

Russian steel workers protest shut-down for world cup, French and UK rail workers continue action

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Russian steel workers oppose plant shutdown during World Cup

Around 3,000 workers at the Red October steel factory in Volgograd have been laid off as the factory has been temporarily shuttered for the duration of the World Cup football tournament because of air quality fears. There have also been delays in their salary payments. The workers fear the shutdown could be the prelude to closure.

They plan to hold a protest in Volgograd on Monday to coincide with the match between England and Tunisia being played that day.

The plant produces steel for T-14 Armata tanks, the first new Russian battle tank since the fall of the Soviet Union.

## March by Portuguese workers

On Saturday thousands of workers marched through the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, to demand improved living and working conditions, including the raising of the minimum monthly wage to €650 in January 2019. A rally was addressed by the secretary-general of the General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers. He called for support for a demonstration July 6 outside parliament against proposed labour legislation reform.

## Strike of London borough housing staff enters second week

Around 20 staff working for Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) Association in the London borough of Tower Hamlets are in the second week of strike action. The members of Unison are protesting the housing association's introduction of a new payment system. The workers will be paid a market rate salary replacing the current National Joint Council local government rate, with salaries "market tested" every two years. THCH argues some staff could be paid more than their current rate but staff fear otherwise.

## Strikes by French rail workers continue

French rail workers are continuing rolling strikes two days out of every five, to last until the end of this month. On Tuesday strikers held a "day of rail anger" with demonstrations in the business area of Paris. The unions have accepted the bulk of Macron's rail reforms to be brought into law this week.

The reforms will end job security for rail workers and convert the state rail company SNCF into a joint-stock company, a prelude to privatization.

Drawn-out rolling strikes are designed to wear down militancy. Only around 17 percent of SNCF workers took part in the Tuesday strike, down by over 30 percent in April, when half of all train drivers came out.

## Care workers in southwest England continue partial strike

Around 120 residential care workers employed by private company Sirona, which provides services to Bath and North East Somerset council, are continuing their two-hour per day strike. They plan to continue the action until the end of the month. The action by members of Unison union follows a 24-hour strike last week. They are opposing Sirona's plans to impose an unpaid half hour break, which means working longer with a pay cut.

## Strike of Portuguese rail workers

Rail workers in south Portugal came out on strike Tuesday, returning to work on Wednesday. They work for the main train operator CP that employs around 3,000 staff. They were protesting proposals by CP for trains to be operated single-handedly. Currently another worker accompanies the driver in the train cab. The strike led to a 60 percent reduction in services.

A further strike is planned for June 23 and 24, hitting train services in the north.

## Further strikes by UK rail staff over role of guards

Rail staff working for Arriva Rail North (Northern Rail) are to take

24-hour strike action on June 19, 21 and 23. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) are opposing the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO would downgrade the role of guards, threatens passenger safety and the loss of 6,000 guard jobs nationally.

Northern Rail is currently experiencing chaos after the botched introduction of a new timetable.

Planned 24-hour strikes on June 16 and 23 at Greater Anglia over the same issue have been called off. An RMT press release stated, "In our view the offer is good enough to be put to the membership with a view to resolving this dispute. Therefore, the union has suspended industrial action ... while we conduct a referendum ballot of our members."?

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

RMT members working for Unipart Rail in Doncaster went on strike Wednesday over pay and conditions. Unipart Rail is a private company supplying rolling stock, machinery and services to the rail industry.

### **Scottish council leisure staff to strike**

Several hundred staff working for East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust (EDLCT), an arms-length company providing services to the council, are set to strike June 21, 22, 25 and 26. A work-to-rule will follow. EDLCT provides sport, library and other leisure services. Members of Unison, Unite and GMB are taking the action over proposed cuts to terms and conditions.

### **Hospital staff vote to oppose transfer to private company**

Hospital workers at the Mid Yorkshire Hospital group, including hospitals in Dewsbury, Wakefield and Pontefract in northern England have voted by a 97 percent majority to strike against privatisation.

The hospital trust plans to move 900 workers to an outside firm it has set up. Staff to be moved include cleaners, canteen staff, IT staff and maintenance workers. While existing workers would supposedly keep their current pay and conditions, new-hires would be on lower pay and worse conditions. The move is a prelude to full privatisation.

Adrian O'Malley, Unison regional branch secretary, said no date has been set for strike action, though it is likely to be in July. A protest was planned for Thursday outside the Pinderfields hospital Wakefield.

### **Strike by Slovenian rail workers**

Slovenian rail workers, members of the largest rail union, held a four-hour token strike Tuesday. They are demanding higher pay, increased staffing and better treatment from management. Further strikes are planned.

### **Work to rule by Belgian customs officers**

On Wednesday customs officers at Zaventem airport in the Belgian capital Brussels carried out a work-to-rule. The members of the Christian CSC trade union are protesting staff shortages. Workers are retiring, but few new recruits are being taken on. Their action led to long queues of passengers waiting for their baggage to be checked.

### **Israeli municipal workers to strike**

Israeli municipal workers have voted to strike on June 27. The strike would affect refuse collection, the closure of schools and kindergartens and there would be no administrative staff in municipal offices.

Workers are opposing the outsourcing of municipal services and the failure of municipalities to keep to collective bargaining agreements.

### **Demonstrating Iranian steel workers arrested**

Police arrested around 50 protesting steelworkers Monday night in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahwaz. The following day a further 15 were arrested. The members of the Independent Union of Iranian Workers were protesting repeated wages arrears by their employer, the Ahwaz National Steel Industrial Group. The company employs around 4,000 workers.

### **Namibian media workers demand pay rise and repayment of missing funds**

Workers employed at the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) carried out a national demonstration at its regional office in Zambezi Region. The members of the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU) are demanding payment of a 6 percent wage increase agreed 2017, and the repayment of workers' contributions.

Workers understood they had been paying statutory contributions and repaying loans through NBC to credit companies, but their payments have gone missing, leaving them facing legal action.

Workers also want all personnel to be placed in positions they are qualified for. The union gave management until Thursday to come to an agreement or they will take "unspecified action."

### **Ugandan lecturers strike over a backlog of unpaid wages and pay increases**

Lecturers have gone on strike at Makerere Business School in Kampala, Uganda over salary arrears and unpaid pay increases. The lecturers walked out yesterday after attempts in May and June to resolve the dispute failed.

Arrears have amounted to around Sh45 billion (US\$444.8 million).

### **Angolan nurses resume suspended strike over wages and conditions**

Nurses in Angola's capital Luanda went on indefinite strike Monday in response to the province and federal government constantly renegeing on promised wages and conditions settlements.

The members of the Luandan Nurses Trade Union are demanding unpaid salaries, job regrading, salary increases, payment of agreed subsidies and incentives outstanding since 2012. Other demands include lack of medicines and medical equipment.

The union suspended strike action a year ago, over similar issues.

#### **Mozambique bakers and drivers strike over illegal labour practices**

The bakery workers at Espiga d'Ouro in the southern city of Matola, Mozambique went on strike Monday over employers deducting wages when bread is unsold.

Drivers joined the action, which could halt the delivery of 1.8 million loaves a day.

The company also refuses to pay for overtime or provide workers with a contract, which is illegal. Workers want a written contract, a wage increase, dangerous work payments, and legal working hours with no more wage cuts.

The company began production eight months ago and is expected to employ around 1,200 workers. Hope is that the advanced production methods will overcome bread shortages, which have led to food riots.

#### **Zimbabwe explosives workers demonstrate over unpaid and underpaid wages**

Workers and their wives protested over unpaid wages outside Zimbabwe's GML Explosives Company, which locked them out from the beginning of the year.

A spokesman for GML Workers Committee accused officials of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions of siding with GML management. He said they have not been paid consistently for the last 10 years, and when paid, only received 70 percent of their wages. The workers are owed around \$1.3 million.

GML was a joint operation between Switzerland and Zimbabwe until taken over by a Croatian company in 2014.

#### **Strike at Johannesburg Metrobus, South Africa over union recognition**

South African Johannesburg Metrobus drivers are out on strike over union recognition. Bus transport has been halted since last week.

The bus company refuses to recognise the Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers of South Africa and negotiate on its demands, including salary increases and the filling of vacant positions.

The company claims it has a recognition agreement with the South African Local Government Association, which workers deny.

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration has been called in.

#### **South African power workers protest zero pay increase**

Members of the National Union of Mineworkers South Africa, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and Solidarity have rejected a zero percent wage offer from Eskom, the country's bankrupt power generator. Inflation is running at 4.3 percent.

The unions have declared a "dispute of interest" at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. They are opposed to strike action, which is illegal in essential services.

Workers are demanding a 15 percent pay rise, a R2,000 housing allowance increase, the banning of labour brokers, and bringing cleaners and security guards onto the books.

Pickets and demonstrations are to be set up during workers' lunch breaks at power stations, with a protest at Mega Watt Park on Thursday.

Eskom has applied to the National Regulator for a 20 percent electricity price increase.

#### **South African university staff strike over pay**

Lecturers and other staff at South Africa's Fort Hare University in Alice, Eastern Cape began strike action on Tuesday.

Two campuses were brought to a halt when staff struck in demand of a 12 percent wage increase against management's offer of 6 percent.

Management have refused to negotiate since 2017.

#### **Nigerian emergency workers strike against incompetent management**

Workers have gone on a national strike at Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency over government ignoring agreements.

The members of the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria are opposed to the grounding of many projects like the Mobile Intensive Care Unit, the Emergency Response Vehicles, and the Air Ambulance Helicopter that cost the taxpayer \$100 million to set up.

They are demanding the removal of the Agency's director general, whose incompetence is putting workers' lives in jeopardy. Agreed training, staff insurance coverage and hazard allowance payments have not been implemented, and agency workers are without equipment.

The government has declared the strike illegal.



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