

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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South African gold miners pay strike at Sibanye Stillwater continues Africa

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## South African gold miners to continue pay strike at Sibanye Stillwater

At a mass meeting on Monday, South African gold miners decided to continue their four month-long pay strike against Sibanye Stillwater.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) had agreed a deal with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, which the company rejected. Sibanye described the deal as similar to its own offer, except that the union wanted a further R2,700 in back pay.

The 15,000 AMCU members began striking in November for an annual wage increase of R1,000 a month over three years. Three other unions settled for what the AMCU called a “slave labour deal.”

Several labour court decisions have ruled against AMCU, aimed at making continued action illegal. A ruling imposing the company’s method to determine who holds the majority membership went against AMCU on appeal. This means the company can impose the inferior deal agreed by the other unions. Another ruling gave the company the right to sack up to 7,000 workers.

At the beginning of March, the court declared illegal proposed secondary strikes that would have closed all South Africa’s gold, platinum and coal mines. AMCU then called off the action.

Sibanye is on the verge of a takeover of Lonmin, a competitor mining conglomerate and the company that the miners who were shot down in the 2012 Marikana mining massacre were employed by.

Lonmin is preparing massive redundancies. To date nine workers have lost their lives in the dispute and over 60 homes have been burned.

## South African union sells out pharmaceutical strike

The strike by South African workers in the pharmaceutical industry and its retail arm has ended after the union agreed to withdraw its demands.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) members came out November 16 for a minimum wage of R12,500 a month and an annual bonus. The company, Dis-Chem, does not recognise NUPSAW, claiming only 13 percent of its 17,200 employees are members.

For the first time, the South African Labour Court brought in a ruling to ban protests and picketing at company premises on the grounds of violence. Police used rubber bullets on peaceful pickets at the beginning of the strike, injuring many workers.

A Dis-Chem spokeswoman said the union also agreed to disciplinary action to be taken against anyone responsible for misconduct during the dispute.

## South African tax workers’ unions end wage strike

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and the Public Services Association (PSA) have called off the week-long strike of 10,000 workers at the South African Revenues Services (SARS).

The workers came out for a 15 percent wage rise. The unions reduced this to nine and then accepted SARS’ offer of an 8 percent pay increase this year, and 2 percent above inflation over the next two years.

It was the first strike in 10 years at the Revenue Services.

## South African police use violence against striking steel workers and community protests

South African striking steel workers in Boipatong, Gauteng province have been shot at by police.

National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) members at Arcelor Mittal have been on strike to demand casual workers are made permanent, and for an end to unsafe working conditions.

At the same time there have been community protests in the area against the lack of electricity for three weeks. A local resident was shot with a rubber bullet at point blank range and hospitalised, leaving him with severe injuries.

## South African chemical workers strike for skill-related pay increases and safe working conditions

Workers are striking at the South African chemical company Foskor in KwaZulu-Natal.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members came out March 20 to demand an increase in pay for every new skill workers attain. They are also demanding healthy working conditions—one worker died last year and some became ill at work recently—plus an investigation into

alleged corruption.

Foskor failed in its attempt to get the strike banned by the labour court, while refusing to negotiate with the union.

### **Nigerian polytechnic strike over implementation of salary structure continues**

Non-academic staff at Nigeria's Lagos State Polytechnic are continuing a long running strike over a new salary structure.

The Non-Academic Staff Union members have been striking on and off since 2016 in an attempt to get the agreed CONTISS 15 salary structure implemented.

On January 20, strikers locked the gates to the institution preventing other staff and pupils from entering. They had previously just locked out management. This was in response to non-payment of wages for March that workers are entitled to.

Management brought in the police to reopen the gates.

### **Kenyan county medical workers threaten strike against casualisation**

Kenyan medical workers are threatening to strike if the Homa Bay county governors continue to advertise jobs on short-term contracts.

Three-year casual contracts are being offered for nurses and five years for higher-level medical staff. The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union says the casuals will lose out on pensions and other benefits, undermining morale.

### **Kenyan sugar workers strike over unpaid wages**

More than 2,000 workers at Kenya's Sony Sugar Company went on strike on Monday, demanding payment of a Sh100million wages arrears. Casual workers have not been paid for January and February and directly employed workers have not been paid for February.

The Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers members says the company will be brought to a halt if workers are not paid.

The Company managing director said the strike would be deemed illegal and strikers would be disciplined with possible sackings. He said the company was facing financial difficulties.

### **Gabonese oil workers strike over lack of annual leave**

Oil workers went on strike for two days last week at Vaalco Energy Inc. in Gabon over annual leave.

ONEP, the oil workers union, says the stoppage will resume if negotiations with government and the company do not meet their demands.

The company produces 14,000 barrels of oil a day out of 187,000 produced nationally.

### **Violence used against striking Zambian council workers**

Council workers at Zambia's Kabwe district came out on strike March 27-29 demanding six months of unpaid wages. This was part of national protests against pay arrears.

The strike was deemed illegal and management suspended 74 employees for alleged riotous behaviour and violence. Police cautioned three Zambian Patriotic Front members for attacking strikers at Kabwe Civic Centre.

Councils claim they have no money to pay wages. K1.4 million has been released from an Equalisation Fund to pay the outstanding wages.

Europe

### **Local authority workers in Dundee, Scotland threaten strike**

Around 5,000 Dundee city council workers, comprising home care staff, building workers, pupil support workers in schools, librarian and environmental health staff, have voted by over 90 percent to strike in a consultative ballot.

They are opposed to plans by the council to bring in compulsory redundancies, restrict flexible retirement and reduce pay protection for staff moved to lower grade posts.

The Unite union is calling for further negotiations with the council.

### **Scottish airport workers in Glasgow vote to strike**

Hundreds of airport workers in Glasgow, Scotland have voted to strike by a margin of over 95 percent on a 75 percent turnout. The Unite union members are opposed to the below inflation imposed pay rise of 1.8 percent. They also oppose plans by Glasgow airport to close their final pension scheme, decided in an agreement brokered by the Advisory and Conciliation and Arbitration Service in 2016.

The action will involve a series of stoppages between mid-April and mid-October and an overtime ban. Glasgow airport is run by AGS, which also runs Aberdeen and Southampton airports.

Around 240 staff at Aberdeen airport face similar attacks. Unite members there are currently being balloted for action. The ballot will close on April 23.

### **Refuse collectors in Scottish Angus council vote to strike**

Refuse collectors in Angus local authority, northeast Scotland are to hold a five-day strike beginning April 8. They will also begin a work to rule and overtime ban.

The strike, backed by a more than 90 percent majority on a near 90 percent turnout, is in opposition to the Angus council's plans to introduce a split shift system from April 8. Under the split shift system workers would be expected to work 6am – 2pm and 2pm – 10pm shifts, replacing the current 7am – 3pm work pattern.

The 140 Unite members also voted to hold a series of 48-hour strikes beginning each Monday from April 15 till June 24.

### **Staff at UK revenue office in London hold 24-hour strike**

Workers at Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) tax office in Ealing, London, held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. The strikers also held a rally outside their work place, International House.

The Public and Commercial Services Union members took action in opposition to HMRC's plans to close International House, along with 90 percent of its offices across the country. This is part of HMRC's "Building Our Future" proposal due to take effect in 2020. Staff at International House are to hold a three-day strike beginning April 10 against the closure.

### **UK Trinity House staff strike**

UK seafarers working for Trinity House were to begin a 24-hour strike at 2pm on Wednesday. Around 30 Unite union members voted by over 90 percent to walk off the job.

Trinity House is responsible for maintaining navigation aides around the UK coast, such as lighthouses.

The seafarers operate three ships, two based in Harwich Essex and one at Swansea in South Wales. They are striking to demand higher pay after no rises or below inflation rises in pay over the last seven years. The strike is the first in the 500-year history of Trinity House.

### **Croatian ship builders' strike continues**

A strike by workers at the Uljanik shipyards in Pula and Rijeka in Croatia is continuing. They are protesting the non-payment of wages for the last seven months.

The workers are represented by several unions. The Metalworkers union SMH has declared an end to the dispute but SMH members at the yards are still striking along with colleagues in the other unions.

The financial crisis of the company, in which the Croatian government has a 25 percent stake, continues to worsen. This week, a Kuwaiti client decided to end its contract with the yard.

Last week, police arrested 12 former company executives on allegations of fraud and financial mismanagement.

### **Greek trolley bus drivers' work stoppage in Athens**

Trolley bus drivers in the Greek capital, Athens, were set to stop work on Wednesday between 10:30am and 5pm. *Kathimerini* reported "According to their union, the workers will convene a meeting to discuss the company's administrative and financial affairs."

### **Union cancels Icelandic hotel and bus strikes**

Planned strikes by hotel workers and bus drivers, who transport tourists in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, have been called off by the Efling

union. A strike by tourist bus drivers went ahead on Tuesday afternoon, but not the scheduled Wednesday strike.

The hotel staff, who provide cleaning, laundry and catering services, and the bus drivers are demanding higher pay and a cut in working hours. A series of strikes were planned throughout April with an all-out strike to begin May 1.

Following talks between the union and the employers' body, a deal has been negotiated. It has yet to be ratified by the union members.

### **Irish ambulance staff hold further strike**

Ambulance workers across Ireland held a fifth strike on Tuesday from 7am to 5pm.

The 500 National Ambulance Service Representative Association (Nasra) members, are affiliated to the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA). The ambulance staff are demanding their employer the Health Service Executive (HSE) recognise the PNA as a negotiating body.

The HSE recognises only the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) for negotiating purposes. A further strike is planned for April 10 and the PNA says it will then escalate the action.

### **Irish hospital workers to be balloted for strike**

Around 7,000 Irish hospital staff are to be balloted for possible strike action. The SIPTU members include health care assistants, maternity care assistants, laboratory aides, surgical instrument technicians and chefs.

The workers accuse their employer, the HSE, of failing to stick to a job evaluation scheme negotiated as part of the Lansdowne Road Agreement in 2015. Under the scheme, they should have had a pay rise of between 5 and 7 percent from September/October last year.

### **Staff demonstrate at US base in Italy**

Dozens of Italian staff employed at the US Aviano air base in northern Italy demonstrated outside the gates on Saturday. Their grievances include the base changing employment days and hours without negotiation and employing Italian staff on a temporary rather than a permanent basis.



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