

South Africa's shoe workers in national strike; telecom workers, transport workers strike in the UK and Belgium

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## South African shoe manufacturing workers on national strike

Eighty-six percent of South Africa's footwear manufacturing workers voted to strike last week and walked out this Monday.

Members of the National Union of Leather & Allied Workers and Southern African Clothing & Textile Workers' Union are demanding a 9.5 percent pay increase as opposed to a "final offer" of 6.25 percent from their employers.

Many shoe factories are closed with an estimated 10,000 workers on strike.

## Thousands of telecom workers strike in South Africa

Thousands of postal and telecom workers struck July 6 to demand a 12 percent pay increase against an offer by Post Office management of 6 percent.

Members of the Communication Workers Union, Customs Union and the Democratic Postal and Communications Union are into their third year without a pay increase, but with a significant workload increase.

An anonymous worker told AllAfrica.com, "There is an overload of work. We work overtime but we are not paid well. The work is strenuous ... We open at 5am and go home at 8:30pm. It's more work but less money."

The Post Office has recently taken on the contract of paying out 1.5 million in social grants from Cash Paymaster Services with no extra staff. In consequence, hundreds of benefit recipients are being starved of their minimal income.

## South African power generating workers threaten strike over pay claim

Workers employed at South Africa's power generating company Eskom

have turned down a wage offer of 7 percent this year and 6.5 percent in 2019 and 2020.

Members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and the Solidarity union are demanding increases of 8 percent this year and 8.5 percent for the two following years. They also want a R750 (US \$55) housing allowance, a bonus of 12 percent of annual income in 2018, and 25 percent in 2019-20.

A further round of talks was scheduled for Tuesday this week with threats of an unofficial strike if the company does not concede.

## Nigerian workers picket telecom company

Members of the National Labour Congress (NLC) picketed South Africa's giant telecommunications company MTN at its Nigerian subsidiary on Monday. Similar action took place at other company facilities across the country.

NLC are accusing MTN of illegally employing almost the entire workforce as casuals and refusing union organisation. In May last year, MTN Nigeria sacked 280 workers of which 200 were full-time with up to 15 years of service.

The NLC hopes to increase its union dues base among the more than 5,000 casuals and employees at the company. The action concludes on Wednesday.

## Nigerian emergency medical workers protest over no wage payments for a year

Members of the Emergency Medical Workers (EMW) in Ondo state, Nigeria, protested Monday over 12 months' work without pay and continued casual status. EMW are mainly first providers of medical attention to accident victims on Nigeria's roads.

"Hunger is killing us," say the workers, "Rescue us to rescue others on the roads." The Commissioner for Health and the Secretary to the State Government refuses to meet them or implement the previous administration's promises of employment on the register and proper funding.

Also affected are 40 call centre agents and 80 other emergency workers.

### **Malawi court support staff strike for pay increase**

Malawi's lower and higher courts are closed as support staff strike for a promised pay increase of 27 percent.

The government's minister of finance claims they had signed off on the increase and it was the responsibility of the registrar of the high court to implement the increase.

The strikers refuse to return to work until the pay increase is implemented.

### **Nigerian journalists appeal for improved working conditions and allowances**

Staff at the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria in Kaduna went on strike Monday, demanding improvements in working conditions, equipment and payment of outstanding allowances.

A spokesman for the National Union of Journalists appealed to the government to intervene saying, "We are the voice or mouthpiece of the government within and outside Nigeria." The director of the station said he would hand a protest letter to the government.

### **Malawi teachers union calls off strike over salary arrears**

The Teachers Union of Malawi called off its planned July 9 strike and demonstration. Teachers in primary and secondary schools are owed K1.7 billion (US\$2.36 million) in salary arrears going back to 2010.

The strike threatened to disrupt examinations due to begin Monday.

### **Social workers in Gambia in sit-down strike demanding removal of managing director**

Gambian social service workers went on sit-down strike last week following a demonstration demanding the sacking of the managing director (MD).

Members of the Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation accuse the MD of corrupt practices, citing mismanagement of office, nepotism and favouritism.

### **Kenyan digital taxi drivers strike over inadequate compensation**

Kenyan digital taxi drivers were striking alongside their South African counterparts last week over low fares and high commissions on drivers.

The 2,000 Kenyan drivers organised in the Digital Taxi Association (DTA) are demanding a doubling of fares with a greater proportion going to them rather than Uber and Taxify.

DTA fares have been driven down due to competition, leaving drivers to work longer hours for less than a living wage.

### **Refuse workers in Huddersfield, UK suspend strike**

Refuse workers in Huddersfield, employed by the local Kirklees council, ended their weeklong strike on Monday.

The 80 Unison members were protesting bullying and racial abuse by management. Another grievance is that management declined requests to grant owed leave, citing staff shortages. Some workers were owed up to 30 weeks, while others were refused time off for medical appointments.

Some of the workers have since become eligible for retirement or taken other jobs, exacerbating the staff shortages.

### **Tram workers strike in Sheffield, UK**

Around 200 conductors and drivers working for the Supertram system in Sheffield, England held a 24-hour strike Monday. Another 24-hour strike against the company—run by private transport conglomerate, Stagecoach—was due to take place Thursday.

The Unite members voted to strike by an over 90 percent majority in pursuit of a 50 pence an hour pay increase against the company offer of 26 pence. Monday's strike saw only a handful of trams running. A 72-hour strike has been planned for July 20-22, the weekend of the Tramlines music festival.

### **Further strike by Arriva Northern Rail guards announced**

Guards working for the Arriva Northern Rail franchise in the UK are to hold a 24-hour strike on July 21. Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are continuing the long running dispute over the extension of the use of Driver Only Operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens 6,000 jobs and passenger safety.

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

RMT members at South Western Railway have voted to begin an overtime and rest day ban on July 17. This action is in response to victimization of strikers on South Western Railways.

### **London Underground rail maintenance staff strike**

Staff at the maintenance and stores depot of London Underground's rail depot in Ruislip in west London were set to strike Thursday till Sunday. The RMT members are in dispute over pay parity.

### **National rail strike in Belgium**

A 48-hour strike by Belgian rail workers working for the national rail company SNCB began at 3 a.m. on Tuesday. The action impacted rail services nationally, with only around a third of scheduled services operating.

Workers in the Metsip-Protect Union, the Independent Union of

Railway Workers and the Autonomous Union of Train Conductors are opposing plans to re-evaluate the role of train drivers.

The SNCB employs a workforce of 18,000.

### **Irish airline pilots to strike**

Pilots working for Ryanair in Ireland were due to begin a 24-hour strike Thursday. The dispute is over how pilots are transferred between its European and African bases.

Pilots also want a clearer system of leave allocation and promotion.

Talks were due to begin Wednesday between the Irish Airline Pilots Association and management to try and resolve the dispute.

Some 250 pilots employed by Ryanair on a contract basis will not join the 100 strikers. The company expected to cancel around 10 percent of its flights.

### **Strike threat by Irish ambulance staff**

Irish ambulance staff voted to begin strike action on July 24. The members of the National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) voted by a 98 percent majority for action.

Their employer, the Health Service Executive (HSE), is refusing to deduct NASRA union dues at source for new employees. The HSE argues that as it does not recognise NASRA for negotiating rights, it is not under any obligation to deduct the dues.

### **Firefighters in Cork, Ireland vote to strike**

Around 140 firefighters in the Irish city of Cork have voted overwhelmingly to take action up to and including strike action.

The members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union are opposing Cork City Council's refusal to honour an agreement to pay them monies due under the Public Services Stability Agreement. The Stability Agreement was ostensibly part of an easing of austerity measures.

The Cork fire brigade is the only full-time brigade not to have received this payment, worth about €500 for each firefighter. No strike date has been set.

### **Walkout by Norwegian oil and gas workers**

Around 650 workers at the Norwegian Knarr offshore oil and gas platforms walked off the job on Tuesday after rejecting a pay offer.

Talks that were held under the auspices of the state mediator—between the YS and Safe unions and the employers' representative, the Shipowners' Association—broke down.

A further 900 workers could join the action at midnight on Sunday if no agreement is reached, with a further 700 joining the strike later.

### **Ukrainian miners protest wages arrears**

Ukrainian miners held a protest outside the parliament building in Kiev on Wednesday over arrears of wages said to be 900m UAH (\$34m). Talks took place between miners' representatives and the energy ministry last Friday after a similar demonstration, but no agreement was reached.

### **Strike threat by Israeli Civil Administration workers**

Israeli Civil Administration employees are threatening to strike on Sunday. The Civil Administration is part of the Defence Ministry responsible for running affairs in the occupied West Bank.

They are protesting the Finance Ministry's refusal to meet their demands to improve working conditions.

### **Moroccan doctors' strike threat**

Moroccan doctors at government hospitals across the country, who carried out a 48-hour strike on June 26, are threatening a further 48-hour strike beginning July 18. They are demanding improved pay and working conditions.



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