

Public sector workers strike in defence of teachers in Greece, strikes across Zimbabwe, South African gold miners' stoppage at Sibanye spreads

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 January 2019

### Public sector strike and protests in support of Greek teachers

On Thursday, hundreds of striking teachers and their supporters marched through Athens. The action was part of a 24-hour public sector strike called by civil servants' union Adedy.

Teachers have held two recent protests, which were attacked by riot police using tear gas. They are protesting the hiring of teachers on temporary contracts. Over the last 10 years, around 30,000 teachers are laid off each June. They then move around the country, often working away from home, to secure another temporary post for the next year.

The pseudo-left Syriza government claims it will hire 15,000 full-time teachers over the next three years, beginning in the autumn—but temporary teachers are unlikely to qualify. There is also a teacher shortage of 30,000.

On January 11, riot police attacked protesting teachers who marched to the Greek parliament and attempted to enter the building. An MP and a teachers' union leader were admitted to hospital as a result of the police violence. Such was the excessive force used by the riot squad it forced an investigation to be called. *Kathemerini* reported Citizens' Protection minister Olga Gerovasili describing the action "unacceptable and politically dangerous acts by certain members of the riot police".

On January 14, primary school teachers in the DOE union went on a 24-hour strike while the secondary teachers in the OLME union walked out between 11am and 2 pm. A demonstration in Athens attracted around 3,000 teachers; some carrying banners reading, "Permanent Hirings Now!" It was again attacked outside the parliament building with riot police firing tear gas canisters into protesters.

Thursday's strike and protest coincided with discussion on the bill to hire additional teachers taking place in the Greek parliament.

### Arriva North rail workers in England to hold further strikes

Rail guards working for Arriva North in northern England are to strike on Saturday—their 45th day of action. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are opposing the introduction of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

Twenty-four-hour strikes are taking place each Saturday throughout January. Last Saturday's picket swelled to 200, after the picket line the

previous week was threatened by far-right-wing thugs.

The RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed DOO deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia.

### Scottish rail contract staff in Edinburgh to strike

Workers at the Edinburgh-based ISS rail contractor are to hold a 24-hour strike on January 27. The RMT members at Edinburgh Waverley station are taking the action over the ISS's failure to improve staff accommodation facilities and install air conditioning as they had promised.

### Drivers at Arriva bus company plan further pay strikes in northern England

Around 650 bus drivers at Arriva in northern England are planning a further stoppage over pay parity. The company serves County Durham, Teesside and parts of North Yorkshire.

The Unite members are to hold a 10-day strike beginning January 27. According to the union, the drivers working for the company are the second lowest paid within the Arriva group.

### Lecturers at 16 UK colleges to strike

Staff at 16 UK colleges are to hold a two-day strike beginning January 29. The University and College Union (UCU) members are demanding a pay increase. They have seen 25 percent erosion in pay over the last decade. College lecturers earn around £7,000 less than secondary school teachers.

Lecturers at six colleges went on strike for improved pay in November.

In another dispute, 70,000 UCU members at universities across the UK

are currently being balloted for strike action over pay. The ballot is due to close February 22. Last year, the UCU betrayed a strike by 50,000 university lecturers and administrators in defence of their pensions—the largest such strike in history.

### **Strike by public sector workers in Jersey**

Civil servants on the island of Jersey struck on Monday and Tuesday. Strikers included custom and immigration staff, health and community services staff and teaching assistants.

The Unite and Prospect union members are seeking a pay rise.

On Tuesday, striking civil servants gathered in Royal Square as members of the Jersey parliament held their first meeting of the year.

National Education Union (NEU) members on the island voted by a 97 percent majority to strike over pay. The NEU is proposing a series of limited rolling strikes by teachers, but has yet to announce final details.

### **UK protest by London minicab drivers**

Around 1,000 minicab drivers held a protest in central London on Monday. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members were protesting the imposition of the congestion charge on private hire drivers, such as those working for Uber. The charge is to start in April.

Drivers say the £11.50 a day charge would mean a 25 percent cut in their earnings. They pledged to repeat the demonstrations each Monday.

### **Strike by staff at UK Ministry of Justice announced**

Outsourced staff providing security, cleaning and receptionist services at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) building in London are due to begin a 48-hour strike on January 21.

The United Voices of the World union members are demanding to be paid the so-called London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour. Cleaners at the MoJ went on strike in August, winning a 12 percent wage rise bringing them up to their current £9 an hour.

In a separate dispute, outsourced staff at the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy department will hold a 24-hour strike on January 22. The Public and Commercial Services union members demand to be paid the London Living Wage.

### **Care workers in northwest England to vote on strike action**

Around 600 low-paid care workers employed by the charity Alternative Futures Group (AFG) voted this week to strike. They will initially hold a 48-hour stoppage.

The Unison members are opposed to AFG's plans to cut the rate for sleep-ins, which could leave them up to £40 a night short.

Many organisations paid carers a lump sum to cover the period when they were sleeping in. However, in 2016 a court ruled that workers carrying out sleep-ins were due the minimum wage rather than a lower

lump sum rate. A recent court of appeal overturned this, and many organisations are now returning to paying a minimal lump sum.

Following intervention by the Unison public sector union, AFG increased its proposed lump sum payment from £40 to £55 a night beginning in March, but this still represents a £15 a night cut.

### **German security staff strike at eight airports**

Security staff at eight German airports held an 18-hour strike Tuesday. The airports affected were Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, Hanover, Bremen, Leipzig, Dresden and Erfurt.

The Verdi union members are demanding €20 an hour pay.

The strikes affected flights of passengers and cargo, with nearly 500 flights cancelled at Frankfurt alone.

The dispute is ongoing, with strikes at Berlin, Cologne-Bonn, Dusseldorf and Stuttgart last week, cancelling over 800 flights. The next negotiations are due January 23.

### **Strike by Belgian telecommunications workers**

Workers at the Belgian telecommunications company Proximus held a one-day strike Tuesday. The CSC Transcom union members are protesting plans by the company to make 1,900 redundancies, including compulsory ones, as part of a restructuring plan.

Around 2,000 pickets gathered outside the Brussels-based Proximus headquarters during the strike.

### **Strike by dockers at Cypriot port**

Dockers at the Cypriot port of Limassol were to hold a 24-hour strike Wednesday. The strike, called by the PEO union, is over the introduction of an arbitration panel to conduct negotiations between the union and management over the renewal of a collective bargaining agreement.

There have been a series of disputes since the port was privatized in 2017.

### **Nationwide demonstrations planned in Hungary over forced overtime**

Nationwide protests are planned tomorrow in Hungary against legislation passed by the right-wing government of Victor Orban. It extends enforced overtime from 250 to 400 hours a year. In addition, the period for delayed payment of overtime has been extended from 12 months to three years.

### **Irish nurses to strike in pay dispute**

A series of 24-hour strikes planned by Irish nurses is due to begin at the

end of the month. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation and the Psychiatric Nurses Association members are seeking a 12 percent pay rise to bring them in line with physiotherapists.

The unions met with the Irish Health Executive on Tuesday but made no progress. The Irish government public spending oversight committee is to meet today to discuss the issue. The government may go to the Workplace Relations Committee and the Labour Court to avert the stoppages.

### **Strike threat by Dutch photojournalists**

Around 300 Dutch photojournalists are threatening to strike on January 25. The NVJ/NVF union members are seeking a 14 percent rise in the rates paid to them for photos.

In 2014, the average paid per photo was €80, and today it is around €42. The union has written to six major media outlets calling for talks.

### **Strike across Palestinian West Bank**

Thousands took part in a strike across the occupied Palestinian West Bank on Tuesday, and businesses also closed. Hundreds attended protests in Ramallah.

They were protesting the introduction of social security legislation by the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian workers will have to contribute to the scheme, with public sector workers paying 10 percent of their salaries. Many workers fear the funds will be mismanaged.

### **Tunisian public sector workers strike**

Tunisian public sector workers were set to strike Thursday over pay. A meeting on Tuesday between the UGTT union and the Tunisian government failed to agree a pay raise for 670,000 civil servants.

The sectors to be affected include staff working in ports, airports and government offices. The Tunisian government is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to freeze public sector pay.

### **Moroccan month of anger protests**

Workers in Morocco have planned strikes and protests in January in a so-called month of anger. The CDT union members planned a protest and motor convoy in Tangiers on January 11. The UMT federation members were scheduled to take part in protests, strikes and marches between January 10 to 20.

The protests are to highlight the high cost of living, unemployment, lack of opportunities for young people and deteriorating social conditions. They are also demanding the government respect union rights as agreed in an April 2011 memorandum.

### **Zimbabwean striking workers shot by state forces; unions call off**

### **doctors' strike**

Workers in Zimbabwe on a three-day general strike were shot at by state forces using live ammunition. At least two workers died and many more were wounded.

Members of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) came out after fuel prices were doubled over the weekend. A ZCTU spokesman said a worker travelling to work typically spends \$260 a month on fares whereas average pay is \$300. Many workers cannot afford travel costs.

Many civil service workers were already on strike over starvation wages and the collapsing economic and social system. Greyhound buses into Harare were cancelled on Monday.

The ZCTU are demanding the government pay workers in US dollars as the Zimbabwe national currency is becoming worthless. A currency shortage, however, is making it impossible to acquire foreign exchange to pay all workers in dollars. Some small businesses lack dollars to buy imports, threatening further job losses.

The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industry, cited in the *New Zimbabwe* said, "Industry is facing imminent collapse. The house is burning."

On January 10, the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association called off the 40-day doctor's stoppage, despite the doctors' disapproval because it did not address their demand for a salary review.

The Ministry of Health and Child Care pledged to improve drug distribution, health facilities in the hospitals and the issue of outstanding promotions.

Zimbabwe's hospital system, once the best in Africa, now needs \$8 billion just to return to where it was. This is the equivalent of Zimbabwe's total budget.

### **South African Sibanye platinum miners to join gold miners' stoppage at Sibanye Stillwater Gold**

South African platinum miners at Sibanye are threatening to join gold miners at Sibanye Stillwater Gold on strike January 21.

Fifteen thousand Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members have been on strike for eight weeks, demanding a pay increase of R1,000 each year over three years.

Sibanye Gold agreed a deal with three other unions including the National Union of Mineworkers, which AMCU called a slave labour agreement.

The company claims that AMCU represents less than 50 percent of the workforce, which under employment law would mean the settlement applies to all workers at Sibanye's three South African gold mining operations.

AMCU has a majority membership in the platinum mines, particularly at Lonmin Platinum—the company Sibanye is bidding to take over in February. The company said it would not increase its offer agreed with the other unions, even if the strike is extended.

### **Mali workers in three-day general strike**

Workers in all sectors in Mali went on three-day general strike Wednesday last week over pay, bonuses, retirement and other grievances.

National Union of Workers of Mali (NUWM) members including public sector workers and miners came out on strike December 18. Some of the

workers, including railway employees have not been paid for many months, went on hunger strike.

Mali's Radio and Television were able only to play pre-recorded music and national news coverage was largely paralysed.

NUWM claimed 95 percent of workers adhered to the strike call.

Elections in Mali were cancelled in the middle of last year and a year-long extension of an existing state of emergency was imposed October 31.

### **Nigerian government/unions agree another deadline for minimum wage**

On January 8, during a day of protest by workers demanding a minimum wage, Nigeria's federal government agreed to put a minimum wage bill to parliament.

Members of the National Labour Congress (NLC) and two other federations are in an ongoing struggle against starvation wages. Workers had wanted a monthly minimum wage of N56,000 to N65,000, but the NLC settled for N30,000, last September.

The government missed an earlier implementation deadline—agreed after strike threats—for December 31.

President Muhammadu Buhari was reported asking how the NLC expects the federal and state governments to pay N30,000 when they cannot pay the present minimum wage of N18,000.

### **Nigeria's Kwara state doctors and nurses begin wages strike**

An indefinite strike by doctors and nurses in Nigeria's Kwara state began Monday. Workers are demanding the implementation of a 10 percent wage increase agreed with employers.

The Joint Council of Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria and the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives called for the strike to be extended January 21 to all health facilities, hospitals and the Agricultural and Environment Ministries.

### **Nigerian academic staff strike enters week 11**

Nigeria's university lecturers are into week 11 of strike action after members rejected a government offer.

Academic Staff of University Unions members describe the government university education bill offer made January 7 of N15.4 billion as tokenism.

The government promised a university revitalization fund valued at N1.1 trillion. Workers are demanding the government release N220 billion for this quarter, which would include their outstanding allowances.



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