

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## 2,000 miners strike at Barberton Mines in South Africa

21 April 2017

### Strike by cinema staff in UK capital

Staff at five London cinemas, belonging to the Picturehouse group, held a 24-hour strike on Easter Saturday. Staff at the Ritzy cinema have been taking action since the summer of 2014. For staff at East Dulwich, it was their first strike. Saturday's strike brought the total number of strikes at the Picturehouse group to 40 over the past half-year.

The workers are members of the media and entertainment trade union BECTU. They are demanding to be paid the London living wage of £9.75, and are currently paid between £9.05 and £9.10 an hour. Their other demands are for sick pay for all staff, maternity pay and pay rises for managerial staff and technicians.

Cineworld Cinemas, which owns Picturehouse, made more than £80 million in profits in 2015. Prior to the strike, Picturehouse recruited and trained a scab labour force to cover the posts of striking staff at the cinemas. A campaign calling for a boycott of the cinema chain has been supported by a host of celebrities, including Sir Patrick Stewart, Ricky Tomlinson, Michael Palin and Irvine Welsh.

### Arriva Rail North staff to strike

Conductors working for Arriva Rail North will hold a 24-hour strike on April 28 over the company's plans to extend the use of driver-only-operated (DOO) trains. DOO is unsafe and aimed at downgrading the role of the onboard conductor.

Some 6,000 conductors jobs are threatened, with rail companies nationwide seeking to impose DOO and expand it where it already exists. The conductors are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT). In talks between Arriva Rail North and the RMT, the parties have been unable to reach agreement.

On the same day, rail staff working for Virgin East Coast, whose services include the Edinburgh-to-London route, will begin a 48-hour strike. Virgin East Coast intends to terminate the safety-critical role of the newly created train managers.

### Strike threat by staff at London Underground station

Staff based at the London Underground (LU) stations of London Bridge and Waterloo have voted for strike action and action short of a strike in

support of the "London Bridge Three." Last November, a member of staff attempted to apprehend a fare dodger who then assaulted the member of staff. Two other employees, one of whom was pregnant, came to his assistance and were in turn assaulted by the fare dodger.

Following the incident, LU sacked the member of staff who challenged the fare dodger, accusing him of provoking the incident. His colleagues have been disciplined. The workers involved are members of the RMT, and the ballot result is being considered by the union's national executive.

### Irish teachers protest unequal pay

Irish teachers belonging to the Irish National Teachers Organisation protested as the Fine Gael education minister, Richard Bruton, addressed the second day of their conference this week.

In a silent protest, they held up placards as he spoke to protest an unequal pay structure, which discriminates against new and young teachers.

### Estonian health unions announce strike

Three health unions in Estonia—the Estonian Medical Association, Estonian Union of Healthcare Professionals and the Estonian Nurses' Association—have called a strike for May 15. The stoppage is to highlight the underfunding of the Health Insurance Fund to pay for patients' treatment. According to the unions, there is a €70 million shortfall in the fund.

### Strike threat at Tesla's German factory

Workers at the Tesla car factory in the German town of Prum are threatening a strike in pursuit of a €400-a-month rise. The company has offered €150. Roughly half of the 1,400 workforce are represented by the IG Metall union.

The factory, which had been owned by Grohmann Engineering, was recently acquired by Tesla, which plans to begin production of its new Model 3 at the site in July.

### **Portuguese air cabin crew announce strike**

Cabin crew, employed by SATA International/Azores Airlines, have announced a two-day strike to take place on May 1 and 2. The crew, who are members of the National Union of Civil Aviation (SNPVAC), accuse the company of failing to comply with the terms of a contract signed between the company and the union.

### **Italian minister suspends air transport strike**

An industry-wide strike due to begin today affecting Italian air transport has been suspended, following the intervention of Italian Transport Minister Graziano Delrio.

### **Dutch teachers give notice of strike**

A recent poll by a PO primary teacher action group found a 97 percent majority in favour of taking strike action. A similar poll by the AOb general education union resulted in a 91 percent majority in favour of industrial action.

Teachers are pushing for higher salaries and smaller class sizes. If the strike goes ahead, it would take place in September.

### **Janitors in Glasgow, Scotland, to strike again**

School janitors, who work for the arms-length company Cordia—providing janitorial services to schools in Glasgow for the Labour-controlled council—are set to strike for three days beginning April 25.

They are members of the Unison union and are in dispute over enhancement payments for odious duties. Beginning in March of last year, the janitors have taken 64 days of strike action so far.

### **Teachers in England oppose funding cuts**

Delegates of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) Easter conference in Cardiff have voted in favour of holding coordinated strikes before the end of the summer term in opposition to cuts in school budgets.

NUT members at three secondary schools in London were set to strike Thursday over budget cuts. The three secondary schools are Plumstead Manor School, Corelli College and Forest Hill School. Teachers at Plumstead and Corelli are also due to strike on Tuesday and Wednesday next week. Proposed budget cuts at the three schools would lead to more than 40 jobs being cut.

### **Public sector strike in Israel**

A nationwide strike of Israeli public sector workers is set for April 25. The strike was called by the Histadrut labour federation.

The strike is to protest government plans to change the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and set up a new broadcasting service known as Kan. Under the government proposals, staff hired for the Kan news division will lose their jobs, which will go to news staff at the IBA.

The strike is in opposition to the treatment of news staff at Kan and attempts by the government to divide the workforce.

### **South African miners strike over reduction in bonus payments**

Almost 2,000 miners at the Barberton Mines Company in South Africa are out on strike to demand a fair monthly bonus payment.

The members of the National Union of Mineworkers are used to bonuses of between R800 (US\$60) and R1,000 (US\$72), but their latest payment has been reduced to R143 (US\$11).

The company secured a court injunction, making the strike a contempt of court if they do not return to work. As part of the interdict, strikers cannot picket at the company gates and interfere with scabs wanting to break the strike.

### **South African bus workers' union claims strike sold out**

National industrial action throughout South Africa's bus transport sector has been brought to an end. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has accused other participating unions of selling out.

NUMSA, the second largest union in the industry, claims it did not agree with the settlement, but nevertheless it is ordering its members back to work to maintain "industrial peace and stability."

The agreement between the unions and 16 bus companies are for a 9 percent wage increase plus increases in increments. Allowances will rise by 10 percent in relation to over-the-border trips, night-shift working and long-distance driving.

NUMSA accused the other unions of not dealing with the poor conditions facing the drivers and did not put the company offer to their members. NUMSA was accused of using the sell-out as a recruitment drive, saying to members in the other unions they "must now join NUMSA."

### **South African early development workers strike over wages and bonuses**

ASHA Early Childhood Development workers took strike action and protested at the company's head office in Klipspruit, South Africa, on April 12 over unpaid wages.

The pre-school education staff are demanding the payment of December's unpaid bonuses, as well as an end to half payment and no payment of wages. They are also demanding the removal of the chief operating officer (COO) still employed at the company, although he resigned last year.

In total, 376 employees work in 41 crèches around the country, out of which 350 are members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU). Management has refused to concede to the

union's demands, and the COO has said he is not leaving, while the NEHAWU says it will continue the strike.

Even though ASHA company workers are not getting paid, they are expected to pay ASHA fees, if their child attends the early learning centres. The private company receives R15 million (US\$1.1 million) in state subsidies

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

South African Social Development Workers are to return to work, ending their five-week strike. The strike was over outstanding agreements going back to 2015.

An agreement has been signed by National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and the Department of Social Development. The union says most of its 13 demands have been addressed.

Some workers returned to work on April 14, with most going back on Tuesday.

### **Cameroon doctors strike**

Cameroon doctors went out on strike in the country's capital, Yaoundé, on Monday demanding better pay and working conditions. It left hospitals with no doctors, and patients only being attended by nurses.

The government says it does not recognise the doctors' organisation, SYMEC, as a legal organisation, making the strike illegal; medics say this is not true.

The strike comes on top of other industrial action involving teachers and lawyers.

### **Nigerian oil workers strike over unpaid wages**

Members of Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) struck General Electric (GE) on April 12.

GE Nigeria oil operations were disrupted as workers downed tools at the transnational company to demand payment of unpaid wages. Payments for wages should have been paid to ARCO, a GE maintenance subcontractor, but the company has not received the funds.

Workers formed pickets at GE's headquarters in Lagos and at the southern oil hub at Port Harcourt, with plans to extend their protests to offices in the capital, Abuja.

### **Nigerian Petrol University strikes over wage cuts**

Staff at the specialist Federal University of Petro Resources (FUPRE) began a three-day warning strike over wages cuts on April 7. The staff are in four academic and non-academic unions.

The workers returned to work April 12.

The unions, under the umbrella of the Joint Action Congress (JAC), passed a no-confidence vote in the university governing council. The

salaries of the council have been maintained, while the FUPRE workers have seen their wages slashed substantially.

FUPRE, established in 2007, was the first university in Africa based on the oil industry.



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