

Growing strikes in South Africa; more UK rail strikes

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 October 2018

Ten thousand South African workers in plastic industry continue strike

Striking workers in South Africa's plastics industry are continuing their strike after an attempt by employers in the Labour Court in Johannesburg to ban the walkout was temporarily defeated.

Ten thousand employees began striking on October 15 for a 15 percent pay rise in line with colleagues in the metal industry, and a return to a R40 (US \$2.74) basic hourly rate.

South African bus workers wildcat strike

MyCiTi bus workers are into the second week of their wildcat strike although picketing has been restricted by the labour courts. Striking workers employed by Vehicle Operating Companies are on half the pay of employees at Cape Town municipality transport. They are demanding an end to outsourcing and pay parity.

A workers' spokesman accused the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa of not taking their complaints seriously.

South African firefighters continue work-to-rule in Cape Town

Firefighters in Cape Town's 30 stations are continuing a work-to-rule to demand a 40-hour week and no more than two hours a day overtime—instead of 24-hour shifts. They also want paid overtime.

The members of the South Africa Municipal Workers Union and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union have stopped all voluntary overtime above 40 hours a week.

In retaliation, Fire and Rescue Service management are monitoring sick leave and say they will hold firefighters responsible for any fire damages.

Firefighters are burdened with excessive overtime because of staff shortages. They have insufficient fire-fighting equipment and complain that in the dry season untrained staff are employed.

South African arms industry workers demonstrate over threat to jobs and wages

Around 1,000 workers at South Africa's arms manufacturer, Denel, protested October 17 over wages and cut backs.

The company is beset by economic problems and is negotiating with the Solidarity union to reduce staff and cut wages. The company claims it cannot guarantee wages in November. Some managers and specialists did not get full pay in September.

Negotiations have taken place with Saudi Arabia, which is interested in buying a stake in Denel.

South African engineers at Scaw Metals strike against violent shareholder

On Monday, engineers went on strike at Scaw Metals, Gauteng South Africa after a shareholder assaulted a worker for using a cell phone while on duty.

The recent attack has highlighted several assaults on employees by the same shareholder (unnamed) over a period, ignored by the company.

Mounting teachers' strikes in Sudan

Strikes are developing across Sudan as teachers and some civil servants down tools over wages that have gone unpaid for months. Strikers came out on Monday and protested in Central Darfur.

A teachers' spokesperson said if salaries are not paid by next Monday the strike will continue. Teachers have struck over several weeks in a number of states over deteriorating conditions. In El Gazira, just south of Khartoum, teachers occupied 200 schools to stop their closure.

Kenyan flower farm workers strike over unpaid wages

Flower farm workers at Zena Roses, in Gatanga Sub County, Kenya are on a go-slow to protest three months of unpaid wages.

The company has not paid subscriptions for health care, union dues and payments to loan companies so the 200 workers are unable to borrow and have no money for bus fares to work.

The workers also complain of the lack of safety equipment, particularly clothing, to protect them from harmful chemicals used in the industry.

Workers appealed to the Confederation of Trade Unions to support them.

Malawi university staff strike over unpaid pay rise

Support staff struck last week at the University of Malawi to demand an agreed pay increase in line with academic and administrative staff.

The sit-in strike is affecting several colleges, including the college of medicine, the college of nursing, and the Chancellor College. Students cannot access libraries, laboratories and other facilities.

Nigerian minimum wage dispute continues

The Nigerian labour congresses are threatening another strike on November 6 if the government does not uphold an increase in the minimum wage to N30,000 (US \$82.45) a month. The unions say government and industry agreed to this figure, but the government says it depends on resources.

Workers are demanding a minimum wage of N56,000 (US \$153.91) to N65,000 (US \$178.64).

The Nigeria Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress and the United Labour Congress have called a “day of rage” demonstration for October 30.

The government said it will meet any strike with a no-work no-pay rule. Minimum wage negotiations are constitutional every five years. The government refused to participate last September until a general strike forced negotiations.

The previous minimum wage settlement of N18,000 (US \$49.47) was rarely paid in the public sector, with workers receiving 50 or 35 percent, if paid at all.

Sierra Leone rutile miners walk out on wildcat strike

Part of the workforce at Iluka Resources’ subsidiary, Sierra Rutile in Sierra Leone, went on a wildcat strike this week stopping production. The striking miners, management and union officials met with the minister of labour to hear workers’ demands.

The Australian-based company is the largest producer of zircon and titanium dioxide-derived rutile and synthetic rutile in the world

Conductors on two UK rail franchises continue action to protest Driver Only Operated trains

Rail workers on two UK rail franchises are continuing their strike action over the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, which threatens passenger safety and the loss of 6,000 conductor posts nationally.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at Arriva North, which serves the north of England, will strike Saturday and the following two Saturdays. Conductors at South Western trains began a five-

day strike Tuesday. This is to be followed by 24-hour strikes on consecutive Saturdays from November 3 to 24.

The RMT has limited action against DOO to regional, short-term strikes, to isolate and dissipate struggles, without fundamentally affecting rail operations. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia. The union has agreed a sell-out deal “in principle” with Merseyrail and the Labour Party-led Liverpool City Region Combined Authority whereby “door control and dispatch of the trains will transfer to the driver” on new trains.

Welsh college staff vote to strike

Staff at Welsh further education facilities have voted by around 90 percent to strike for a 7.5 percent pay increase and cuts in their workload. The employers have offered a 1 percent rise.

The University and College Union has not, however, announced any dates for strike action and instead called on employers to negotiate.

Two-day strike by Finnish welfare workers

Finnish welfare sector workers in the JHL union held a two-day strike on Monday and Tuesday to oppose the government’s plans to make it easier to dismiss workers at entities employing less than 10 workers.

The strike affected meal provision at schools and day care centres, and closed some libraries and sports facilities. Health and social care staff in the Tehy union and nurses in the Super union supported the action by refusing to switch shifts.

Croatian shipyard workers strike over pay delays

The 4,000 workers at the Uljanik shipyards in Croatia came out on strike Monday demanding their September wages. They work at the company shipyards in Pula and Rijeka. Over 1,000 strikers marched through Pula.

The workers previously held a two-week strike at the end of August after the company failed to pay July and August wages. The Croatian government has a 25 percent share in the company and intervened to cover only those wage arrears.

The company has an ongoing financial crisis and is due to be monitored by the European Commission. A search for a private investor to bail out the company continues.

March by Croatian workers against raising pension age

Thousands of Croatian workers marched through the capital Zagreb on Saturday to protest government plans to increase the retirement age to 67, starting in 2033, and impose a 4 percent cut on workers taking early retirement.

The march was organised by the Independent Croatian Trade Union, NHS, the Association of Independent Trade Unions of Croatia, SSSH, and the Association of Croatian Trade Unions, MHS.

Workers from major cities such as Osijek, Pula, Rijeka, Slavonski Brod, Split and Varazdin, travelled to Zagreb for the protest. Marchers accused the government officials of being thieves and those working in heavy industry, as well as nurses, said they cannot physically continue working to that age. The unions have pledged to organise a referendum if the government does not back down.

Overtime ban threat by Irish ambulance drivers

Around 600 Irish ambulance drivers belonging to the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, an affiliate of the Psychiatric Nurses Association, have threatened an overtime ban beginning November 7.

They are protesting against their employer, the Health Service Executive (HSE), which is refusing to process union subscriptions for ambulance workers who had formerly belonged to the SIPTU union.

The HSE only recognises SIPTU. The ambulance service, which is heavily dependent on overtime working, will be affected by the ban if it goes ahead.

Strike by Polish airline staff

A strike of hundreds of pilots and cabin crew employed by the Polish state airline LOT, which began last Thursday, has continued this week.

LOT, which employs 3,000 staff members, plans to transfer some of its workers to self-employment contracts. On Monday, the company dismissed 67 of the striking workers. Workers are demanding their reinstatement.

Some staff employed by the Polish wing of Ryanair are also threatened with self-employment contracts as part of the company's transfer to a local subsidiary, Ryanair Sun.

Turkish airport construction workers strike over unpaid wages

Around 100 construction workers employed by DSG at the new Istanbul airport in Turkey came out on strike Monday saying they are owed three months' pay.

The site, which employs 35,000 construction workers, saw a strike in September after employees were injured when being transported to work. Other grievances included dangerous working conditions that have led to hundreds of deaths and poor dormitory conditions.

Turkish security forces attacked protesting workers and rounded up hundreds. Twenty-eight striking workers remain in detention from the previous strike.

The construction workers are under enormous pressure from the Turkish government to complete the prestigious new airport at the expense of their health and safety.

Arrests during national strike by Iranian teachers

Iranian teachers in the Coordination Council of Teachers' Trade Organisations struck on October 14 and 15 in 29 out of 31 of Iran's provinces. They were protesting low pay and poor working conditions.

Teachers said inflation had eroded their earnings. US sanctions have fuelled a collapse in the value of the Iranian currency.

Following the strike, six teachers were summoned to the Department of Public Place in Saqqez in western Iran. The Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA) reported the head of its secretariat was arrested. On October 17, an ITTA member in Saqqez was arrested by Intelligence Ministry agents.

On October 11, an ITTA member in Mashhad was reportedly arrested and held in an unknown location.

Workers in the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers Syndicate, who have conducted a long campaign against non-payment of wages, issued a statement supporting the teachers. Many shopkeepers closed their stores in support of the protest.

Strike by Tunisian public sector workers called off

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) called off a planned strike of public employees Wednesday after a retreat by the government. The strike was called in support of a pay increase and against plans to privatise public companies, including the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas and TunisAir.

The government agreed to raise pay and halt privatisation plans, with a deal due to be signed within a few days.

Under pressure from international lenders to address the \$3 billion loss accumulated by public companies, the government is preparing to renew its attacks.



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