

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## Fight by rail guards at UK rail franchises continues

28 December 2018

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Rail guards working for Arriva North held their 41st day of strike action on December 22, with further 24-hour strikes due tomorrow and each Saturday throughout January. Guards working for South Western Railways held a 24-hour strike Thursday with a further one planned for December 31. In both disputes, the action is over the extension of the use of driver only operated trains (DOO). The guards are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. 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 also 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 that “On such new or modified rolling stock, train drivers will operate the train doors and undertake train dispatch in normal circumstances ...”

### Strike by staff at rail food provider in Scottish capital

Over 20 staff working for Edinburgh based Rail Gourmet, which provides food on the LNER rail service, were on strike Christmas Eve. The third such strike by RMT members is in response to accusations of bullying and harassment, non-compliance with disciplinary procedures and non-payment for additional duties carried out.

### UK food couriers sacked in lead-up to Christmas

In the week running up to Christmas, the Deliveroo food courier service sacked hundreds of its couriers by email. Each courier was sent the identical email, accusing them of fraud and terminating their contract. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union, which represents some Deliveroo staff, suggested the sackings were aimed at weakening growing resistance among Deliveroo staff. IWW couriers have demanded the company provide evidence of any alleged fraud.

### Strike by journalists in Cumbria, northern England

Journalists working for the Newsquest Cumbria newspaper group in north west England walked out on strike December 20. The group publishes the *Carlisle News and Star*, the *Cumberland News*, the *Workington Times and Star* and the *Whitehaven News*. The National Union of Journalists members are opposing Newsquest’s actions since taking over the group in March this year. The company has imposed a pay freeze and made around 100 journalists redundant, including many of the most experienced.

### Cleaners at UK airport strike

Cleaning staff at Luton airport in southern England began a weeklong strike on December 21. They are fighting against low pay, being paid just £7.83 an hour. They have rejected a 9 percent increase over three years from their employers Sasse. The Unite union members held a weeklong strike in early December over the same issue.

### Strike by security staff at royal palaces in UK capital

Security staff working for the Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) in London staged a three-hour walkout on December 21 to be followed by similar action today and January 2. Included in the action were the iconic beefeaters at the Tower of London. Staff at Kensington Palace and Hampton Court are also involved. They are members of the Public and Commercial Services union and are opposed to plans by HRP to transfer staff to an inferior pension scheme. Members of the GMB union at the three HRP sites are due to take separate strike action on January 8 over the same issue.

### Strike by bus drivers in Durham, England back on

The strike by around 650 bus drivers working for Arriva buses in Durham is back on. The weeklong strike is due to begin on Sunday January 6. A previous strike due to begin December 16 was suspended

after the company put a revised pay offer. However, the drivers, who are the second lowest paid Arriva drivers, voted by over 70 percent to reject the offer of 75p an hour increase over two years in four instalments and instead fight for their demand of £1 an hour increase backdated to March this year. The Unite union members are based at depots in Darlington, Durham, Redcar, Stockton and Whitby.

### **French games workers in pay dispute fired**

Last week six workers employed by video games developer Eugen Systems were fired. They represent around a quarter of the workforce. At the end of 2016 workers discovered they were being paid less than the statutory minimum wage for games developers. They began a campaign to be paid the statutory rate. Negotiations failed to advance their claim, which is due to be heard at a labour tribunal in March next year. In February this year, half the workforce walked out on strike over the issue. The six who have been fired were involved in the strike. The company said they were sacked for making disparaging remarks about the company in an online chat forum. The workforce is represented by the STJV trade union.

### **Walkout by German Amazon staff**

Staff at two Amazon fulfilment centres in Germany walked out on the evening of December 21. The two sites are in Werne in the west of the country and Saxony in the east. The walkouts were part of a five-year-long dispute by Verdi union members who demand to be paid the going rate for retail staff in Germany. Amazon continues to insist they are logistics workers and are being paid accordingly.

### **Strike threat by German airport security staff**

Security staff at several German airports are threatening to strike in January in their demand for higher pay. Verdi, the union representing around 23,000 airport security staff, has yet to announce which airports would be affected and the specific dates of any strikes if they give the go ahead. Talks on pay are to resume on January 23.

### **Strike by staff at Irish Tesco store**

Around 90 percent of the workforce at the Carrick-on-Shannon branch of Tesco in northwest Ireland struck on December 22. The Mandate union members voted by a majority of more than 80 percent to strike. They accuse the company of refusing to abide by collective agreements. They also seek improved canteen facilities, and for the union to be able to negotiate on pay, weekly hours worked and rosters. The 180 staff recruited before 1996 have refused to change their contract to one with less favourable hours. They have not had pay rises in line with other workers in contracts from 1996 onwards. The Tesco pickets were joined by members of the An Post Carrick branch of the Communication

Workers Union.

### **Portuguese rail workers Christmas strike**

Rail workers employed by the Portuguese state-owned rail company CP were on strike Monday and Christmas Day. The strikes are part of a continuing campaign for improved working conditions. CP was only able to run a skeleton service, with less than a third of scheduled services running. It was expected services would continue to be disrupted on Boxing Day as a result of the strikes.

### **Portuguese firefighters strike over Christmas holiday period**

Portuguese firefighters are striking over the Christmas holiday period over their professional status and the age at which they can retire. The firefighters said they would respond to any emergency callouts.

### **Portuguese dockers end long-running strike**

Dock workers at the Portuguese port of Setubal went back to work on December 15, ending their near six-week strike. The strike ended following an agreement between employers and the Seal union. Under the agreement 56 casual workers have been offered contracts immediately, with between 10 and 37 casual workers to be offered contracts in the near future. The offer had been put forward by the employers previously but this time it included a promise to address discrimination of Seal members at two other ports. Middle East

### **Iranian truckers begin fifth round of action**

Iranian truck drivers began their fifth round of strike action on December 21, which is due to end on December 31. They took their first action in September. The nationwide strike is to protest corruption by law enforcement representatives, the high cost of fuel and spare parts, low pay and the bad state of the road system.

### **Striking South African Sibanye miners repel strike ban**

Fifteen thousand gold miners at Sibanye Stillwater are continuing a stoppage that their employers have declared illegal. This was after workers acted against a deal the firm agreed with three other unions. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) is opposing a proposed settlement of the strike agreed to by the National Union of Mineworkers and two smaller unions. An AMCU spokesman described the agreement as slave labour. AMCU claims that Sibanye has been encouraging recruitment of its members to the other three unions in order to bring their total representation to above 50 percent. Under South

African labour law amendments, if above 50 percent of the total union membership accepts a deal, it is imposed on the rest of the workforce.

### **South African bus drivers reluctantly return to work after wildcat strike**

Long distance bus drivers working for Autopax went on strike on December 19. Seven hundred workers employed by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa subsidiary came out on a wildcat strike after the company arbitrarily postponed overtime payments. Payments were held back that should have been paid for Christmas, leaving workers' income short of what was expected for the festive period. After 105 bus journeys had been cancelled affecting 3,900 passengers, the South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union stepped in and the drivers went back the next day. Angry strikers were reluctant to return to work as a second demand, the removal of Autopax's CEO, had not been fulfilled.

### **South African airline workers strike called off**

Airline workers at South Africa's Comair were kept from striking over the Christmas period as the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) agreed to go into arbitration on December 20. They will meet with Comair management and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. NUMSA will sit on a committee with management to discuss workers' pay and other grievances. Among their grievances, workers are demanding a pay increase of 12 percent and an upgrade in their allowances to bring them into line with other airport employees. Comair provides airport services to British Airways and Kulula South Africa throughout the country.

### **South African union federation hold demonstration over pay and conditions**

Workers protested outside the parliament in Cape Town on December 20 to demand improved wages and conditions. They are members of the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU). Tens of thousands of workers in the federation are involved in protracted strikes, including in the plastics industry, at the pharmacist Dis-Chem and at Premier Foods. These strikes have been marred by predominantly state-organised violence, which the authorities seeking to utilise claims of violence at picket lines as a justification for making strikes illegal. This follows a change in legislation introduced in November. SAFTU has called a general strike to be held in March in opposition to the R20-an-hour minimum wage rate being introduced on January 1.

### **Nigeria's National Labour Congress calls for protest**

Nigeria's National Labour Congress (NLC) has called a national day of protest on January 11 to demand implementation of a promised minimum wage agreement. The NLC previously called off a general strike planned

for November 5 at the 11th hour, after accepting promises of an early government bill on a minimum wage agreement. No bill has yet been proposed, making it difficult for the NLC to contain workers' anger, particularly among public sector workers. In an attempt to placate workers, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said the bill will be put forward soon.

### **Nigerian parliamentary workers strike called off**

Workers at Nigeria's parliament were sent back to work on December 20, with the union involved claiming management have agreed its demands. The Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN) held a four-day warning strike for the implementation of a pay increase and a 2009 conditions of service agreement, CONLESS. PASAN called off the stoppage to allow parliamentary budget business to go ahead, while an injunction against the strike was put in place but not served on the union, which they say was unnecessary. Although parliamentary management have previously refused to negotiate with PASAN, they say they will discuss the workers' grievances.

### **Zambian postal workers' two-week strike over pay ends after management promises**

The National Union for Communication postal workers union called off their two-week strike at Zampost on a promise by management to pay five months of unpaid wages. The strike ended Monday on the promise that a decision will be made Wednesday when "some" of the outstanding salaries would be paid. The union assured the company that its members would be working New Year's Day to recover money lost by Zampost due to the strike.

### **Council workers strike in Zambia over unpaid wages**

Zambian council workers began a nationwide strike on December 22 to demand payment of over two months of unpaid wages. They are taking action in Mongu, the capital of the western province and other areas of the country. Led by a delegation from the FIRESUZ fire brigades union, workers in Mongu protested at the offices of their employers demanding to know the whereabouts of their wages. In a thinly disguised threat, council management claim that many of its posts are severely overstaffed, resulting in a shortage of resources. In Chipata, members of the Zambia United Local Authorities Workers Union acted in the form of a go-slow demanding unpaid wages for December 2017 and November 2018.

### **Zimbabwe doctors and radiographers strike ruled illegal**

A court ruling has deemed illegal the month-long Zimbabwe doctors and radiographers strike. In response, the government has suspended 550 mainly junior doctors. The strike is in pursuit of a pay increase, pay in US dollars, better working conditions, provision of medicines and working

medical equipment. The rest of the country's doctors and medical officers, a further 500, are continuing to strike in support of their colleagues. According to *Sowetan Live*, this means there are no working doctors or medicines in Zimbabwe's public hospitals and it is predicted the nurses will soon follow suit. All discussion with the Health Service Board has been suspended by the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association until they deem a serious offer is made. Zimbabwe's hospital system is dependent on aid from the US and Europe.



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