

Platinum miners join South African Sibanye gold miners' stoppage;
South African plastics strike continues, Zimbabwe

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 January 2019

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

On Tuesday, South African platinum miners at Sibanye joined strike action alongside gold miners at Sibanye Stillwater Gold.

The 15,000 gold miners have been on strike for nine weeks. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members are 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 AMCU represents less than 50 percent of the workforce, which under employment law means the settlement applies to all workers at Sibanye's three South African gold mining operations.

AMCU, however, has a majority membership in the platinum mines. An order by the Labour Court to determine the total membership of the AMCU was halted on appeal by the union.

Sibanye is earning super profits from sales of palladium and rhodium, extracted from its platinum mines in South Africa and Canada as prices have soared.

Police shoot at South African striking miners

Striking pickets were shot at with rubber bullets last week by South African police at LanXess Chrome Mining, Johannesburg. One worker was killed and another wounded. They are striking over wages.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa is pressing the Independent Police Investigative Directorate to investigate.

South African plastic workers reject divisive offer

Ten thousand workers in South Africa's plastics industry are continuing their strike after rejecting their employers' divisive pay offer.

The workers came out in October to demand pay parity with engineers and a 15 percent settlement this year, in line with the Metal and Engineering Industries Bargaining Council. Included in their demands is a return to the R40 minimum wage, against the recently imposed R20.

Talks collapsed after employers sought to introduce different pay rates depending on location—lesser rates in more remote areas. They also wanted to base wage increases on basic rather than actual rates of pay.

The National Union of Metalworkers members rejected the offer, saying it undermines the principle of same wage for same work.

The workers are employed in the IT, cell phone and auto industry.

South African Bakery workers' pay strike at Blue Ribbon Bread

South African workers at Premier's Blue Ribbon Bread, Cape Town, are continuing a strike over pay that began in November.

The Food and Allied Workers Union members are demanding a 10 percent annual wage increase and funeral cover.

Employers offered 8 percent until 2021, with no reference to the funeral fund.

Several workers were hospitalised when South African Police shot rubber bullets at pickets. Other workers were held in prison for up to four days without being charged.

Workers at an adjacent wheat mill took unofficial action in support.

South African municipal workers in Greater Tzaneen Municipality protest sackings

A South African labour court has backed the sacking of 150 Greater Tzaneen Municipality (GTM) municipal workers and demanded they end their protest.

The street cleaners were informed on Christmas day that their jobs would end on December 31. Some had worked for the municipality for several years and expected permanent contracts or to be taken on by the new contractor brought in by GMT.

The South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union members refused an offer from the council to take on 26 of their number.

The union is taking the dispute to arbitration.

South African airline workers threaten strike over pay differentials

Workers at South Africa's Comair airlines are threatening strike action over pay differentials and an outstanding pay claim. The airline provides facilities to South Africa's Kulula airlines and British Airway flights throughout the country.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members allege that pay rates are based on race, with pay differences from 600 to over R7,000 for the same job.

NUMSA, however, cancelled its strike call for Christmas—to demand a 12 percent wage increase and an upgrade in allowances to bring Comair workers into line with other airline workers—in favour of arbitration.

The union and Comair will meet under the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration services this week, but say their members will strike if no agreement is reached.

Zimbabwe government forces shoot protesting workers

At least a dozen people were killed by police in last week's three-day general strike in Zimbabwe. Scores were treated for gunshot wounds.

Members of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) came out after fuel prices were doubled.

Hundreds of protesters were detained and accused of public order offences. Oppositionists went into hiding while media companies blacked out social networks.

Government spokesman George Charamba said that this "response so far is just a foretaste of things to come."

Teachers in the Zimbabwe Teachers Association went on strike on Monday. Other sectors threatened strike action next Monday, at the end of a 14-day warning period.

With inflation at 31 percent for November, the trade unions are demanding an increase for the lowest paid, currently on \$414, to \$1,700 a month just to catch up with inflation.

The South African Confederation of Trade Unions called a two-day general strike to be held in March.

Nigeria's health service unions are threatening to resume suspended strike action

Nigeria's health workers may resume last May's strike over their work and conditions contract—agreed but not implemented—and unpaid wages for April and May.

On January 15, the JOHESU joint health service union gave the government a 15-day warning to address the issue in May.

Power workers and public sector strikes across Eswatini

Workers in the electricity supply industry planned to strike Thursday, with a demonstration at the head office of the Eswatini (Swaziland) Electricity Company.

The Swaziland Electricity Supply, Maintenance and Allied Workers Union members are demanding a cost-of-living increase and the implementation of a 2016 salary agreement.

On January 28, public service sector workers plan a stoppage. They are demanding a cost-of-living increase, which they have not had for the last

two years. Inflation rose to 5.3 percent in 2018.

Workers in the National Public Service and Allied Workers Union, the Swaziland National Association of Teachers, the Swaziland Democratic Nurses Union and the Swaziland National Association of Government Accounting Personnel plan strike action next week over pay.

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 46th day of action. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are opposing the introduction of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

The strike was to be the last in a series of an ineffectual series of weekly strikes, but the guards voted to extend their action. They will strike for 24 hours on Saturday February 2, 9 and 16.

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

The RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes. It has already sealed DOO 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.

Arriva bus drivers in north east England to vote on new pay offer

The 650 UK drivers employed by the Arriva Durham County bus company were to be balloted on a new pay offer Wednesday and Thursday this week, with the ballot result announced today.

The Unite union members began a 10-day strike on January 27 for pay parity with other Arriva bus companies. The union said that any decision to suspend action will depend on the ballot result. The drivers are based in Darlington, Durham, Redcar, Stockton and Whitby.

Outsourced staff at UK government offices in strike over pay

Outsourced staff, who provide cleaning, security, portering, catering and administration services at the UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) office London, held a one-day strike on Tuesday.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are demanding to be paid the so-called London Living wage, currently set at £10.55 an hour. Contractors Engie and Aramark provide contracted services to the BEIS office.

On Tuesday, outsourced staff working for the Ministry of Justice began a 48-hour strike over the same issue. They belong to the United Voices of the World Union.

UK Royal Palace staff strike over pensions

UK Staff who provide security at Historic Royal Palace (HRP) sites including the Tower of London and Hampton Court Palace held another 24-hour strike Tuesday. The GMB members are protesting HRP's plans to downgrade the current defined benefit pension scheme to one paying inferior amounts. The current pension scheme is due to end in April.

Kosovo teachers in nationwide strike

A nationwide strike by teachers across all educational sectors in Kosovo has entered its second week. It began on January 14, with teachers demanding a 30 percent pay rise.

The Union of Education, Culture and Science of Kosovo members turned down a government offer of 10 percent.

Strike by Greek postal workers against cuts

Workers at the Greek state-owned postal service, ELTA, were set to strike on Wednesday. They are protesting planned cutbacks—the loss of over 2,000 jobs, the closure of 220 post office branches and a further pay cut.

According to the POST union, postal workers' pay has shrunk by 40 percent since 2010.

The cuts are being imposed by the pseudo-left Syriza government on behalf of the European Union and Greece's creditors. *Kathimerini* noted last August, "The postal service reportedly incurred debts of more than 557 million euros in 2017." It added, "The Hellenic Corporation of Assets and Participations (HCAP) is also expected to replace the company's board, the employees' union representatives and those of the other shareholders ...

"The changes are part of HCAP's mandate to consolidate the finances of the state-owned companies under its purview.

"Set up in 2016 as part of Greece's bailout program commitments, HCAP oversees several state entities and companies, among which the agency in charge of state asset sales, HRADF ..."

Protests against Hungary's "slave law"; car workers in two-hour strike

Around 2,000 protestors marched through the Hungarian capital Budapest on Saturday. They were protesting the law brought in last month by Prime Minister Viktor Orban's right-wing Fidesz party.

Under the legislation companies can demand workers do 400 hours a year compulsory overtime, equivalent to a six-day week. Companies will also have up to three years to reimburse their workers for the overtime worked. Some marchers opposed attacks on democratic rights.

Other marches took place in 12 Hungarian towns and cities. Surveys reveal 80 percent of Hungarians are opposed to the overtime working law. Unions are reportedly in discussion over a general strike against the law.

On January 18, 4,000 autoworkers at an Audi factory in the west of the country held a two-hour strike over low pay.

Irish health workers strike

On Tuesday, around 500 Irish ambulance staff held a 10-hour strike. The members of the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, affiliated to the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA), are seeking union recognition.

The Health Service Executive currently only recognises the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union, which represents the majority of the 1,800 Irish ambulance staff.

Irish nurses are due to strike over staff shortages related to low pay. The nurses are calling for a 12 percent across-the-board pay rise to address poor recruitment figures.

Talks were due on Wednesday, with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) saying proposed strikes were avoidable. INMO plans six 24-hour strikes beginning January 30, while the PNA has called for a three-day strike beginning February 12.

Spanish telecom workers announce strike

Workers employed by the mobile phone service provider Vodafone in Spain have given notice that they will hold a one-hour strike January 29.

The STC, UGT and CCOO union members are opposing plans by the company to cut staff numbers by nearly a quarter. Over the last six years the company has cut numbers by 3,400 in a series of restructuring exercises.

Spanish taxi drivers protest over Uber

Taxi drivers in Barcelona struck and held protests since the weekend over the use of ride-hailing apps such as Uber or Cabify. They were joined by taxi drivers in Madrid on Monday.

In Madrid, taxi drivers donned yellow vests, lit bonfires and blocked roads. On Wednesday, they threatened to blockade an international tourism show due to be opened by the Spanish king.

Uber, with fewer overheads than other taxi firms, threatens the livelihoods of regulated taxi drivers by undercutting prices.

Strike by Turkish insulation workers

Turkish workers at the Izocam insulation factory at its two sites began indefinite strike action on January 18. The dispute followed the failure to agree a contract between Izocam and the Kristal-is union, which represents around 180 workers.

Workers also demand a pay increase.

The demand for union recognition by workers at Izocam, a subsidiary of the French multinational Saint-Gobain, began in August last year, after a four-and-a-half-year campaign.

Two-day general strike threatened by Tunisian unions

Following the Tunisian general strike of public sector workers on January 17, the UGTT union has called a further two-day stoppage. It is due on February 20–21.

The one-day January strike saw two thirds of a million public sector workers demand a pay rise. The Tunisian government is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut back on public spending.

Strike of Moroccan local government workers

Around 150,000 municipal and civil servants in Morocco held a 24-hour general strike on January 17. The strike highlighted “catastrophic” working conditions and called for higher pay. Like Tunisia, Morocco is under pressure from the IMF to slash public spending.



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