

UK Arriva North rail sell-out deal, Scottish lecturers' strike, Sibanye miners' stoppage continues in South Africa

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 February 2019

## UK: Rail union agrees sell-out settlement at Arriva North

Strikes by rail guards working for Arriva North in northern England have been called off by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. The workers were due to walk out on Saturday as part of a series of three 24-hour strikes in their long-standing dispute. To date they have taken 47 days of strike action.

The RMT members are opposing the introduction of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. According to the union, Arriva North offered a guarantee of a conductor on all trains at talks brokered by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. Talks will continue to determine the exact role of the conductor.

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. At West Midlands Trains, private train operator Abellio and the RMT agreed the imposition of DOO/DCO (Driver Controlled Operation) on new trains arriving in 2020.

The RMT negotiated a Framework Agreement that states, "On such new or modified rolling stock, train drivers will operate the train doors and undertake train despatch in normal circumstances ..." 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.

## Refuse workers in Birmingham, UK vote to strike

Around 300 refuse workers in the UK's second largest city, Birmingham, have voted to strike two days a week—on February 19, 22, 27, 28, March 4, 8, 12, 13, 21 and 22. The strikes are an escalation of the current work to rule, which began December 29.

The Unite members are taking the action to oppose the council's decision to make a payment to GMB union members but not the Unite members. Unite say the council are discriminating against them. Unite members were involved in a three-month dispute which began in June 2017 over the council's restructuring of the refuse service, which would have led to job losses and pay cuts.

## Strike vote by UK hospital staff in Liverpool, UK

Staff employed by outsourcing company OCS at the Women's Hospital in Liverpool voted by a 100 percent majority on an 83 percent turnout to strike.

The 40 Unison members provide cleaning, catering, portering and security services at the hospital. They are demanding pay parity with workers at the hospital employed directly by the National Health Service (NHS). The contract workers are paid around £2,000 a year less than their NHS colleagues. No dates have been set for industrial action.

## Scottish lecturers hold further strike

College lecturers across Scotland held a second day of strikes Tuesday. They held their first on January 16 and a third stoppage is planned for March 6.

The members of the Educational Institute of Scotland—Further Education Lecturers' Association are striking for a substantial cost-of-living rise. They have not received such a payment since April 2016. The employers' offer of a 2 percent rise consolidated over three years has been rejected.

## Strike by Deliveroo food delivery workers in UK

Food delivery couriers working for Deliveroo held two-hour strikes on February 1 in a number of UK cities. They were protesting the rates paid for deliveries and their designation as self-employed, meaning they miss out on pensions, sick pay and holiday pay.

Deliveroo workers in Bristol, Cheltenham Spa, London, Nottingham and York took part in the action. In London, they protested outside a Deliveroo management office in Myddleton Square Gardens between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. In Nottingham they held a demonstration between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

## London taxi drivers protest

Hundreds of minicab drivers in London held a protest on Monday evening by blockading London Bridge. They are protesting plans by Labour Party Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to introduce a congestion charge for minicabs in April.

Black cab drivers will be exempt from the charge. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain says the charges amount to a tax on the poor.

### **German steel workers warning strike**

Around 300 steel workers at the ThyssenKrupp facility in Dortmund walked out for several hours on Monday in a warning strike. Other warning strikes were planned at other steel plants across northwest Germany.

Talks between the employers and the IG Metall union broke down on February 1. Around 72,000 steel workers are demanding a 6 percent pay rise and €1,800 holiday payments. Further pay talks are scheduled for February 18.

### **One-day strike by Hamburg airport staff in Germany**

Workers, including baggage handlers, airport bus drivers and plane handling staff at Hamburg airport, held a one-day strike Monday. The action led to the cancellation of around 55 flights, 15 percent of the total flights for that day.

The 1,000 Verdi union members are seeking a €275 a month pay rise and have rejected the management offer.

### **Irish nurses plan additional strikes**

Following a meeting on February 2, Irish nurses voted to strike on February 19 and 21. On January 30, 35,000 Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation members held a 24-hour strike seeking a 12 percent pay rise to address staff shortages and recruitment problems.

This was followed by a further 24-hour strike Tuesday, with another stoppage Thursday. They are also scheduled to begin a three-day strike on February 12. The three-day action will coincide with one planned by 6,000 Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) members over the same issue. PNA members began an overtime ban Wednesday.

### **Pfizer pharmaceutical workers to strike in Cork, Ireland**

Around 400 workers at Pfizer's pharmaceutical plants in Cork have voted to hold 24-hour strikes on February 15 and 18 and undertake an indefinite overtime ban.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union members oppose the company's plans to end its defined benefits pension scheme and replace it with an inferior one.

### **Protest march by pensioners in Madrid**

Thousands of Spanish pensioners marched through Madrid on Saturday to protest the low levels of pensions. They demanded pensions rise in line with inflation. The last rise in 2017 was by a minuscule 0.25 percent.

### **Taxi drivers in Spanish capital end strike**

On Tuesday, Spanish taxi drivers in Madrid voted by a narrow majority to end their strike, begun on January 21. They were demanding the regional government regulate private hire vehicles using digital hailing apps such as Uber and Cabify. Around 7,000 drivers took part.

### **Ukrainian miners protest non-payment of wages**

Around 350 coal miners held a protest in the city of Lviv to protest non-payment of wages by the state-owned Lvivvugillia coal mine. They held a march and rally near the Lviv Regional State Administration building.

### **Teachers protest in Tunisia**

Thousands of teachers marched through the Tunisian capital of Tunis Wednesday. They were calling for the resignation of Education Minister Hatem Ben Salem as well as demanding improved working conditions, early retirement and payment of bonuses.

Teachers have been carrying out a programme of sporadic strikes since October, hitting students' exams. The protest was called by the UGTT trade union federation, which is calling for teachers to end their strikes. A public sector strike has been called by the UGTT for February 20 and 21.

### **Israeli pharmaceutical workers end long-running dispute**

A dispute at Teva Pharmaceutical Industries plant in Migada, Israel, has been settled. The workers carried out several strikes in the course of the dispute.

As part of a restructuring, Teva proposed selling the Migada operation. Under the agreement, the sale of the plant will go ahead but the rights of the 170 employers will be maintained for three years. They will receive a bonus and a 3 percent pay rise.

### **South African workers to strike nationwide over job losses**

Workers in South Africa are planning a national strike February 13 over the tide of job losses in public and private companies. A restructuring program at Eskom, South Africa's power generating company, means 7,000 redundancies over the next five years, while South Africa's public

broadcaster SABC is in the process of eliminating 1,000 jobs.

The mining industry is reducing its workforce by tens of thousands. South Africa's Confederation of Trade Unions (COSATU), affiliated to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), called the strike after being unable to reach an agreement with the government to even stem the job destruction. COSATU has 1.6 million members.

The ANC is committed to cutting jobs in the public sector and is attempting to render powerless workers' resistance through new labour laws.

### **South Africa's Sibanye Gold miners' pay strike continues**

The strike by miners at Sibanye Stillwater Gold, South Africa, is into its 11th week. Fifteen thousand Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union members, out since November 22, were joined by miners from Sibanye Stillwater's platinum mines.

The workers are demanding a pay rise of R1,000 a year over the next three years. The company is attempting to foist a wage settlement agreed with three minority unions on members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which has a majority of miners as members at the mine. Sibanye turned to the industrial court to get a ruling forcing the AMCU to accept the agreement.

An appeal to the court in December was suspended to allow a tally of members of the competing unions. However, the arbitration service, AMCU and the company could not agree on a method for counting. At least three miners have lost their lives during the dispute. Under recently introduced legislation, violence associated with strikes can be used to outlaw industrial action.

### **Strike at South African bakery continues into tenth week**

South Africa's 600 Blue Ribbon bakery workers have been on strike since November 28. The Food and Allied Workers union members are demanding a 10 percent pay increase and funeral cover. Employer Premier has accused workers of violence, yet a company manager was seen shooting at pickets at the beginning of the strike.

Strikers have been assaulted by security guards and police officers using rubber bullets and stun grenades. Last week, a demonstration outside the Cape Town Central Police Station was organised by the South African Federation of Trade Unions to protest police violence.

### **South Africa milling/bakery workers threaten pay strike**

Workers are to strike at RCL Foods' Sugar & Milling Division in Millbake, Pretoria, South Africa, if their demands for improved wages and allowances are not met.

The National Trade Union Congress members are demanding a basic wage of R9,000, and R15,000 for those already above that, an annual production bonus and increases in their medical, housing and danger allowances.

### **Kenyan nurses strike over reneged-on wage deal**

Kenyan nurses took national strike action on Monday over the failure of the government to implement a 2017 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Clinical officers also gave 14 days notice, from Wednesday last week, of joining the strike after their attempts to reopen CBA discussions failed.

A Kenyan National Union of Nurses spokesperson said the strike will only affect those counties that have not honoured the 2017 agreement, listing 21 that had "shown willingness" to implement it. Pay and conditions differ throughout Kenya's 47 counties.

### **Kenyan airline workers oppose takeover deal threat to jobs**

Kenyan airline unions threatened strike action February 5 in opposition to Kenyan Airways taking over Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

The Kenyan Aviation Workers Union members also demand the Kenyan Airways Authority managing director (MD) be removed from his job. They are concerned about job losses under the takeover. The MD proposes to dismiss all the employees and negotiate a new contract with each worker on inferior conditions.

### **Zimbabwe teachers strike as civil servants' union pulls out**

A Zimbabwe teachers' indefinite strike began Tuesday despite the Apex Council (AC) calling off action. The AC has 305,000 members, the majority being teachers.

Members of the Zimbabwe Teachers Union and the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe came out after the government offered no concessions on their demands for wage increases covering inflation and payment in US dollars. A three-day strike and demonstration over the doubling of fuel prices and wage demands in Harare last month were met with police/military violence. Twelve workers lost their lives and many more were wounded.

Since the January protest, taxi prices have been raised threefold, bread prices have increased by 60 percent with other staple food prices continually increasing. Hundreds of lawyers demonstrated in Harare January 29, demanding justice for the more than 1,000 detainees picked up in morning raids during and after the January 14 demonstration.

### **Eswatini sugar estate workers occupy company houses after sackings**

Workers employed in Swaziland's sugar industry are refusing to leave their company housing after being dismissed. Many of the workers have worked for Ubombo Sugar Industries (USI) for decades as casual employees.

USI is carrying out a restructuring process involving many redundancies. Sacked workers are evicted from company housing. Workers say the occupation will continue until the company agrees a severance package.

## **Eswatini civil servants demonstrate after court bans strike**

Eswatini civil servants marched in Mbabane last Friday demanding a Cost of Living Adjustment (CoLA) be incorporated into their wage structure. A strike initially planned for Monday was barred by the court. The marchers delivered petitions to several ministries to demand a CoLA, and to police headquarters to protest police violence against peaceful activity.



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