

Sibanye gold miners' strike joined by platinum miners; Public worker strikes spread in Kosovo

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

1 February 2019

### Kosovo public sector workers strike

On Monday, municipal workers in Kosovo's capital Pristina, along with public television journalists, went on strike. They have joined thousands of teachers striking for a 30 percent pay rise.

The following day, around 20,000 local and central government staff were to strike. They are demanding substantial pay rises.

The government had offered teachers a 10 percent increase after what it called a "serious review of the budget." A draft law on salaries was scheduled for debate January 31 by the Kosovo Assembly.

### UK: Arriva North rail workers to begin new round of strikes

Rail guards working for Arriva North in northern England are to strike on Saturday as part of a series of three 24-hour strikes in their long-standing dispute. The strike will be the 47th day of strike action. Additional strikes are planned for February 9 and 16.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposing the introduction of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

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.

### ScotRail managers vote for action against staff shortages in Scotland

Team managers working for the Scottish rail company ScotRail have voted to withdraw their names from an overnight roster. The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association members are protesting staff shortages. The roster is used to provide back-up and emergency services at stations for the company's sites across Scotland.

### Bus drivers at First Bus in Yorkshire, England to ballot for strike

Around 3,500 bus drivers employed by First Bus in West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire are to be balloted for industrial action. The company is accused of creating a "bullying culture" which led to the dismissal of two senior Unite trade union reps, one in West Yorkshire and one in North Yorkshire. Workers in South Yorkshire say they have been subjected to a harsh disciplinary regime and that long-standing agreements have been undermined.

In a separate dispute, 650 drivers employed by Arriva Durham voted to accept a new pay offer. A planned 10-day strike to begin Sunday was called off. The drivers were demanding parity with drivers at other Arriva bus companies. Under the new two-year agreement, it will take drivers three rather than five years to achieve a new top pay rate of £10.60 an hour.

### UK Historic Palace staff plan further strikes

Around 120 staff employed to provide security and other services at six historic royal palaces have planned three strikes. The sites affected include Hampton Court and the Yeomen guards at the Tower of London. The workers are opposing plans by their employer, Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) to scrap its defined benefits pension scheme and replace it with an inferior defined contribution scheme.

The four-hour strikes will take place on February 6, 16 and 21. Following a strike on December 21, two planned three-hour strikes in January were called off after HRP and the Public and Commercial Services union held talks. However, workers rejected a revised offer.

### UK: Care workers dispute continues at Birmingham City Council

Care workers at Birmingham City Council have been in dispute for a year, and to date have carried out 50 days of strikes. The 200 Unison union members are opposing plans by the council to cut their hours and pay. They could see their pay reduced by around £4,000 a year under the proposals.

The workers held a rally on Tuesday addressed by Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

### **Irish nurses hold 24-hour strike**

Around 35,000 Irish nurses struck for 24 hours on Wednesday. They are demanding a 12 percent across-the-board pay rise to address poor recruitment figures.

It was the first national strike of Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) for 20 years.

Exploratory talks involving the Labour Court, which began Monday, were abandoned Tuesday with the court deciding not to intervene. Five 24-hour strikes are planned over the next two weeks.

The one-day strike led to the cancellation of around 13,000 outpatient appointments and 2,000 planned procedures.

Six thousand Psychiatric Nurses Association members were to begin an overtime ban on Thursday, with a planned three full days of strikes February 12 to 14. These will coincide with a planned stoppage by the INMO.

### **Irish ambulance workers plan further strikes**

Around 500 Irish ambulance workers plan two further strikes. The strikes will take place on consecutive days, to be announced. The National Ambulance Service Representative Association members held a 10-hour strike on January 22 for union recognition.

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

### **Swedish dockers announce further strikes**

Swedish dockers are planning strikes at the ports of Halmstad and Monstera, beginning February 6.

A series of 25 intermittent strikes affecting 15 ports took place last week. Around 1,000 dockers walked out in a series of several hour stoppages. In some cases, employers imposed a lockout.

The Swedish Harbour Workers Union members are calling for a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) specifically relating to dockers' issues. Dockers in the Swedish Transport Workers Union are covered by a more generic CBA.

### **Strike call by Israeli telecom staff**

Workers at Bezeq Israel Telecom are set to strike on February 5. This is in response to plans by Bezeq's majority stake holder, Internet Gold, to sell its stake in the company. Workers oppose the firm's use of contract staff to carry out roles performed by permanent staff.

### **South African Sibanye gold mine strikers joined by platinum miners**

Miners from South Africa's Sibanye Stillwater's platinum mines have

joined Sibanye gold miners ongoing strike action.

Fifteen thousand Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union members have been out since November 22 over a wage claim. They are demanding a pay rise of R1000 a year over the next three years.

The gold and platinum miners marched on the Mineral Council of South Africa and Sibanye headquarters on January 22, giving the company 48 hours to settle or the strike would continue.

Sibanye is in a takeover bid for Lonmin Platinum, which would make Sibanye Platinum one of the world's largest producers of the mineral, with operations in Zimbabwe and North America. It is reported that the merger would involve 13,334 job cuts. Sibanye claim that 885 redundancies would be related to the takeover.

### **South African strikers demonstrate against police brutality**

Workers demonstrated in Cape Town, South Africa on January 23 protesting police brutality against strikers.

Around 150 workers demonstrated in front of Cape Town Central Police Station over the violent treatment of strikers at Dish-Chem pharmaceuticals and the Blue Ribbon bakery.

The demonstration was organised by the South African Federation of Trade Unions and the two unions involved in the strikes—the National Union of Public Services and Allied Workers Union and the Food and Allied Workers Union.

The 2,000 pharmaceutical workers have been out since mid-November, and have a court ruling barring them from picketing and protesting until the end of February. Around 600 bakery workers have been on strike since the end of November.

Both strikes are over wages, allowances and bonuses.

A union spokesman said demonstrations would continue every month until there is an investigation.

### **South African Metro bus drivers' strike**

Workers employed at South Africa's Johannesburg Metrobus went on strike Monday. The workers are demanding a pay rise and pay parity and have over 40 other grievances.

Only a minority of drivers are members of the Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, but other workers walked off the job too and brought the Metrobus to a halt.

### **South African workers on cheap labour scheme protest unpaid wages**

Workers employed under the Expanded Public Works Scheme in Port Elizabeth, South Africa protested last week. They have not been paid for three months.

The 100 workers set up roadblocks with burning tyres and rocks and locked up their workplace to bar entry.

A worker from Motherwell township, employed on the scheme cleaning the beaches, says she receives just R100 a day working without any protective clothing. She has been forced into debt, which incurs interest.

Striking public employees carried out a similar protest, dumping rocks on the main streets of Mthala, in the King Sabata Dalindyebo

municipality.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union condemned a breakaway faction of the union for the "wrongdoing."

### **Workers protest reduction of Nigeria's minimum wage**

Workers booed and shouted down Nigeria's Labour Minister, Chris Ngige, as he proposed a two-tier minimum wage level in parliament. The government is proposing N27,000 in 36 states, and N30,000 for federal employees.

Last November, the government and National Labour Congress agreed a figure of N30,000 to head off a threatened general strike. Workers had wanted a monthly minimum wage of N56,000 to N65,000.

Many of the 36 state governors are saying they cannot afford to pay N27,000.

The minimum wage bill is expected to be approved by the Senate and return to President Muhammadu Buhari for final action.

### **Nigerian resident doctors strike over staff shortages**

Resident (trainee) doctors at Lagos State University Hospital, Nigeria, embarked on a three-day warning strike on Tuesday.

The Association of Resident Doctors are protesting conditions in the hospital.

Staff shortages and a refusal to fill vacant posts put doctors and house officers under severe stress, causing health problems.

The strike was reported 100 percent solid among doctors, but consultants continue to work, though they sympathise with their colleagues.

### **Angolan rail workers strike for pay increase**

Angolan railway workers at the Luanda Railway Company struck on January 21 in pursuit of a pay increase. They want an 80 percent rise and an increase in food, travel and other subsidies.

All freight trains from Luanda were brought to a standstill.

Workers are frustrated that management claims to have no money and has not offered a pay increase that can be agreed by the March deadline.

### **Ugandan university employees strike over pay and victimisation**

Workers at Uganda's oldest university remain out on strike to demand the reinstatement of their union representatives, who were sacked for striking.

Employees at Makerere University voted to strike mid-January over non-payment of salary enhancements and management's refusal to put a new salary structure into place.

Workers rejected an appeal by President Yoweri Museveni and his wife to return to work, on a promise to backdate enhancement pay, but without agreeing a salary structure.

A National Union of Education Institutions spokesperson said the strike will continue.

The three suspended officials are the general secretary, a representative of the administrative staff and a representative of the academic staff, referred to by the Vice Chancellor as troublemakers.

The university has established a committee to investigate the suspensions that is presided over by the same manager who imposed the suspensions. The unions say they will not recognise the committee until the manager is removed.



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