

15,000 South African miners at Sybanye Stillwater still out; UK rail and shipbuilders strike; Turkish cosmetic workers strike passes 200 days

## **Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa**

**7 December 2018**

### **Rail strikes in northern England to continue**

A series of 24-hour strikes by guards each Saturday at Arriva North rail franchise in England will continue. This week, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) sponsored talks to end the strikes between the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union and the company. They broke down on Tuesday with no agreement.

Guards at Arriva North have been taking strike action over many months over plans by the company to introduce driver only operation trains (DOO). DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 conductors' jobs.

The RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia. The union has agreed to 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. In June, the RMT agreed to a framework deal with West Midlands Trains, agreeing that "On such new or modified rolling stock, train drivers will operate the train doors and undertake train dispatch in normal circumstances..."

The next Northern Rail strike will take place on Saturday, with subsequent strikes on December 15, 22 and 29.

### **Strike by rail catering staff in Edinburgh, Scotland**

Staff working for Rail Gourmet in Edinburgh went on strike Tuesday. It followed a previous strike in October. They are protesting bullying behavior by management, abuse of disciplinary procedures and non-payment of extra duties.

The members of the RMT union supply catering services on the LNER rail service, which runs trains between London and Edinburgh on the east coast route.

A further 24-hour strike is planned for Christmas Eve.

### **UK shipbuilders continue sectional strike action**

Strikes at shipbuilders Cammell Laird in the English town of Birkenhead are continuing. The workers are taking the action against plans by the company to impose 291 redundancies by March next year—40 percent of the workforce.

Workers walked out on November 23, marking the beginning of an overtime ban. The Unite and GMB unions' 24-hour strikes have been extended to January 18 next year.

### **UK postal workers set to walk out on Isle of Man**

UK postal workers on the Isle of Man have voted by over 90 percent to hold a 48-hour strike December 13 and 14. The action by the members of the Communication Workers Union is to protest plans to downgrade their pension scheme, impose a below inflation pay rise and bring in a two-tier workforce.

On December 1, postal workers demonstrated across the UK to oppose plans to close some Crown post offices and transfer others to franchise operations run by the likes of high street retailer, WH Smith. Around 70 post offices are at risk of closure or marked to be put out to franchise.

### **Cleaners begin week-long strike at UK airport**

Cleaners working for Sasse at Luton airport in southern England began a weeklong strike on Tuesday. The Unite members are demanding an improved pay offer. They currently earn £7.83 an hour and the company's offer of 9 percent over three years will leave them below the so-called living wage of £9 an hour.

A planned strike by staff at Clece Care Services, which assists disabled passengers at the airport, was suspended while the staff vote on an improved pay offer.

### **Bus drivers in Keighley, England take strike action, North East drivers to join them**

Around 180 drivers working for the Keighley Bus Company held a 24-hour strike Tuesday to pursue a 50p an hour pay increase. The company has offered a 34p rise over two years. The Acas government conciliation service has arranged a meeting between the Unite union and company for Monday next week.

Meanwhile around 650 bus drivers at Arriva Durham County Ltd in the north east are due to begin a week's stoppage on December 16. The workers voted by over 90 percent to take the action for a £1 an hour pay rise, backdated to March this year. A Unite official said the drivers were the second lowest paid drivers across the Arriva network of bus companies.

### **French oil refinery workers strike suspended**

A week-long strike by French oil refinery workers was suspended on November 29. The members of the Stalinist-led CGT union had been on strike at Total's refinery at Gonfreville for a pay increase. Annual salary negotiations are due to start December 11.

### **German pharmacy workers in Wuppertal protest job cuts**

Around 1,000 workers at the German Bayer pharmaceutical plant in Wuppertal held a demonstration at the site on Monday.

They were protesting plans by the multinational company to cut 12,000, or 10 percent of its international workforce by 2025. The pharmacy workers fear around 350 of the jobs will be lost at Wuppertal.

### **Turkish cosmetic workers in Gebze pass 200th day of picketing**

Around 130 workers at the Flormar cosmetics factory in Gebze, northwest Turkey have been mounting a picket each day at the factory for over 200 days for the right to join a union.

They were fired for joining the Petrol-Is union.

Flormar is owned by the multinational cosmetic firm Yves Rocher. With winter approaching, the pickets set up a fire and tent to provide shelter and warmth but last month the regional governor banned the use of the brazier, shelter and megaphone.

### **Protest by Bulgarian miners and energy workers to demand security of employment**

On November 29, Bulgarian miners marched along with energy workers in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. Around 2,000 supported the march to the European Union headquarters where they held a rally.

Their main demand was to ensure the security of employment and opposing EU plans to rundown coalmines.

### **Croatian shipbuilders hold further strike against wage arrears**

Workers at the Croatian shipbuilding group Uljanik began their fourth major strike this year on Monday. All shipbuilding throughout the group came to a standstill.

They are demanding payment of wages for September and October. They are also protesting the ongoing financial fragility at the yard, which threatens jobs.

They are demanding state intervention to secure the yard. The Croatian government said its hands are tied by EU regulation.

### **Bus strikes in Cyprus over unpaid wages**

Bus workers in Larnaca at the Zenon bus company, at Emel in Limassol and Osypa in Paphos struck Monday over non-payment of wages arrears. None were paid their November wages and are concerned about payment of their December salary and end of year bonuses. The SEK union members in Larnaca returned to work Tuesday after government reassurances that the arrears would be paid. Workers in Limassol and Paphos returned Wednesday.

### **Staff at two Irish Tesco supermarket stores to strike**

Staff at Tesco stores in Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon are set to strike. Those at Sligo were due to strike Thursday and again on December 14. Workers at Carrick are due to strike December 22.

Staff at both stores voted by big turnouts and margins to take action in pursuit of trade union representation.

### **Tunisian teachers in exam boycott**

Teachers in Tunisian secondary schools began a boycott of exams on Monday. The action by members of the Secondary Education Union is supported by 90 percent of teachers.

They are protesting lack of career progression and the funding of special grants. The government education minister threatened to take legal action.

### **South African Gold Fields miners oppose union jobs sellout**

The regional leader of South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has called on miners to end their four-week strike against Gold Fields.

Gauteng NUM regional chairman Ndlela Radebe was reportedly stabbed at an NUM mass meeting on Monday, after he called for a return to work on Gold Fields terms already rejected by miners.

The company said they will proceed with plans to make a quarter of its 5,500-workforce redundant, and only increase severance pay.

### **Half the miners at Sybanye Stillwater mine, Johannesburg continue pay strike**

Half the workforce at South Africa's Sybanye Stillwater mine in Johannesburg are continuing their strike over pay. The 15,000 miners began the stoppage November 21.

The members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union are demanding a R12,500 (US \$913) monthly basic wage and R1,000 (US \$73) pay increase over each of the next three years.

The National Union of Mineworkers have settled for a 5.5 percent pay increase, that is below the 6.5 percent the major mine companies agreed.

South Africa's Minister for Mineral Resources intervened to call for the strike to end.

#### **Chauffeurs strike at Avis South Africa for wage increase**

South African chauffeurs working for international car hire company, Avis, came out on strike last week for a pay increase. Around 70 drivers are complaining about long hours and poor pay.

Avis chauffeurs receive the minimum wage of R3,500 (US \$254) a month and have put in a claim for R19,500 (US \$1,415), considered the living wage.

Avis South Africa is refusing to negotiate with or recognize the Motor Transport Workers Union bargaining for the chauffeurs.

#### **South Africa's Free State municipal workers in Masilonyana demonstrate over unpaid wages and contributions**

Workers in Masilonyana, Free State South Africa demonstrated on Wednesday against the municipality over unpaid wages for November. Their dues have not been paid for months.

The South African Municipal Workers Union deny their members are on strike. Workers have been protesting for a month demanding the mayor resign. The authorities are blaming workers for local townships being without water for weeks.

#### **Bread production pickets in Cape Town, South Africa hospitalized after police assault**

Workers picketing Blue Ribbon bread in Salt River, Cape Town, were attacked by police firing rubber bullets and stun grenades.

The members of the Food and Allied Workers Union Workers came out Wednesday last week for a 10 percent pay rise and a payment of R48 (US \$3.5) to the union funeral policy.

Two injured workers remained in hospital, while two other pickets were imprisoned for four without charge.

#### **Ethiopian road workers hold infrastructure company representative over unpaid wages**

Ethiopian road engineering workers have detained representatives of the Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Ltd (IL+FS), an Indian shadow lending company, over wages unpaid from November 25.

The company has not paid in workers' taxes or pensions contributions for the last nine months. IL+FS, an Indian banking company in a joint venture with a Spanish company, has got into massive financial difficulties with unpaid debts of \$12.5 billion.

The seven Indian representatives of IL+FS, held at three different sites in Oromia and Amhara states, have appealed to their employers and Prime Minister Nerandi Modi to pay the workers' wages.

Modi's Indian government took over IL+FS on October 15, saying it represented a risk to the Indian economy. It brought in the Serious Fraud Investigation Office to investigate the company.

#### **Namibian municipal workers strike for pay increase**

Katima Mulilos council workers in Namibia began a strike from Monday to demand a nine percent wage increase.

The council initially offered no increase but changed it to five percent.

The cash starved council owes N\$19 million (US \$1.4 million) to state owned Nam Water and its water supply is regularly cut off. Rubbish has also not been collected for at least the last two months.

A council worker said employees are unable to do their jobs as the vehicles are in disrepair.

#### **Academics continue strikes at Nigerian universities**

A strike by academics at universities in Nigeria begun November 5 is continuing.

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities are protesting over lack of funding to the universities and the non-implementation of a 2017 Memorandum of Action agreed with the government.

The Federal government in Nigeria has instructed all vice chancellors not to pay strikers, imposing a no-work no-pay rule. Non-academic staff are being paid and students are instructed to stay at home.

#### **Sierra Leonean rutile miners strike ends**

An eight-day strike by workers at Australian owned mine, Sierra Rutile, in Sierra Leone was called off November 30.

*Reuters* reported that the strike began because four union leaders were suspended for their involvement in the previous stoppage. The 50 workers cut the power at the facility and barricaded local roads. The strike ended after negotiations between President Julius Maada Bio, the Vice President and various ministries with the United Mineworkers Union.

A previous mid-October stoppage was deemed illegal and called off after the Minister of Labour intervened. Sierra Rutile refused to state why the strike had taken place.



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