

## Greek municipal workers in 4-day protest, GM to pull out of South Africa

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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### Greek municipal staff strike

Unions representing municipal workers in Greece took strike action over four days up until Tuesday of this week. Strikers demanded the government provide permanent status to staff currently employed on fixed term contracts. A recent court order declared that the continuous extension of short-term contracts is contrary to the constitution.

The POP-OTA and POE-OTA trade union federations embracing municipal staff called their members out on strike on Saturday and Sunday, while the POE-OTA trade union federation extended the action to Monday and Tuesday. POE-OTA held a rally on Monday in Athens to push its demands with a rally by contract staff outside its Athens offices on Tuesday.

The issue of short-term contracts mainly affects kindergarten and cleaning staff, but all municipal staff, including refuse collectors, took part in the strikes.

### Strike at French car part factory suspended

Nearly 300 workers at the GM&S car parts factory at La Souterraine in central France have voted to lift their strike and are set to resume work on Monday. The factory, which is the main supplier of car parts to Renault and PSA, was declared bankrupt last December and given until this month to find a buyer. Workers at the factory have threatened to destroy it rather than let it close.

The economy minister, Bruno Le Maire, has won assurances from Renault and PSA that they will step up orders from the factory to keep it operating in the short term, but with no guarantees of long-term support. However, the promised orders from the two car manufacturers would mean work for only 100 at the factory.

If no buyer can be found GM&S will face closure. According to press reports, two companies, GMD and Magneto, have expressed interest in taking over the car parts factory, but the deadline for offers has now been extended to June 7. Workers have vowed to resume strike action if no serious buyer is found.

### Spanish dockers strike

The Spanish dockworkers union CETM has cancelled an eight-day strike originally scheduled to take place Wednesday May 24. The strike has been replaced by a limited series of go-slows, with dockers refusing to work every other hour on June 5, 7 and 9.

The action is a token protest by the union leadership against legislation in the Spanish parliament to abolish the SAGEPS dock labour scheme that gave dockers a measure of security and wage protection. Its abolition is in line with EU directives attacking workers' conditions that will lead to lower pay and reduced pensions.

The CETM union had called off previous planned action to enter negotiations with the Popular Party government.

### Planned strike by Turkish glass workers banned by government

The Turkish government has banned a strike by nearly 6,000 Turkish glass workers, on the grounds that the strike would be prejudicial to national security. The workers, employed by the Sisecam Company, were due to have struck on Wednesday and are fighting to defend wages and conditions. Under Turkish legislation, the company and union must now negotiate over the next 60 days and resolve the issue.

The current Turkish government has banned strikes in the metal, glass, rubber and mining sectors, in each case citing national security.

### Irish unions wind up strike by bus workers

The three unions representing Bus Eireann staff have wound up their strike. The National Bus and Rail Union, the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union, and Unite, have accepted a Labour Court judgement that employees earning over €60,000 should take a 10 percent pay cut and the closure of a Bus Eireann garage in Dundalk. The membership of the unions voted in favour of the Labour Court decision.

### Striking Manchester housing workers hold demonstration

Striking house maintenance workers jointly employed by Mears (a

private contractor) and Manchester Working (a joint venture company) held a demonstration Monday outside the offices of Northwards Housing.

The workers are demanding an end to pay differentials, which see some workers earning up to £3,500 a year less, despite doing the same work. They are also opposing Mears' attempts to introduce a contract that would increase hours and drive up productivity but with no commensurate pay-rise.

Northwards Housing is an "arms length management organisation" (ALMO) run by Manchester council, which manages 13,000 council homes in north Manchester.

Monday's demonstration coincided with the fourth day of strikes. Currently the workers are striking Monday, Thursday and Friday each week.

### **Planned strike by rail staff suspended**

Planned strikes on May 30 by train conductors at three train companies—Merseyrail, Northern Rail and Southern Rail—to oppose driver only operated (DOO) trains, have been suspended. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union used Monday night's Manchester terror bombing as the pretext to suspend the action.

### **Scottish lecturers strike suspended**

Members of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) have suspended their rolling strike action. They had been striking to demand their employers, represented by Colleges Scotland, honour a March 2016 agreement to remove pay differentials at the various colleges. Colleges Scotland has agreed to implement the first phase of the agreement signed last year, with some details still to be finalised.

The lecturers held several days of strike action in May, and had been scheduled to strike Tuesday through to Thursday of this week.

### **UK Equality staff hold further strikes**

Civil servants working for the government Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), members of the Public and Commercial Services union in London, were on strike throughout this week. They are fighting government proposals to cut EHRC staff. The strikes in London were part of a rolling programme of strikes, with the Glasgow office holding a strike last week and offices in Cardiff due to take action next week, with Manchester striking the following week.

### **Electricians working on London Crossrail down tools**

On Monday, some electricians working on the London Crossrail project, creating an east west link across the city, downed tools and "cabined-up" at the Canning Town, Holborn and Mile End sites.

The walkout was triggered by the refusal of the contractor, Skanska Ashleigh Weatherfoil consortium, to agree a £3 an hour bonus for the

remainder of the contract. Other contractors on the project have agreed the bonus. The rank and file workers also held a demonstration. Last week they refused to work overtime and conducted a social media campaign. The contractor is also refusing to recognise a Unite trade union representative.

For its part, Unite issued a statement: "This is not a union backed dispute, indeed we have little knowledge as to who is involved in the protest..."

### **Palestinian general strike in support of hunger strikers**

A general strike by Palestinians took place on Monday affecting East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The strike was called in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, who have been on hunger strike for more than a month against brutal conditions. The strike coincided with the visit of US president Donald Trump to Israel.

### **General Motors pulling out of South Africa**

General Motors has announced it is pulling its operations out of South Africa and selling its plants to Isuzu, the truck manufacturer.

Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), Irvin Jim, responded to the news looking both ways at once.

While complaining they were not informed of what is effectively an illegal move by GM, not giving 60 days notice of redundancies, NUMSA proposes to organise a boycott of the company's products while negotiating redundancy conditions.

Jim also complained the car manufacturer did not give notice to the government. Because of the move, it is thought that around 600 workers will likely lose their jobs.

The company is not only removing its production facilities but also its retail outlets for all Chevrolet models.

GM made over \$50 million profit last year in its South African operations.

### **Zimbabwean sugar workers set to strike for wage increase**

Zimbabwean workers at the Tongaat Hullet sugar plantation and refinery company, in Chirezdi, are preparing for industrial action. The Zimbabwe Sugarcane Milling Workers' Union (ZISMWU) has put in a claim for a wage increase of 39 percent.

Negotiations have gone through arbitration without a settlement. A decision is awaited from the labour court for a judgement on what action can be taken.

The workers complain their take home pay is only \$100 a month while the living wage is estimated to be \$250 a month. A strike by 16,000 workers in 2015 shut down the company's operations for 4 weeks. Workers were sent back to work on a promise that was never fulfilled, leaving strikers to be victimised.

Although the company says it will never agree to the union's demands, workers claim their counterparts in other Tongaat Hullet plantations across southern Africa get wages between \$400 and \$700 a month.

## **Cameroon dockers go on sit down strike over employment rights**

In a long running dispute, Cameroon dockworkers resumed their strike on May 11 demanding recognition as port employees. Dockers complained that their plight was left in the hands of individual importers and exporters with little or no rights.

The more than 400 workers are pushing for a fixed wage for all dockers, plus allowances, insurance cover and official ID cards confirming them as Douala Port Authority employees, as part of a 12-point list of demands. Negotiations with the dockers' union and the port authorities have broken down and the strike is continuing.

## **Ghanaian construction workers strike**

Eight hundred construction workers involved in the Tema harbour expansion scheme, in Accra, Ghana, came out on strike last week. Part of their complaint is that a new recruitment agency, that determines wages and conditions of employment, are not implementing previous agreements.

Workers accuse the Chinese Harbour Engineering Company of using underhand methods to renege on agreements by employing a new agency. A previous demonstration and strike earlier in the month brought the same issues to the fore.

Construction workers are demanding an improvement in wages, better risk allowances and follow-up on promised promotions. A previous agreement that offered workers a salary increase and permanent status after 3 months has not been adhered to. Workers complain their wages have been cut. The Maritime Dock Workers Union has been brought in to "resolve" the dispute.

## **Workers strike at Accra's premier hotel**

Hotel workers at the Labadi Beach Hotel, Accra's premier hotel, struck last week over wages and conditions. Staff at the £240 a night hotel are said by one worker to be "treated like enemies" when it comes to wage negotiations.

The local chairman of the hotel workers' union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, complained that demands made earlier this year have been ignored and their recent attempts to get an agreement saw the management walk out of negotiations.

Only 10 percent of workers at the hotel are permanent staff, the other 90 percent are casuals being paid GHC 300 (US\$70) a month, with no other benefits.

## **Kenyan tea pickers victimised**

Around a thousand workers have been victimised by Kenyan tea plantations for striking in 2015. Workers took industrial action to get a court awarded pay increase, with only limited success.

Kenyan Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union said the multinational tea companies seem to be taking revenge action over the 2015 strike. Around 20,000 tea workers are employed in Nandi County.

The tea workers' union have appealed to Nandi Hills Member of Parliament and the Confederation of Trade Unions to intervene.

## **Nigerian oil union ignores court ruling to return to work**

A standoff is developing between Nigeria's labour court and PENGASSAN, the oil workers' union. The administration sent the dispute to the Industrial Arbitration Court when the union refused to continue futile discussions with the government.

The court has used a ruling against lockouts and striking in a bid to force the oil workers back to work. The union has called for a total withdrawal of labour from the Exxon oil industry.

The strike was triggered by the oil industry's refusal to abide by the country's labour laws, arbitrarily sacking workers. Eighty-three workers have been dismissed illegally, including 10 union officials. At the government's request, the union officials were reinstated but were then sacked again.

The union is said to be considering calling off the strike under advice from their lawyers. The lawyers suggest they allow a 21-day period, demanded by the labour court, to attempt to achieve a resolution to the dispute.

## **Nigerian, Nasarawi state government refuses to negotiate over unpaid wages**

Nigeria workers in Nasarawi state are continuing their near two-week strike over unpaid wages. The state's Nigerian Labour Council, the union body conducting the strike, has instructed its members to continue striking while the state government refuses to negotiate with them.

The union chapter felt it necessary to remove its chairman as he was seen as too close to the government, further discrediting the already discredited labour body.

The state government, while refusing to negotiate with the new branch leader, is holding discussions with the impeached union chairman.



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