

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## Kenyan nurses continue their national strike beyond 11 weeks

25 August 2017

### Africa

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Kenya's nurses have been out on strike for 11 weeks, with some being paid their wages while others are not. Kenyan public sector workers expect to get their wages paid while on official strike.

Further negotiations are dependent on the reconstituting of the Council of Governors, which is not to take place until September. A new line-up of governors is being selected after the August 8 general election, with several new faces taking their seats.

The nurses continue to strike over a signed collective bargaining agreement, which the previous governors of the 47 states, and the Salary and Remunerations Committee (SRC), continue to refuse to implement.

They are now confronting a regrading process by the SRC where the nurses have been initially categorised as semi-skilled with the participation of the Kenyan National Union of Nurses.

#### Kenyan tea workers strike for a new wage agreement halted by court order

A strike by Kenyan tea plantation workers has been halted by the Employment and Labour Court order until September 21. Kenyan Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU) officials have put off the strike in respect of court procedures.

The strike notice was issued July 31 to take place on August 14 against planters such as Unilever Tea Kenya Limited, James Finlay Ltd, the Kenya Tea Growers Association and Eastern Produce Kenya Ltd.

The tea conglomerates are refusing wage negotiations with around 100,000 tea workers, while the unions have attempted to compel them to go through the courts.

KPAWU is complaining the workers' pay and conditions have not changed for four years and want to open negotiations on a belated 2016-17 collective bargaining agreement, to succeed the 2012 CBA.

The union is asking for a 100 percent pay increase and improvements in housing allowances.

#### Sudanese education workers suspend strike

Sudanese education workers carried out a strike from Thursday last week to Monday this week over education grants. The grants, referred to by education workers as bonuses, are owed to them from June.

A worker speaking to Radio Dabanga said if the education authority does not pay the bonus, an open-ended strike could follow.

The strike took place in a number of schools in West Kordofan state, although workers in several other states are also affected by the non-payment. The promised grant payment from the government was for the end of Ramadan on June 15.

The Union of Education Workers set a deadline of August 31 for the government to pay up, or a further two-day strike would be carried out starting September 10.

#### Swaziland university staff strike over right to demonstrate

Swaziland university staff at the Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU) struck for a final day Tuesday after being locked out of their camp compound.

The strike was in response to the lockout, which had the effect of denying them the right to demonstrate at or near their workplace.

The academic staff union, the Swaziland Health Institutions and Allied Workers Union, said that university management has no right to lock them out, and that their action was illegal.

When the strike ended, the union took its grievances to court.

#### Workers strike at South Africa's Reserve Bank over medical subscriptions

Workers responsible for producing banknotes at South Africa's Reserve Bank's subsidiary are striking to protest unpaid medical subsidies and for a wage claim.

Employees from the South African Banknote Company marched and demonstrated at the Reserve Bank demanding the bank meets its obligations in funding the workforce's medical subsidy.

A spokesman for the SASBO union said medical aid was a condition of employment at the company and the company had promised for five years to pay the whole medical aid cover, but continue to pay only half.

The company is offering a 6.6 percent pay offer while workers are demanding 8.8 percent and insisting that the bank addresses the question of unequal pay paid for equal work.

The Reserve Bank said last week that it had enough bank notes to keep it going for a month.

### **Staff protest at Nigerian university hospital over unpaid wages**

This week staff at the Nigerian University Hospital in Imo State picketed the administration entrance in protest over unpaid and half-paid wages.

The 300 demonstrators were organised by the Joint Action Committee (JAC) that consists of the Association of Resident Doctors, the Medical and Dental Consultants of Nigeria, the National Association Nurses and Midwives, the Medical Health Workers Union of Nigeria and the National Union of Allied Professionals.

Salaries have been reduced for the last 18 months by 30 percent, it is claimed, without union agreement. Wages have gone unpaid since the end of April.

This persists at the same time as management is paying itself three months salary in advance. According to the JAC chairman, workers have to carry out child delivery by torchlight.

### **Nurses ordered back to work at Moi Teaching Hospital Kenya**

Nurses struck at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH) in Nairobi, Kenya, last Friday. They were sent back to work immediately after the courts threatened to jail and fine the union secretary general.

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUT) was striking to demand the implementation of their agreed collective bargaining agreement.

The MTRH nurses came out on strike on May 24, but a court order declared the action illegal and they were instructed to return by May 30. The union, until last Friday, had refused to return to work and now the court order is being imposed.

Union secretary general, Seth Panyako, the recently defeated candidate for state governor in the August 8 elections, is taking advice from his lawyer and has sent the nurses back to work to avoid a N200,000 (US\$550) fine or six-month jail sentence.

The MTRH strike is separate from the Kenyan nurses' national strike as the MTRH is treated as an independent parastatal.

### **Europe**

### **UK rail union to ballot members over extending DOO dispute to Greater Anglia**

Train conductors employed by Greater Anglia are to be balloted, with a view to industrial action, over the private rail franchise's intention to impose DOO (driver only operated) trains.

Conductors, who are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) and train divers have been battling rail franchises Merseyrail, Northern and Southern, in some cases for over a year, on a region by region basis.

DOO, which already operates on a third of UK trains, has the aim of eliminating the role of the conductor, threatening 6,000 jobs, and compromising passenger safety.

In response to Greater Anglia's attempts to claim conductors' jobs

would be safe, RMT general Secretary Mick Cash said, "The union remains available for further talks around the crucial issue of the guard guarantee."

### **Wigan refuse workers vote to strike over proposed shift pattern changes**

Refuse workers employed by Wigan Council in North West England are to strike next Thursday, followed by a six-day overtime ban, to protest shift pattern changes as part of a £2 million cuts package.

From September 25 bin collections will change from a two to three-week rota. The Unison union says the council has plans to introduce 11-hour shifts from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., without notice. Workers will also be expected to do Christmas shifts that are normally worked by volunteers.

Staff have already been hit by job losses and a four-day working week.

Refuse collectors do a job that is already very demanding physically. An 11-hour shift spent continually walking, working outdoors in all weathers, is physically exhausting and detrimental to health.

### **Ford workers in Wales vote for industrial action**

Workers have voted 52.1 percent in favour of strike action against the feared closure of Ford's car plant in Bridgend, Wales.

In March, workers balloted by 71.9 percent to strike in defence of jobs, with 1,160 jobs at risk according to the Unite union.

Last September, the American car giant said it intended to reduce the level of investment from a planned £181 million to £100 million. Production of its new generation of petrol engines made in Bridgend is also to be halved.

The Unite union have approached the company to "seek a resolution to this situation."

### **Unite sell out refuse workers strike in Birmingham**

Refuse workers in Birmingham, England face clearing a rubbish backlog after the Unite union called off a two-month-long strike after negotiating a sell-out deal with the council.

The council is seeking to restructure the refuse collection service, threatening the loss of around 120 jobs and pay cuts of up to £5,000.

While the jobs of grade three workers, responsible for safety at the back of refuse vehicles, will not be immediately at risk, the union has agreed to a five-day working week to replace the current four-day week.

### **Unite suspends British Airways cabin crew strike**

The Unite union have called off the long-running dispute by cabin crew at British Airways.

Writing to British Airways boss Alex Cruz, Unite's general secretary Len McCluskey said the following: "You will be aware that we have not

issued any further notice for strike action, which will currently end on 30 August.

“This is in order to create a ‘pause for peace’ so that our respective teams can get around the table with a view to securing a mutually accepted resolution to the current dispute.”

The workers are fighting poverty wages, and punitive sanctions imposed on about 1,400 colleagues involved in previous industrial action.

#### **UK: Pilots at Thomas Cook Airlines vote for strike action**

Pilots at UK holiday firm Thomas Cook voted by 80 percent to strike in pursuit of a pay increase of 10.7 percent. The company has offered just 1.5 percent, on top of an annual increment of 1.8 percent.

Workers are also asking to fly business class when travelling between connecting flights.

Four hundred out of the 560 Thomas Cook pilots are members of Balpa (British Airline Pilots Association).

#### **UK Offshore catering workers reject pay offer**

Catering workers in the UK oil offshore industry have rejected another pay offer by their employers, the same one the workers, who are employed by firms who are in the Caterers Offshore Trade Association (COTA), turned down in February.

The association, comprising the Aramark, Compass, Sodexo, Entier and Trinity companies, made a pay offer, but subsequently withdrew it saying the oil industry cannot afford it.

Workers voted by 74 percent to strike after a previous wage agreement in 2015 was reneged on and the February offer was withdrawn. While the association’s employees have not had a rise for two years, other workers in the industry have seen an increase.

Construction workers, who are members of Unite, GMB and the RMT, are also being balloted on industrial action in connection with their terms and conditions.

#### **Theatre staff strike Warrington Hospital in England over pay and patient safety**

Theatre staff at Warrington hospital in the town in North West England struck last Friday and on Monday morning. More action is planned as part of a four-year dispute with the Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The Trust wants to impose new rotas, which will mean reduced numbers of staff working night duty and weekends, as well as pay cuts. Fewer operations will be carried out as a consequence.

#### **Cineworld staff to ballot for industrial action against threatened job losses**

Siptu trade union members at the Cineworld Complex on Parnell street,

Dublin, are to ballot for strike action over redundancies. Employers intend to restructure supervisory and management positions, which will result in job losses.

A Siptu spokesman said the ballot for industrial action was due to the “management attempt to implement compulsory redundancies without consultation with the workers’ union.”

#### **Disabled Romanian workers demonstrate**

Disabled Romanian workers demonstrated on Tuesday in the country’s capital, Bucharest, against a decree that will put them out of work. Around 200 workers demonstrated with slogans declaring, “We want to work, not beg.”

The government of Prime Minister Mihai Tudose has passed a law removing the responsibility of companies with less than 50 workers to employ workers who are disabled.

#### **Railway workers on hunger strike in Georgia**

A Georgian railway worker was hospitalised a day after declaring he would go on hunger strike on August 16, in response to being relocated.

Two railway workers protested at the relocation as they were not to be reimbursed for travelling costs or given living away allowances.

Several other rail workers joined the dispute and around 50 supporters joined a demonstration outside Georgia Railways in the county’s capital, Tbilisi.

The president’s parliamentary secretary has offered to mediate.

#### **Middle East**

#### **Egyptian textile workers end strike**

Textile workers at the Egyptian Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla city, Gharbiya, went back to work August 20 with the union saying it will hold off on further negotiations.

Six thousand textile workers came out August 5, followed by a further 10,000, demanding improved wages and benefits and the payment of delayed bonuses, plus promotions and a share of company profits.

The minister of the Public Business Sector said the minimum wage would be implemented and bonuses would be paid to workers according to the law.

In regards to workers’ demands, he said that “discussions” had taken place with the company management. The union promised that the workforce would work to recover company losses suffered due to the strike.



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