

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 October 2016

## Norwegian oil and gas workers strike, threaten walkout

Members of the Norwegian Union of Industry and Energy Workers began a weeklong strike September 21 to oppose layoffs in the industry.

Workers employed by Schlumberger Norge AS, Baker Hughes Norge AS, Halliburton AS, Oceaneering AS and Oceaneering Asset Integrity AS, downed tools.

On September 28, the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association said, “Companies affected by strike action no longer have work for all their employees after shutting down jobs on offshore installations. It added that the strike “has had major consequences for drilling and well operations on the Norwegian continental shelf.”

As the strike proceeded, more workers were laid off. At Baker Hughes, Schlumberger and Halliburton, 350 people employees were laid off.

In a separate dispute over wages, over 300 Norwegian onshore plant workers at the Royal Dutch Shell Nyhamna facility are threatening to walk out. The Nyhamna facility pipes natural gas to the UK and is responsible for around 20 percent of UK consumption.

Other locations that could be hit are Statoil’s ASA liquefied natural gas plant at Melkøya and the Exxon Mobil refinery at Slagen. The union and the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association, which represents oil employers, were due to hold talks yesterday. A midnight deadline was set for the talks.

## Strike threat by Belgian finance staff

The Dutch-owned multinational and financial services group, ING, has announced it will cut its workforce across Europe by around 7,000, as it seeks to secure savings of some £1 billion by 2021.

It aims to cut the number of branches and concentrate more of its activities online. The brunt of the job cuts will be in Belgium with around 3,100 redundancies, followed by the Netherlands where 2,300 are slated to go. ING said more than 50 percent of the job losses would be through compulsory redundancies.

Speaking to the *Guardian* newspaper, the leader of the Belgian Christian trade union body, Herman Vanderhaegen, threatened an October 7 strike of its members in opposition to the plans. But on Thursday, Vanderhaegen tweeted, “there will no general national strike tomorrow, but there could be local actions in some companies.”

## UK rail staff employed by Virgin Trains hold one-day action

Virgin East Coast railway workers struck for 24 hours on Monday. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT). The workers are opposing plans by Virgin Trains to cut operating costs, which could lead to the loss of around 200 jobs. A previous planned strike was called off by the RMT.

## Refuse collectors in Sheffield strike

Refuse workers in, Sheffield, England began a 24-hour strike at 6 a.m. Wednesday. They are members of the GMB trade union.

The collectors work for the French-owned multinational company Veolia, which is contracted by Sheffield city council to provide collection of domestic waste in the city. The strike affected bin collections in the Mosborough, Halfway, Southey Green, Foxhill and S6 areas of the city.

Staff have been pushing for a pay rise since the beginning of the year. Initially the union put in a claim for a 5 percent rise but this was reduced to a 2 percent pay rise this year. The company has offered a 1.5 percent rise over two years. The government conciliation service ACAS has been involved in previous efforts to resolve the issue.

## Mental health support staff in Bradford, UK walk out

Mental health support staff in the UK city of Bradford held a two-hour strike Wednesday to protest revisions to their shift changes. The 39 staff offer support to people with mental health problems in Bradford. They are members of the public-sector union, Unison.

They were originally employed by Bradford City Council but were transferred to a company called Creative Support. The workers say that under the shift change proposals, they could be called in to work at any time between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m. and have to be available seven days a week. They argue this would cut across home care responsibilities.

## UK betting shop management staff hold one-day protest

Managers and deputy managers employed by the UK betting shop chain, William Hill, held protests outside the chain’s shops on Friday. They are members of the Unite union.

They are protesting plans to replace their roles with a so-called “customer experience manager”, who will be paid around £6,000 a year less than the manager/deputy manager role.

carried out by the Syriza-led government.

### **Irish oncology nurses continue work-to-rule**

Twenty-one oncology nurses at Cork University Hospital in the south west of Ireland are continuing their work-to-rule action. They have banned clerical and support duties but continue offering care to their patients.

The nurses, members of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organization, working at the hospital's Oncology/Radiotherapy unit have taken the action over concerns about staffing levels at the 27-bed unit.

The nurses have agreed to return to the Work and Relations Commission (WRC) for further talks. The union had been involved in previous discussions, brokered by the WRC, who recommended an additional seven staff be taken on at the unit. No staff have yet been added.

### **Irish police college cleaning staff in dispute**

Cleaning staff at the Garda College in Templemore, Ireland, began a work-to-rule on Monday. The work-to-rule will mean staff just carrying out cleaning duties but refusing to do housekeeping or perform hotel services.

The female workers are members of the IMPACT trade union. They are protesting that they are paid only the lowest legal wage and are the lowest paid Irish civil servants.

A previously planned work-to-rule in September was suspended for talks to take place under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission. IMPACT said it may launch an equal pay case as male staff doing similar roles are paid more than the Garda College cleaners.

### **Sickout by German airline staff leads to flight cancellations**

Cabin and cockpit staff working for German airline, Tuifly, have been reporting in sick in large numbers this week. The staff are concerned that plans to partially merge Air Berlin with Tuifly could lead to the loss of around 1,200 jobs.

On Wednesday, the absence of workers led to the cancellation of over 55 Air Berlin and Tuifly scheduled flights. Tuifly provides staff and airplanes to Air Berlin.

### **All-out strike by Greek air traffic controllers announced**

Air traffic control staff in Greece are due to begin a series of 24-hour strikes beginning Sunday that will carry through to October 13. The strike, if it goes ahead, will lead to the cancellation of all flights into and out of the country.

On Tuesday, the Air Traffic Control (ATC) union announced their intention to strike. This was timed to coincide with the introduction of a bill in the Greek parliament that seeks to change the terms and conditions of air traffic controllers. The changes are being enforced at the behest of the European Union and International Monetary Fund as part of the Third Memorandum austerity programme. The austerity programme is being

### **Israeli natural gas workers dispute continues**

The international trade union federation, IndustriALL Global Union, is calling on the Israeli owned Israel Natural Gas Lines (INGL) company to begin negotiations with the Israeli labour federation, Histadrut.

INGL has been attacking the working conditions of its employees, including imposing a pay freeze and cancelling travel time. It is also seeking to outsource more roles such as gas technicians and electricians.

The dispute has been ongoing for four months. On September 22, workers blockaded the entrance to the Sodom station after management changed the locks.

### **United Nations staff in Palestine announce strike**

On Wednesday, the union representing staff working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees announced it would hold a one-day strike in Gaza.

The UNRWA staff are protesting cutbacks in services and accuses the authority of failing to fill around 450 vacancies. The strike will affect all UNRWA facilities apart from schools and health facilities.

### **South African miners wildcat strike**

South Africa's Sibanye mining company is planning to close its Cooke operations with the loss of 1,700 employees' jobs, plus those of contractors. A wildcat strike took place on Tuesday, though the union organised a return to work Wednesday.

Employees at the company are represented by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) and the National Union of Miners (NUM).

On Tuesday, the NUM organised a demonstration in response to the closure threat. The union appealed to the government to take Sibanye's Cooke mining licence from them and pass it on to a new employer.

A company spokesman implied the strike was a result of a dispute between the NUM and AMCU over a union verification process.

Sibanye was formed in 2013 and has become the largest gold producer in South Africa. The Cooke mine was bought by Sibanye to recover gold and uranium deposits. The mine is now being closed due to "underperformance."

The company has a highly profitable gold and platinum mining operation and is expanding its stock by acquiring Aquarius Platinum and Anglo American's Rustenburg platinum mine.

### **South African bus workers threaten to extend dispute**

Bus workers are threatening to strike at several towns on the Garden Route, a popular tourist destination on the Indian Ocean in South Africa.

Workers took what management deemed illegal strike action in mid-

September over what they describe as an unfair distribution of routes. Aggrieved workers are complaining that managers are receiving preferential treatment.

The South African Municipal Workers Union has approached the Bargaining Council to declare a dispute, threatening to bring out workers in 12 towns along the route.

### **South African University staff continues strike**

Members of South Africa's National Education Health and Allied Workers Union are continuing their strike at the University of Zululand. Education workers at the university have been on strike for nine weeks.

They are seeking a wage increase, with pay progression, contract work done in-house, and temporary staff brought onto the books, among other demands. The pickets inside the university were moved away under a court order acquired by management.

Management is also demanding any staff wishing to enter the premises must rescind their union membership.

### **Nigerian teachers demand payment of wages arrears**

Teachers in Bayelsa state, Nigeria are continuing their strike that began in September. Primary and secondary school teachers in the public sector have stayed away from work since the new school term began last month.

Teachers are demanding the payment of seven months outstanding wages. The decision to strike was taken when the government did not deliver on a promise made in May to pay half the owed salary when resources became available. Among the 36 Nigerian states, 27 owe a backlog of wages to their teachers.

### **Ghana workers protest over continued employment of manager**

On Monday, Electricity Company of Ghana employees protested after the managing director continued to be employed, despite reaching his 60th birthday.

Workers at the company recently took strike action to oppose privatization at the company and hold the managing director responsible. Retirement age in Ghana is 60 and the managing director is reported to have secured a one-year extension.

The Ghana Web news site reported that demonstrators held placards saying, "You have finished serving your term", "What do you have to show for during your tenure", "MD, leave the scene for others to come", "You betrayed our trust". Police intervened and tried to arrest the protest organiser.



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