

Icelandair cabin crew reject contract, threatened with sacking; Israel's nurses, social workers strike; Zimbabwe nurses' strike continues

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Icelandair threatens to fire all cabin crew

Last week, Icelandair announced it was firing all its cabin crew and would instead deploy pilots not required for flying. The move followed a 73 percent rejection of a new contract.

This was the second contract agreed by the company and the FFÍ trade union that cabin crew rejected. FFÍ agreed a five-year agreement "increasing productivity and flexibility." Icelandair had already made similar deals with the pilots' and engineers' unions. The company said that "a mutually agreed conclusion will not be reached" and began looking to recruit new staff.

After the talks, 38 cabin crew were laid off, on top of the 900 laid off in May as a result of the pandemic.

FFÍ chairperson Guðlaug Líney Jóhannsdóttir said the union were in "the precarious position" of preparing for an immediate strike. She requested a meeting at the State Mediation Office, where a new contract was drawn up. Jóhannsdóttir said the disputed provisions had now been negotiated, and the union are presenting the third contract to members this week.

Union calls off Iceland ferry strike

A third scheduled three-day strike by Icelandic seafarers working on ferries to the Westman Islands has been called off. The Seamen's Union of Iceland members are in wage negotiations with operator Herjólfur ohf.

The company and the union agreed a negotiation schedule and expect to sign a new contract by August 17. Jónas Garðarsson of the Seamen's Union said he would have liked more progress, but the union did not want the responsibility for the impact of a strike on tourism to the islands.

Debenhams workers protest in Ireland against redundancy terms

Former workers at the UK-based department store Debenhams have protested outside the Bank of Ireland in Dublin.

They are appealing to the government to make the bank, which has shares in the company, contribute to better redundancy terms. They say the package offered when the company was liquidated in April was unfair. They will receive statutory redundancy of two weeks' salary per year of service. They are demanding four weeks' pay per service year.

On Saturday, the workers marked the 100th day of their dispute over redundancy terms with a series of protests across the country.

UK London borough refuse workers to strike over living wage

More than 150 UK refuse workers in the London Borough of Bexley are to take five days of strike action over pay. The workers are employed by

contractor Serco in Crayford.

The Unite union members are paid £10.15 an hour and are demanding a raise to a minimum of £13, in line with workers in Greenwich. They are also complaining of bullying at the depot.

They will strike July 30 and 31, and August 3, 4, and 6, between 5 a.m. and 9 a.m.

The workers took one and a half days of strike action in March, before the pandemic, but the union called off further action because of coronavirus. Serco then failed to properly pay 30 workers sick pay due for COVID-19-related absences.

Serco has also been criticised by the Health and Safety Executive over the social distancing measures in place at the depot.

Staff at Scotland's Edinburgh Napier University to be balloted for strike action

Non-academic staff are being balloted for strike action after Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland moved to make at least 60 compulsory redundancies. Balloting closes August 16, meaning that strikes could take place in time for freshers' week and the first week of teaching.

The UNISON public sector union, however, wants to pause the process until the student recruitment income is known, and open "a genuine voluntary severance scheme in the meantime." UNISON organiser Lorcan Mullen said he hoped the ballot would "focus minds" on adopting the union's "very reasonable counter proposal."

UNISON is also appealing to Richard Lochhead, Scotland's minister for higher and further education, to intervene on the basis of Holyrood's Fair Work standards.

UK's Drax Power Station workers reject redundancy proposals

UK workers at Drax Power Station in North Yorkshire rejected management's latest redundancy offer by 84 percent. The Unite union members could soon be balloted for strike action over the 206 proposed redundancies, one-third of the workforce, when the company goes coal-free next April.

The union claims last year's pay deal agreed there would be no compulsory redundancies. Drax pointed to previous joint statements with the union agreeing to reduce numbers wherever possible. Unite regional officer Shane Sweeting said the union had offered "a pay and bonus freeze to improve redundancy terms and maintain jobs."

Members of the other unions on site, GMB and Prospect, accepted the terms.

Doctors strike across Spain

Doctors in Valencia, Spain have gone on indefinite strike over contracts and salaries.

The MIR union members are unhappy at the time off after long weekend and bank holiday shifts and call for a maximum working week of 37.5 hours. They are also demanding a pay rise, as doctors in Valencia are paid less than in other regions.

Elsewhere, medical interns in Madrid have protested over conditions for the second consecutive Monday. Some 2,000 interns demand recognition of their role during the coronavirus pandemic and are seeking changes to their current working conditions, including rent subsidies, paid transport, training payments, and not having salary dependent on 24-hour shifts.

Union puts deal for job losses and pay cut to BA pilots

UK pilots' union BALPA has struck a deal with British Airways (BA) that would see at least 270 jobs lost and pilots taking pay cuts of up to 20 percent. BA was looking to lay off 12,000 workers, including 1,255 pilots, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Last week, it began implementing a "fire and rehire" policy with cabin crew. BALPA have been in negotiation for three months. Brian Strutton, general secretary, said the union had advanced a "full package of mitigations ... which would have avoided any job losses at all, and at no cost to BA." This pledge of wage cuts was not enough for BA, who have thanked BALPA for their "hard work and tireless effort."

The deal involves voluntary redundancies, part-time working and a "holding pool" of pilots on reduced wages who will be re-employed should demand resume. "Holding pool" wages will be funded by wage cuts for retained pilots, from an initial 20 percent cut narrowing to 8 percent below present rates in two years. BALPA called the deal "hugely disappointing," saying it was a matter of "huge regret" that it would entail compulsory redundancies. BALPA is encouraging pilots to accept what it calls "the best package ... to save as many jobs as possible." The ballot closes next Thursday.

Israeli nurses' stoppage over staff shortages

Israeli nurses came out on strike July 20, over coronavirus conditions and staff shortages. A meeting between the National Association of Nurses and the Finance and Health ministries failed to reach any agreement.

There is a critical nursing shortage, estimated at as many as 1,000 nurses. Israel has one of the lowest nursing ratios in the developed world—five per 1,000 citizens, against an average of nine per 1,000.

The National Association of Nurses is demanding the allocation of more staff to hospitals, clinics and other medical facilities. It is threatening a general strike if this does not happen.

The Association complains that hospitals have purchased ventilators without providing additional training for nurses, opened coronavirus wards without adding nurses, and failed to increase staffing levels to deal with the pandemic.

It is reported that 813 nurses are in quarantine over coronavirus.

Last summer, nurses walked out against poor working conditions, heavy caseloads and low standards of care.

The present strike is part of a growing wave of anger at the government's response to the pandemic crisis, with water cannon being deployed against protesters at the weekend.

The union agreed to end the strike when the Finance Ministry offered 2,000 temporary nursing positions and 400 doctors' positions, as well as additional security personnel. They will form a team to agree permanent staffing numbers within a month. A decision had yet to be reached on salaries for nurses required to quarantine after being exposed to the virus.

Israeli social workers' strike continues

Israeli social workers are continuing their indefinite strike after negotiations failed to reach a deal over workload, pay and conditions. The Histadrut labour federation warned that other public sector workers could join them if the situation continues.

The government's latest salary offer was described as being only a few hundred shekels per month. Inbal Hermoni of the Israeli Union of Social Workers said, "We've been demanding change for 10 years. We are currently being offered a meagre salary increase and a protection programme that will expire in June 2021."

The Finance Ministry say they can make no permanent offers because of the pandemic.

Social workers have long complained of unreasonable workloads, low wages, and the constant danger of violence. Last year, 83 percent of social workers reported violence at work, 30 percent suffered physical violence and 30 percent experienced threats to their lives or their children's lives. On Sunday, protesters hung 300 files on a fence outside the prime minister's office to highlight each social worker's required case load. Around 1,000 open positions remain unfilled because of the conditions.

Zimbabwe nurses continue fight for a living wage

Nurses in Zimbabwe are continuing their strike begun July 4 for improved pay and better working conditions. Previously, demonstrating nurses had been charged by police with batons and then arrested for being at a gathering without wearing masks. One of their demands is for personal protective equipment against COVID-19.

The Zimbabwe Nurses Association members are now demanding to be paid in US dollars so their wages can keep up with inflation, currently running at 737 percent. The nurses also have to contend with low morale in hospitals, saying that they "can only provide care to the sick if they are, themselves, mentally and financially stable."

Zimbabwe has 1,478 reported cases of COVID-19 and 25 deaths.

Nigerian Human Rights Commission workers denied legal right to strike

A planned stoppage by workers at the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), has been declared illegal by a court in the capital city, Abuja. On July 15, the NHRC applied to the National Industrial Court to stop staff going on indefinite strike in their fight to receive the minimum wage and a backdate from when it should have been implemented a year ago.

The workers have also been barred from picketing, gathering in protest or even holding public meetings.

Nigerian health workers in Akwa Ibon threatened with sackings and prosecution if they continue strike

The state government in the Nigerian state of Akwa Ibon has threatened to sack health workers if they do not return to work.

The Joint Health Workers Union members walked out indefinitely for improved pay and conditions on July 14 but have been told it is unlawful for health workers to strike during the pandemic. They have also been threatened with arrest and prosecution if they picket workplaces.

Nigeria has 37,225 reported cases of COVID-19 and 801 deaths.

Nigerian municipal workers to strike over pay

On Monday, municipal workers in Ekiti state, Nigeria, gave a 14-day warning to the state government they would strike over non-payment of salary. Joint union organisation members, including teachers, health workers and civil servants, threatened an initial three-day strike on August 3 unless they receive payments for salary arrears, leave, bonuses, allowances and deductions not paid over a period of almost five years.

Fellow municipal workers in Niger state also gave notice of a three-day strike, in this case because the state administration is only paying workers

70 percent of their salary, blaming a shortfall of money allocated from central government.

Striking Nigerian doctors replaced with volunteers

The government of Ogun state in Nigeria on Monday replaced striking doctors at a COVID-19 isolation centre with volunteer doctors.

Association of Resident Doctors members, including resident doctors, medical officers and house officers, have been on indefinite strike in the state since July 1, over poor pay and conditions. On July 15, the isolation centre doctors joined the industrial action in protest at the government's refusal to respond to their demands.

South African police attack protesting care workers

Police in Eastern Cape, South Africa, assaulted protesting community care workers with rubber bullets and stun grenades when they refused to leave the offices of the provincial health department.

The workers started their protests for permanent employment on July 16. The next day, over 200 workers gathered, refusing to leave until they were given a promised meeting with the health department's superintendent-general. The police used violence to evacuate and disperse the protesters, several of whom were injured, one sustaining a broken arm. The workers have vowed to continue their struggle.

South African workers arrested after pay demand

Dozens of unemployed labourers protested outside the magistrates' offices in Stellenbosch, Eastern Cape, South Africa on July 10, in support of 40 fellow workers who were arrested when they went to the employer's premises demanding to be paid.

The imprisoned workers were previously dismissed after going on strike to demand better working conditions. They were then arrested when they asked the employer, Langverwacht Landscaping, to pay them money due from the COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) relief scheme, which the company had claimed from the government.

Many of the workers were not paid for months, while the employer, blaming cash flow problems due to delays in the UIF payments, was at the same time taking on new staff.

Workers are now desperate to receive their UIF money to support themselves while unemployed.

South Africa has 394,948 reported cases of COVID-19 and 5,940 deaths.

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