 staff employed by the Bank of England (BoE) voted by a 95 percent majority to strike in a ballot organised by the Unite union. Maintenance and security staff are involved in the dispute at the bank's headquarters at Threadneedle Street in the city of London. They service parlours that make up the central offices of the bank which house BoE Governor Mark Carney.

They are opposed to the imposition of a 1 percent pay rise from March of this year. The pay rise is at the discretion of individual line managers who could decide to award less or none of the 1 percent pay increase.

The four-day strike is due to begin on July 31, with talks between the BoE and the Unite union continuing. If the strike goes ahead, it would be the first such strike on the main site of the BoE in its history. Strikes have occurred at other BoE sites.

### Greek garbage workers return to work

Around 1,000 garbage staff in the Greek capital, Athens, agreed to return to work on June 29. This ended their two-week action following a protest march through the city.

Employed on short-term contracts with no job security, they struck to demand permanent employment. The strike coincided with a 40-degree heat wave that exacerbated the health risk from the mounting piles of garbage on the streets.

They previously rejected Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' attempt to end the strike by offering to extend the current job contracts for several months, pending talks on permanent hiring.

### Strike by Greek archaeological sites staff

Staff employed to guard archaeological sites throughout Athens, including the Acropolis, were due to begin a three-hour strike at 8am Thursday. They are demanding overtime payment for working Sundays and national holidays and for the recruitment of an additional 200 guards as the service is currently understaffed.

### Walkout by Greek journalists

Greek journalists belonging to the ESIEA union walked off the job for six hours on Tuesday. The walkout coincided with a meeting of EDOEAP, the healthcare body providing health services to ESIEA members, along with other union bodies. EDOEAP is facing severe financial problems and could be wound up.

### Social work staff in northern English town walk out over workloads

Around 200 social workers employed by the Kirklees Council in the town of Huddersfield walked out on a 48-hour strike Wednesday.

Members of the Unison union, they work in the children's services department. They established picket lines at three sites within the council area.

No party has overall control of the council, but the Labour Party group has the largest number of seats.

At the beginning of the year social workers voted for strike action but this was called off by the union. The issues were the same as in the current dispute, namely heavy caseloads, lack of training, and claims of bullying by management. At that time, the Labour controlled council threatened to go to court to get the proposed strike declared illegal under the new Conservative government's anti-strike legislation. In the end, the council did not go ahead with the threat.

### UK: Further action by Arriva Rail North rail staff

Rail workers employed by Arriva Rail North are due to strike for three days beginning Saturday, affecting train services in the north of England. Staff employed by Merseyrail serving the Liverpool area are also striking for the three days and additionally on July 23.

Conductors at Southern Rail serving the southeast of England will hold a one-day strike on July 10. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. The strikes are over the issue of the increased use of driver-only operated trains in which the safety-critical role of guards, and eventually their jobs, will be abolished.

Workers at all three companies have held a series of strikes over the same issue going back for more than a year.

### Strike by refuse workers in Birmingham, UK

Refuse collectors employed by Labour controlled Birmingham City Council at four depots in the city are taking strike action. Following a 90 percent majority vote to strike, a five-hour stoppage was held June 30 followed by a two-hour stoppage on Monday. Further strikes are planned for July 11, 19, 27 and August 4.

The members of the Unite union are striking to oppose the council's restructuring plans, which would mean 122 redundancies, the introduction of a four-day week, and downgrading of over 100 workers with consequent cuts in pay.

### London hospital workers strike

Over 700 workers at the four hospitals making up the Barts Trust group of hospitals went ahead with their planned three-day strike on Tuesday. The private contractor Serco employs the staff as cleaners, porters and security staff.

Unite members voted by a 99 percent margin in favour of the strike to fight for a 30p an hour pay increase. On Tuesday, the strikers held a

march and rally at the Royal London hospital.

Further proposed strikes include a seven-day strike beginning July 11 and a two-week strike starting on July 25.

#### **Further strike by London cinema staff**

Cinema staff employed by Picturehouse at four sites in London—the Ritzy in Brixton, Hackney Picturehouse, Picturehouse Central and East Dulwich Picturehouse—are set to begin a strike at 3pm today. The BECTU media union members have been taking part in a long-running dispute for the cinema staff to be paid the London living wage.

Three BECTU reps who had worked at the Ritzy cinema were sacked on June 14. They are due to appear at an Employment Tribunal on July 10 to appeal against their dismissal.

#### **Hungarian Tesco supermarket workers protest**

Tesco staff in Hungary are planning a demonstration tomorrow in Budapest to highlight the low wages in the retail sector. They complain that this had led to understaffing and additional pressure on existing staff. The demonstration has been called by KASZ, the Commercial Employees union.

Further demonstrations and strikes are being considered if employers do not respond to the grievances.

#### **Portuguese nurses continue protest**

Portuguese specialist nursing staff in maternity and obstetrics departments are continuing their protest by carrying out only basic nursing duties at work. Hospitals in Lisbon and other areas were badly affected by the action on Tuesday nearly coming to a standstill.

They are demanding additional payments in recognition of their specialist skills, saying they are prepared to protest indefinitely.

#### **Strike by Serbian autoworkers**

Workers at the Fiat Chrysler factory in Kragujevac in Serbia began an all out strike on June 27. The strike follows two one-hour warning strikes. Their four main demands are for a 12 percent pay rise, help with travel costs to work, payment of previously agreed bonuses and for extra staff to be employed to alleviate the workload.

#### **Union ends struggle of Spanish dockers**

The UGT Estiba union representing around 6,000 dockers in Spain has agreed to end a series of strikes. They had been holding alternate hourly strikes over a 48-hour period in opposition to the Spanish government's deregulation of their jobs in line with a European Union ruling.

Under the agreement between the union and ANESCO—the body representing employers—dockers will maintain their existing working conditions for a three-year period. However, their pay will be cut by 10 percent and older workers will be offered early retirement to cut workforce numbers.

#### **Street vendor protest in Tunisia**

On Monday, around 300 street vendors held a protest outside the headquarters of the Tunisian General Union of Labour in the country's capital, Tunis. They were protesting a crackdown on street vendors aimed at driving them off the streets. The police attacked the demonstration leading to the arrest of 47 street vendors.

The government began a campaign in 2011 against the proliferation of street vendors. For many Tunisians street vending offers the only means, albeit precarious, of trying to escape widespread poverty and unemployment.

#### **Kenyan government signs Collective Bargaining Agreement to end doctors' strike**

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) has ended its pay and conditions dispute. The union and the government, with the support of the Salaries Commission, signed up to the new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) on June 30.

The Council of Governors that distributes the doctors' wages has not yet signed the agreement. The strike was officially brought to an end in March after 100 days, however the previous 2013-17 CBA was never implemented.

The 26,000 members of Kenya's National Union of Nurses have been compelled to return to striking in an attempt to get their CBA, agreed in December, enacted.

#### **Kenyan university and college staff continue strike**

Kenyan university staff are back out on strike to demand the government implement a Central Bargaining Agreement (CBA) signed in March. Prior to March, the lecturers had been on strike for 54 days.

A national strike will affect half a million students in 36 public universities and their college constituents. An expected pay increase should have taken place on June 30 as agreed. When the university staff discovered it had not gone into their accounts, they immediately came out on strike.

The four university unions, led by Kenyan University Staff Union, are under pressure from their members, who are demanding that staff should stay out indefinitely until their CBA is implemented.

#### **Kenyan shop workers demand payment of their wages**

Shop workers employed at the Kenyan national market chain UCHUMI are striking and demonstrated across the country over unpaid wages.

The company has also failed to pay money it owes into pensions and medical coverage, which are deducted from workers' salaries and then paid out by the company on workers' behalf.

The company claims it is operating in the red, but has undertaken to pay outstanding wages at different stages in July if suppliers forgo payment for their products until workers' wages have been paid. The deal is on the proviso that strikers return to work immediately.

#### **Namibian Shoprite workers demand an end to victimisations and sackings**

Demonstrations have taken place outside the Katutura branch of Shoprite Stores to protest victimisations and sackings. The demonstrators are protesting the charging of 130 striking staff in 2015 and the sacking of 170 others over the last two years at other branches.

The industrial action leading to dismissals and victimisation of Shoprite workers was provoked by the company's illegal working conditions. An investigation into conditions of Shoprite workers was conducted by Namibia's Ministry of Labour resulting in much criticism of the company's practices, with recommendations that their employment contracts be renewed.

#### **Cross State River Nigerian workers strike called off**

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) has called off an indefinite strike in Cross River State. The NLC and TUC called off the action as the many thousands of local government workers and judicial staff were joining in.

The unions reluctantly called a strike in May for the implementation of the public sector workers' demands. This was called off and then a second strike beginning June 20 has now been called off.

A 12-point plan has been accepted by the unions, including the demand for retired workers to be paid their pensions and "deserving" workers given promotions with appropriate wage increases.

#### **Nigerian aviation union threatens strike over management**

## **promotions**

Employees of Nigeria's National Civil Aviation Authority have given their employers a week's notice before commencing a strike. Members of the National Union of Air Transport Employees are demanding that earned promotions are put into operation or a strike will be undertaken from the weekend.

The threatened strike is in support of promotions for Assistant General Managers and District General Managers. The union claims many members have passed exams qualifying them for promotions going back to 2008. Those that did qualify in 2008 should have had advanced before 2011.

The union complains that only a small number of qualified employees have gained those promotions whereas workers from agencies and other unqualified persons have made it up the ladder.

## **Illovo Sugar Company South Africa strike threat escalates**

Workers at the Illovo Sugar Company are continuing to threaten a strike over a wage claim. Although union and management have made concessions on the wage claim, with the Food and Allied Workers Union reducing its claim from 10 to 8 percent, and management upping its offer from 5 to 6.5 percent, a strike is still in the offing.

The union said management were approaching employees in private offering them the 6.5 percent pay increase. The union, more concerned that the backdoor proposal undermined its position, than by the lesser wage offer, proposed a new strike date to commence July 5.

## **South African Mortuary workers return to work**

South African mortuary workers were expected to return to work last Friday as the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) settled the dispute.

Military medics, in place to break the strike, continued to operate on Monday, as workers had not turned up for work. The three-week strike broke out over trainee workers carrying out the work of morticians without appropriate training or pay.

The union claimed the workers' demands had been partly satisfied while others would be seen as long-term goals. Trainee workers would continue to carry out work that they are not paid for or qualified to do, but under supervision.

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