

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

1 March 2019

## Public sector strikes across Germany as South Africa miners' strike at Sibanye spreads

Europe

### Further public sector strikes in Germany

Public sector workers across Germany began a two-day strike on Tuesday. It affected many federal states including Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt as well as Berlin. In Berlin, 10,000 public sector workers took strike action. Services such as child nurseries, health care centers, libraries, municipal administration, road construction and universities were hit.

The Verdi union members are demanding a rise of at least six percent or €200 extra per month for public sector workers and €300 for care staff. Poor pay has led to many unfilled vacancies, putting additional pressure on staff. A further round of talks with employers' representatives took place yesterday.

### Coordinated strikes by contract workers at UK government departments

Hundreds of subcontracted workers at UK government offices of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) held a strike on Tuesday in London. Contract staff employed at the University of London joined them.

The United Voices of the World, Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) and Public and Commercial Services union members are demanding the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour and to be employed directly. They provide cleaning, security, administrative and catering services at their workplaces.

They held a joint march through central London, passing the BEIS, MOJ and University of London sites. The IWGB is mounting a legal case arguing its members at the University of London should have the right to a collective bargaining agreement and the same terms and conditions as directly employed staff.

### Refuse workers hold strikes in UK city of Birmingham

UK refuse workers in Birmingham began a series of twice-weekly strikes last week, following a work-to-rule begun at the end of December.

The 300 Unite members are being penalised for a three-month dispute against job losses in June 2017. GMB members who did not strike received secret payments.

Three days of talks under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service failed to resolve the dispute. The union, however, suspended the strike planned for Wednesday to allow the council to make a more "acceptable offer."

A planned walkout is set for today. Further strikes are planned for March 4, 8, 12, 13, 21 and 22.

### Staff at UK hospital strike for pay parity

Forty UK support workers at Liverpool Women's hospital held a one-day strike on Monday. Employed by facilities company OCS, they provide cleaning, portering and support staff.

The Unison union members are demanding pay parity with non-contract NHS staff. The OCS workers are paid up to £2,150 a year less than their NHS colleagues.

### Food delivery workers strike in Manchester

Food delivery couriers working for Deliveroo in Manchester held a strike between 11am and 7pm Tuesday. After holding a demonstration outside Deliveroo offices in Manchester, they marched to St Peter's Square.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) members are demanding an increase in payments for delivery to £5 for single deliveries and £8 for double deliveries. They also want a standby rate of £10 an hour when waiting for delivery orders and a minimum £1 for every additional mile travelled outside the Manchester city centre zone.

The Manchester Deliveroo couriers held an initial strike on February 14. IWW members from the nearby city of Bradford supported Tuesday's strike and march.

### Workers at two UK benefit offices vote to strike

Around 270 UK Department of Works and Pension workers have voted by over 90 percent majorities to strike on March 11 and 12. The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are employed at offices in Wolverhampton and Walsall in the midlands processing Universal Credit claims.

They are demanding more staff, a cut in workloads and permanent contracts for those on short-term contracts. The PCS is calling for 5,000 extra staff to process Universal Credit claims.

### **Amazon delivery staff in Lombardy, Italy hold strike**

Around 700 Amazon delivery staff in Lombardy, Italy went on strike Tuesday. They were protesting working conditions. They held a demonstration outside the company's office in Milan.

### **Icelandic hotel workers vote on possible strike**

Icelandic hotel workers around the Reykjavik area are this week voting on strike action on March 8. The balloting began after talks between their union, Efling and the employers' representative, the Confederation of Icelandic Enterprises broke down. The workers, who provide cleaning, housekeeping and laundry services in hotels and guesthouses, are demanding a wage increase.

### **Underground protest by Ukrainian miners**

On February 20, 150 miners held an underground protest at the Kurakhivska state-owned coal mine in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. They were protesting wage arrears totaling around \$9 million. They went down the pit to begin their shift but, instead, held a protest.

Africa

### **South African miners' strike at Sibanye spreading**

After South Africa's Sibanye Stillwater Gold announced 7,000 redundancies, workers are planning to spread the strike begun February 22.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) has informed 15 consortiums in the gold and platinum mining industry that it will extend industrial action to these companies. Coal miners may join the stoppage.

The proposed action was planned to start Thursday this week. Representatives of the 15 mining companies rushed to court to get the strike made illegal.

Fifteen thousand AMCU members are demanding an annual wage increase of R1,000 a month over three years. Three other unions have settled for a "slave labour deal" by the AMCU.

South African law mandates that those unions with the majority of members at the workplace determine the wage deal. AMCU insists it has the majority, but the company disagrees. A court order was introduced to

impose a union member head count, but this has been paralysed by disagreement over the count method.

A spokesman for one of the unions agreeing to the company deal, Solidarity, blames AMCU for the job losses and violence. Seven workers have lost their lives during the strike.

### **South Africa college lecturers' strike enters second week**

The national strike over pay and conditions by South African college workers at 50 colleges is continuing into its second week.

A meeting between the National Education and Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and the education ministry collapsed before it began. NEHAWU demanded the college director general not be part of the negotiations since his sacking was one of their demands due his intransigence over their grievances.

The 15,000 lecturers are demanding that monthly contracts be replaced with permanent employment. Some lecturers get paid below the minimum wage.

### **Kenyan nurses' union calls off national strike**

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN) ended the ongoing national nurses' strike on Tuesday in response to a court order.

Nurses had been on strike for three weeks to force the implementation of a 2017 collective bargaining agreement and unpaid uniform allowances.

After the majority of nurses defied president Uhuru Kenyatta's order to return to work or be sacked, employers sought a court order to end the action. KNUN avoided prosecution for contempt of court by pleading it had not received the court order. When it did, it called the strike off immediately.

### **South African workers' strike threat over privatisation of Eskom**

Workers in all sectors in South Africa are poised to take "rolling action" against the proposed privatisation of Eskom, the country's power generator. The National Union of Metalworkers members may be joined by NUM, SAFTU and Cosatu union members.

Eskom provides 90 percent of the country's energy. Its privatisation means a price increase of 17 percent this year and massive job losses.

The government is preparing to crack down on strike action with an emergency task force, including major generals of the South African Police Service, the crime intelligence's covert division and the chief of organised crime. It is discussing the deployment of South Africa's National Defense Force.

During last year's strike at Eskom over a zero percent pay offer, security guards allowed workers to enter the company to sabotage equipment.

### **South African Blue Ribbon bakery strike escalates**

Workers at Premier's Blue Ribbon Bakeries, Salt River in South Africa, have entered their fourth month of strike action, and the union said it might call out all Premier bakery and milling operations across the country.

Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) members are striking for an 8 percent (revised down from 9) annual wage increase against the company offer of 8 percent over three years. Inflation is at 5.27 percent. Other grievances include the withdrawal of a paid lunch hour and reducing Sunday rates from double time to one and half times the weekday rate.

The GroundUp news web site reported a 25-year-old worker saying, "We will continue fighting. We don't want to give away the right our forefathers fought for... Apartheid is over."

lack of promotions, and demanding confirmation of officers on probation and the employment of more officers to meet the ratio of 1 to 1,000 populations.

A week ago, the KUCO national leadership voted against a strike over a CBA in response to a union recognition agreement.



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### **South Africa Gauteng health workers picket to demand permanent jobs and more pay**

South African health care workers in Gauteng have been picketing contract signing centres since last Thursday to dissuade workers from signing another yearly contract.

The pickets want full-time contracts, promised last November, with a promised pay increase to R6,000 a month and employment on the books. Workers cannot survive on the present wage of R3,500 a month.

The picketing was extended to the Department of Health in Johannesburg and the mainly women pickets demanded to speak to the Minister of Health, threatening to burn the building down if he did not comply. A delegation was eventually allowed to present their grievances, to be passed to the Minister, who will issue a reply within a week.

### **Council staff in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa strike over pay and conditions**

Council clerical staff in Msunduzi municipality, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa went on unprotected strike from Wednesday last week.

The workers include credit controllers, cashiers and validates, and workers in the rates department. They are demanding a pay rise and improved conditions, including more staff to lighten the workload. They are unable to issue bills to residents because electronic equipment does not work. 18 employees share one photocopier.

One worker said they had been complaining over conditions since 2016.

### **Kenya Nairobi union suspends council strike; clinical officers strike**

Last Friday, the Kenya County Workers Union suspended the strike by 13,000 city council workers in Nairobi for 21 days, pending further negotiations over a 2017 collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The employer, the Salaries Remunerations Commission, however, says the council cannot afford to implement the contract.

The union, which says the council budgeted for the CBA and set funds aside, confirmed by a council spokesman, is taking legal action to pursue last year's agreed 15 percent pay rise.

Meanwhile Nairobi's county clinical workers voted to strike on February 28.

Kenyan Union of Clinical Officers (KUCO) members are protesting the