

Iranian lorry drivers' strike spreads as shop and farm workers strike in South Africa

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Middle East

Iranian lorry drivers' strike spreads

A strike by Iranian lorry drivers has entered its third week. The action has been called to protest low pay and increasing costs, including tolls. In addition, workers are being asked to cover the cost for the "spy in the cab" tracking device. The truckers are seeking 25 to 50 percent increases in haulage charges and have rejected the government's 20 percent offer.

The strike has spread from 4 to 25 provinces and 160 cities. Taxi drivers in several cities have come out in support. There have also been reports of clashes between lorry drivers and strikebreakers in the city of Isfahan.

Truckers have rejected government promises as "lip service" and are vowing to press their struggle to win their demands. Truck drivers spend a large portion of their time hauling for the government, the biggest importer and distributor of such vital commodities as food and fuel.

Iranian sugar workers further strike

On Sunday, workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane processing factory in Iran struck. The workers have been involved in a long-running campaign over unpaid wages.

Conditions of workers at the factory have deteriorated since the privatisation of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company in 2015. Workers have accused management of becoming wealthy off the backs of their employees.

In February a Haft Tappeh worker's body was found floating in a canal, an apparent suicide. It was reported that he killed himself due to his debts owing to the withholding of payments by the company.

Jordanian professional workers set to strike

Professional workers including medics in the Jordanian Professional Associations Council were to strike on Wednesday and hold a sit-in at the compound of the Professional Associations Council.

They were protesting a new law lowering the income tax threshold, an

increase in sales tax and a rise in the price of fuel, electricity and water. On Monday, Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned following days of anti-government protests in Amman and other major cities.

Europe

Strike by underground rail staff in Georgian capital

Workers at the Tbilisi metro underground rail system went on strike on Sunday demanding a 45 percent pay rise and improved working conditions. The Tbilisi Transport Company threatened to dismiss the several hundred strikers, members of the Ertoba 2013 union. Talks with Tbilisi's mayor on Monday night failed.

On Tuesday, students rallied in support of the metro staff.

The two-line network comprising 23 stations serves around half a million passengers daily.

Norwegian bank workers strike ends

On Tuesday, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions called off industrial action begun May 31 following negotiations. One-thousand Norwegian bank workers were striking over pay and pension entitlement.

A bigger walkout was avoided after the Finance Sector Union, with 20,000 members, reached an agreement with management.

Slovenian rail workers announce strikes

Members of the Union of Railway Workers of Slovenia will hold a series of strikes beginning June 12 and continuing to July 3. Workers are demanding a pay increase and that more staff be employed. The strikes will hit passenger and freight traffic.

Strike by Spanish steel workers continues

Action by steelworkers at the Megasa steel plant in Zaragoza in northeast Spain continues. The members of the Stalinist-controlled CCOO union began a two-hour-a-day strike in January of this year, leading to a 25 percent drop in production.

Around 1,000 staff are employed at the plant, which produces merchant bars. The workers are protesting the takeover of the plant that was formerly owned by Arcelor Mittal in 2016. The new owners plan to cut pay and increase working hours.

UK rail workers set to take further strike action

Rail workers are due to strike in their ongoing dispute over driver-only-operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union working for the Northern Rail franchise will take part in three 24-hour strikes on June 19, 21 and 23. Northern Rail is currently in crisis over timetable changes, resulting in hundreds of cancellations, delays and chaos.

Guards employed by Greater Anglia are set to strike over DOO for 24-hours on June 16 and 23.

The RMT has limited workers' action to regional, short-term strikes to isolate and dissipate struggles, while not fundamentally impacting rail operations.

Drivers in the RMT on the Jubilee line of the London Underground rail system are to hold 24-hour strikes on June 6 and 14. They are taking the action over the imposition of a new timetable that overrides the current rostering agreement.

RMT members working for contractor ISS—which provides security and administrative services on the Docklands Light Rail system in the financial district in London—will hold a 24-hour strike on June 13. The contractor failed to honour agreements over pay and conditions, and workers complain about management attitude to staff.

Hospital workers in northwest England strike

Staff at hospitals in Wigan, Leigh and Wroughton in the northwest of England are to begin a 48-hour strike today.

They are protesting plans to transfer around 900 staff employed by the National Health Service (NHS) to privately owned company WWL Solutions—affecting jobs, pay and conditions. The Unison union members struck for 48 hours on May 23 and 24.

Plans to transfer employment from the NHS to private companies are being pushed at other hospitals. Unison and other health unions are keeping disputes against outsourcing isolated, with no coordinated action.

Strike of care workers in southwest England

Around 120 residential care workers employed by Sirona—a private company set up by Bath and North East Somerset council—held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. Sirona is seeking to introduce an unpaid half-hour

break, meaning workers either work longer for the same pay or take a wage cut. The Unison members are already low-paid.

A series of two-hour strikes are planned for the rest of the month.

Ongoing fight by cinema staff in London over pay

Cinema staff working at Picturehouse cinemas in East Dulwich, Shaftesbury Avenue, Hackney and Crouch End in London held a 24-hour strike beginning on May 31. Another strike was held June 2.

The BECTU union members have been campaigning for nearly two years to be paid the so-called Living Wage, as determined by the Living Wage Foundation. The rates are £8.75 an hour for outer London and £10.20 an hour for inner London.

Firefighters in West Midlands, England, oppose draconian new contract

Firefighters in the West Midlands region of England have voted by 90 percent on an 82 percent turnout to strike against proposed contracts for new recruits. The new contracts incorporate into their work arrangements to be carried out at the behest of the employer at any time overriding existing agreements.

The *Times Online* cites as examples of included work: ferrying fire casualties to hospital and picking elderly women up who have fallen down.

The Fire Brigades Union has not acted on the mandate from their members but is awaiting the authority's response.

Africa

South African Hospital workers demand payment of bonuses

South African health workers demonstrated at the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital in Johannesburg last week over two years' unpaid bonuses.

Hundreds of nurses, cleaners and porters demonstrated, while the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union condemned their action. Angry staff paraded through the hospital corridors and carried out an overnight sit-in.

Members of the DENOSA, PSA, HOSPERA and NUPSAW unions were involved.

Striking South African Shoprite workers attacked by armed security guards and police

Police and armed security guards attacked South African Shoprite distribution workers on strike since May 24.

Some members of the National Transport Union, who ran into fields to escape being shot with rubber bullets, were wounded.

The 2,000 strikers are demanding a wage of R12,000 (US\$938) a month,

night shift allowance, medical facilities and a retirement fund.

A worker said the police brutality was organised in order to allow scabs to pass.

South African farm workers strike for minimum wage and safety clothes

Thousands of farm workers in South Africa's Sunday Rivers Valley area have downed tools, demanding an increase in wages. The Eastern Cape dispute broke out last Thursday, after workers demanded the recently introduced minimum wage.

Although the new minimum wage of R20 an hour (US\$1.57) is very low, fruit farmers and processors are receiving even less at around R16 an hour (US\$1.26)

Workers in the citrus fields do not have protective clothing against the weather, poisonous chemicals and dangerous venomous snakes. Sick workers are fired on the spot, and unemployment is high.

The South African Police Service arrested seven workers for encouraging others to strike.

South African public service workers threaten strike over inadequate pay offer

South Africa's Public Service Association (PSA) is threatening to bring its 230,000 members out on strike after negotiations failed. Workers are demanding a 12 percent pay increase among all grades.

The union has lodged a strike notice with the government.

Union calls off Angolan bus workers strike

Workers at the Beira Municipal Bus Company—recently outsourced by the Angolan state—have had their wages cut with the agreement of the union.

New owner Beira municipality claims that the bus service is overmanned, with 200 staff and 11 buses transporting 14,000 passengers per day.

The TMB workers commission called off a five-day strike after the Angolan state promised to top up wages, calculating “compensation...30 days prior to signing a new contract.”

Union calls off Nigerian health workers' strike with no resolution

The Joint Health Service Unions has called off the six-week strike by Nigerian health professionals after accepting a back-to-work order by the Nigerian Industrial Court.

The dispute will now be settled at a new body, the Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) centre—with its decisions binding on both parties. The nominally independent ADR centre put the motion to end the strike at the court.

The Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) is threatening

strike action if doctors' grievances from 2013 over pay and conditions are not resolved.

NARD and the Nigerian Medical Association did not join the general health workers' strike.

Nigerian research staff strike over belligerent permanent secretary

Nigerian research workers gave the Ministry of Science three days strike notice starting June 4. The Academic Staff Union of Research Institutions picketed outside the Ministry in Abuja.

Workers are demanding the resignation of the minister of science technology for ignoring labour practices regarding promotions and claim the government reneged on a promise to remove her.



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