

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

6 July 2012

London bus drivers' strike suspended by union

A strike by bus drivers over Olympic Games bonuses was suspended Wednesday, the day before it was due to begin.

Union officials are reportedly considering a new management offer.

Bus companies have offered a meagre bonus of £583 to drivers working 24 of the 29 days that the multi-billion-pound Olympic Games are on, or £700 for drivers in busy garages.

Bus workers went on strike last month and a further strike day is planned on July 24, days before the Games begin.

Around 4,000 London bus drivers are to be balloted again after a high court injunction prevented staff at three operators—London General, Arriva the Shires, and Metroline—taking industrial action over Olympic Games bonuses on June 22.

Sheffield UK recycling workers suspend strike

Workers at five recycling centres in Sheffield have voted to suspend their industrial action.

The recycling workers began industrial action in May, but walked out indefinitely last week in protest at planned changes to the business hours at centres. This threatened seven redundancies and cuts in conditions. Sheffield City Council plans to save around £500,000 by reducing the business hours of the five recycling depots.

On top of payments made by the city council, huge profits are made by the contracted company, Veolia Environmental Services, and its subcontractor, SOVA Recycling Ltd, through the recycling of such articles as electrical equipment, scrap, paper and cardboard.

A spokesman for the GMB union claimed sacked workers would be reinstated and a new bonus scheme implemented. GMB spokesman Pete Davies said, "We've suspended our action with a view to calling it off completely if these talks we were promised go ahead."

He said he expected recycling centres to be "back to normal" on Monday.

Last week, Sheffield City Council announced that it is to change its bin collection frequency from weekly to fortnightly from next month. The declared aim is to save £2.5 million a year. This will lead to an estimated minimum of 42 job losses.

Norwegian offshore oil sector workers' pension strike to continue

A strike by Norwegian offshore oil sector workers is set to continue after the failure of a second round of talks. As well as pensions, the dispute concerns workers' demands over wage increases, better overtime pay and the right to retire at 62.

The strike has delayed crude shipments from the world's eighth-largest exporter. It has cut Norway's oil production by around 13 percent. Oil prices increased this week to over \$100 per barrel.

According to Reuters on Wednesday, traders said Norwegian state-controlled oil firm Statoil had asked other owners of cargoes with the key Oseberg crude grade to defer further shipments, "potentially giving further impetus to global oil prices."

In addition to oil shipments, Norwegian gas output has been cut by around 4 percent, but gas exports to Europe have remained largely unaffected.

Wage talks broke down June 24, after the OLF refused to negotiate an early retirement scheme for the 7,000 workforce.

The strike has shut five Statoil-operated oil and gas fields on the Norwegian continental shelf, including the Oseberg and Heidrun fields. Oseberg is part of the North Sea Brent oil benchmark and is used as the basis for many of the world's trades.

Bulgaria's largest military plant could face strike

Workers and employees at VMZ Sopot, Bulgaria's largest defence industry plant, have started preparations for holding a strike over delayed salaries, according to novinite.com—the Sofia News Agency.

Members of the Podkrepa (Support) Labor Confederation at the state-owned VMZ Sopot, in Central Bulgaria, "further insist on faster privatization of the company, transparent company finances, and initiative in procuring orders, in addition to a timetable for receiving their delayed payments."

The employees of VMZ have not received their payments on time in the past 18 months. The VMZ Sopot plant employs 3,700 workers.

VMZ Sopot produces anti-tank guided and unguided missiles, aviation unguided missiles, artillery ammunition and fuses. It manufactures civilian products such as diamond tools, abrasive discs and grinding wheels, gas cylinders, food industry equipment, and household appliances.

In 2007, Bulgaria's Privatization Agency started to sell some of the plant's assets in order to cover part of its debts. Further company assets were also sold at the beginning of 2009.

Aden University staff continue pay strike

Administrative staff at Aden University, in Yemen, continued their strike for a second week. They closed the University Presidency Gate in protest against salaries that are lower than their colleagues at Sana'a University.

"The strikers also demanded the official hiring of almost 200 workers who have been working on contracts; this also occurs with employees at Sana'a University," reported the *Yemen Times*, Monday.

Lutfi Bakhwar, the general secretary of the Aden University Employees Union, said the strike and the closing of the University presidency would continue until the issues were addressed.

Yemeni security guards go on strike over work hours and pay

Security guards at the Al-Sharq Masood Security Company, who guard the Liquid Natural Gas Company's (LNG) facilities in Balhaf, Shabwa, announced a strike over work hours and pay for an hour per day starting on Friday, June 22.

The guards threatened to increase their strike to three hours on Sunday because the security company didn't pay attention to their demands three months ago, according to Saleh Al-Madhaji, head of the company laborers' union.

The Al-Sharq Masood Security Company workers' union in Balhaf issued the escalating strike plans. The liquid gas project in Balhaf is the largest gas project the Yemeni government operates. It exports gas to the world market from the harbour.

Lebanese civil servants strike to demand wage increase

Civil servants staged a three-hour strike Tuesday to urge the cabinet to approve a wage increase for public workers.

The strike was called by the Unions' Coordination Committee. It included employees of the Economy Ministry, the Culture Ministry and the Central Inspection Department.

Civil servants in the east's Baalbek and Hermel, Mount Lebanon's Aley, the north's Akkar, Bsharri, Koura and Mina-Tripoli, and the south's Nabatieh stopped working for several hours. In some towns and cities, the strikers held sit-ins.

Strike at Ain Sokhna Port, managers detained

Workers at the Ain Sokhna port detained six managers in their efforts to win a dispute over payment of shares in the company.

Last week 600 workers staged a demonstration against the company's failure to adequately distribute 2011 profits, reported the *Daily News Egypt*. Members of the port workers' syndicate told reporters that workers were told "they would not be able to expect this crucial part of their salaries before September."

Dubai Ports World (DP), with more than 60 ports worldwide, had promised disbursement of the shares in April.

In February, workers staged a similar protest demanding an increase in profit shares. The standoff hit critical port operations, costing DP an estimated LE50 million before an agreement was reached with the company.

Ghana university administrators strike continues

The ongoing strike by the Ghana Association of University

Administrators (GAUA), including accountants and finance officers, has disrupted the payment of wages to other university staff. The GAUA members have been on strike since June following a previous strike in May in support of a pay claim.

Namibian construction workers strike

Around 100 construction workers, members of the Namibia Metal and Allied Workers Union (MANWU) employed on building work at the Okahandja Military Academy have gone on strike.

They work for the Chinese-owned Jiangsu Zhengati. Amongst their demands are for a minimum of N\$11.50 (\$1.40) an hour, overtime payment for weekend work, compensation for injuries and other benefits. According to MANWU secretary general, the company had not registered its employees for social security or workmen's compensation in spite of being told to do so back in February.

Kenyan teachers give notice to strike

Teachers organised in the Kenya Union of Teachers will issue a seven-day notice of strike action following an upcoming National Executive Council meeting. They are demanding the government implement the proposals of the 1997 Teachers Service Remuneration Committee which had agreed teachers' salaries would be reviewed every three years and allowances updated. They are also protesting a government plan to employ only a further 10,000 new teachers. The union says 40,000 are needed to meet the countrywide shortfall in teacher numbers.

Nigeria: Ongoing strike by call centre staff

The strike by workers at the MTN call centre in the Plateau state capital of Jos has now entered its third month. MTN is a leading African mobile phone network provider. The Jos centre is run by a subcontractor, Communications Support Service Limited (CNSSL).

Their demands are for pay parity with MTN workers at centres in Kano, Lagos, Kaduna and Port Harcourt. They are also demanding a N11,550 (\$71) payment for overnight work, and a N6,000 (\$37) credit monthly allowance for MTN network phone calls.

The intervention of the Plateau House of Assembly and the Plateau Chapter of the Nigerian Labour Congress has failed to resolve the dispute. They are also demanding the re-instatement of 18 call centre staff sacked by CNSSL.

Nigeria Labour Congress gives strike notice over minimum wage demand

Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) members in the north-western state of Kebbi gave notice this week of their intention to begin an indefinite strike Wednesday July 11, to demand Kebbi state government fully implement the N18, 000 (\$111) minimum wage passed into law by central

government.

South African forest workers strike

Around 1,500 workers employed by Komatiland Forests went on strike Tuesday in pursuit of a 15 percent pay increase. Komatiland's final offer was for 8 percent. Komatiland owns 18 forestry plantations in three provinces and produces timber and other forestry products.

The forestry workers, members of the Food and Allied Workers' Union, are demanding an increase in night shift and other allowances together with the pay increase backdating to April 1.



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