

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 April 2019

**South African gold miners' pay strike at Sibanye Stillwater could be made illegal; Greek teachers strike against Syriza education plans; Israeli firefighters to strike**

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**South African gold miners' long-running pay strike at Sibanye Stillwater could be made illegal**

Gold miners at South Africa's Sibanye Stillwater mines decided to continue their pay strike at a mass meeting last week in the face of legal threats, despite having lost four and a half months in wages.

Fifteen thousand Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members have been out since November for an annual wage increase of R1,000 a month over three years. Three other unions settled for what the AMCU described as a "slave labour deal."

Workers now face the danger of their strike being made illegal.

A Labour court ruling in favour of the company's method to determine which trade union holds the majority membership went against the AMCU on appeal. This means the company can impose the inferior deal agreed by the other unions. Sibanye has now returned to court to get the strike declared illegal. It is also planning to impose 7,000 redundancies.

The AMCU's president, Joseph Mathunjwa, said a deal agreed at the Commission for Consolidation Mediation and Arbitration—rejected by the company but close to their offer—would end the strike. The union claimed it would call out all of South Africa's platinum and coal mines in March, but caved in to a court edict.

Gold production at Sibanye Stillwater, which is the largest gold producer in South Africa, has dropped two thirds compared to the corresponding period last year.

**South African road workers' pay strike in Johannesburg**

South Africa's Johannesburg city centre was disrupted when its Road Agency workers struck on Friday, demonstrating for a pay increase. Protesters blocked the roads with litter and burning tyres, halting traffic and causing traffic jams.

The South Africa Municipal Workers Union members are demanding "pay progression." Management said they don't have a "pay progression" policy and that the demand could go to arbitration.

**South African workers at multinational supermarket chain in Mbombela oppose sackings**

Strikers at one of South Africa's Shoprite supermarket stores in Mbombela, Mpumalanga, have been sacked.

The 35 workers went on wildcat strike and protested last Friday over the previous sacking of four checkout workers who accepted tips. A worker said receiving tips was common.

Management called in the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union to try and get the workers back to work.

The South African-based company operates in 15 countries, employing nearly 150,000 workers with around 2,700 outlets.

**South African truck drivers in dispute over 50 percent wage cut**

Dozens of South African truck drivers previously employed by Moody Blue Trade Invest have had their wages halved after being transferred to a labour agency. The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union has taken the company to court.

The Moody Blue drivers were transferred to RP Africa Fleet Services, with wages and benefits falling from basic pay R8,000 to R4,800 in some cases. The minimum wage for truckers is set at R11,000.

A worker speaking to the media said that if you spoke out or attempted to fight, you would lose your route and job.

The Commission for Consolidation Mediation and Arbitration is investigating the Green Door Cargo 2 Congo company for similar practices.

**Nigerian college staff bar provost and bursar over unpaid wages**

Staff at Nigeria's Tai Solarin College of Education in Omu-Ijebu, Ogun State, have barred its provost and acting nunsar from entering the premises. They are protesting over salaries unpaid for 30 months.

Workers are demanding the managers go to the state governor's office and return with their owed pay. It was the governor who appointed the provost.

Managers are threatening protesters with reprisals. They proscribed the staff unions, so workers set up a new formation, COTAS.

### **National strike threat by Nigerian judiciary in support of Kogi State judiciary out for five months**

Nigeria's judiciary are threatening a national strike if the chief judge in Kogi State is removed from office, as recommended by the State House of Assembly.

The Judiciary Staff Union JUSUN members in Kogi have been on strike for five months over eight months' unpaid wages, since the state began processing salary payments.

The chief judge, Justice Nasir Ajanah, and the union argue that state control of judiciary funds breaches constitutional norms and that payment should be made directly by the federal government, restricting state interference with judicial decisions.

### **Senegalese academics' strike undermined by unions' acceptance of casual labour**

Senegalese academics in the Dakar School of Journalism at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) have been on strike since the beginning of April. They are demanding an increase in full-time teaching staff, increased funding and a regeneration programme for the university

UCAD is the biggest university in Senegal, employing 207 teaching and 48 support staff to cover 32,000 students—more than the rest of Senegal's universities combined. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, however, deems developing nations' teacher-student ratio should be 25 to 1. At UCAD, it is 150 to 1.

The Syndicat Autonome des Enseignants du Supérieur union has overseen the introduction of casuals, who are now being used as strikebreakers.

In February, the SUDES higher education teachers' union described the university as a "time bomb" and said the poor quality in education had to be addressed.

### **Sudanese hospital strike over non-payment of wages**

Doctors and support staff went on strike April 4 at the Teaching Hospital of Zalingei, in the capital of Central Darfur, Sudan. The workers are demanding the payment of wages and benefits owed since February.

Health insurance workers also began a strike last week, protesting the lack of access to their wages. Many ATM machines, where workers would normally draw their wages, have run out of cash, and, as well, many banks are not operational or closed down.

Residents in the Port of Sudan demonstrated in front of the Bank of Khartoum demanding access to cash.

Europe

### **Greek teachers strike**

Greek secondary school teachers are to hold a 24-hour strike today. The OLME union members are opposing plans by the pseudo-left Syriza government to impose curriculum changes for final-year students and changes to university entrance exams.

Teachers and students fear the changes will increase the pressure on students. Rallies are planned for Athens, Thessaloniki and other major cities.

### **Dutch oil refinery strike**

Workers at the Shell Pernis oil refinery in the Dutch city of Rotterdam struck on Monday. The refinery is Europe's largest and produces more than 400,000 barrels a day.

The FNV trade union members are demanding a 5 percent pay rise. Shell has offered 2 percent this year followed by 2.5 percent next year.

On Tuesday, Shell announced the strike was impacting production at the site. The union says it wants to cut production by around two thirds to force Shell into negotiations.

### **London Underground rail staff pay dispute**

Workers on the London Underground (LU) tube system have rejected the employer's 2.5 percent pay offer. The 10,000 Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members will be balloted for strike action.

The pay deal was also rejected by the TSSA union, which represents white-collar staff working for LU.

LU management have refused to look at other demands for a shorter working week and better travel facilities.

### **Russian Ford workers work to rule**

Responding to plans by Ford to close three of its four plants in Russia, workers at Ford's Vsevolozhsk plant in Leningrad began a work to rule Monday. Three hundred workers at a plant meeting last Friday voted to take the action.

The union involved has no plans to oppose Ford's cutbacks in Russia and is merely seeking to pressure management to enter into negotiations over how to impose the job cuts.

### **Spanish airline staff strike threat**

Pilots at Valencia-based Spanish airline Air Nostrum have announced a series of strikes. The proposed dates are April 15 to 17 and April 22 to 24. The Sepla union members are in a long-running dispute related to an outsourcing contract.

In a separate dispute, airport workers, including ground handling and aircraft servicing, are threatening an all-out strike from April 20 over pay and conditions. The USO and UGT unions have announced the strike but make clear they are eager to enter discussions with employers. There are around 60,000 airport staff employed in the sector across Spain.

### **Electric power grid staff in Northern Ireland to strike**

Managers and engineers working for SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) have announced a 24-hour strike for April 15. The Prospect union members are demanding a pay increase.

### **Workers at Northern Ireland timber firm strike**

Workers at Balcas timber and wood products supplier in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, began a 48-hour strike on Tuesday. The Unite members voted for action by over 90 percent on a 76 percent turnout. They are protesting low pay, with many of them receiving just above minimum pay rates. They mounted a picket line, which hauliers respected.

### **Aerospace staff in Northern Ireland to be balloted for strike action**

Workers at the Belfast plant of Canadian-based aerospace company Bombardier are to be balloted for strike action. The ballot will begin on April 29, and follows the announcement of 30 to 35 compulsory redundancies on the heels of 40 “voluntary” redundancies. The GMB and Unite unions represent unions among Bombardier’s 4,000 strong workforce.

The job losses are part of the company’s plans to cut its Northern Irish workforce by nearly 500, as part of a worldwide cull of jobs.

### **Refuse workers at Welsh authority to strike**

Refuse workers at Biffa on the Isle of Anglesey, northern Wales, are to hold a seven-day strike from April 22. The Unite members are demanding improved pay.

Currently, loading staff are on the minimum wage of £8.21 per hour for age 25-plus, with drivers earning only just above that. Biffa is contracted to provide refuse collection services to the Ynys Mon local authority.

### **Staff at UK London Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy office strike for London Living Wage**

Catering staff working for contractor Aramark at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy office in Westminster, London, held a three-day strike this week beginning Monday.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are demanding to be paid the so-called London Living wage of £10.55 an hour.

### **Irish airline crew ballot for union recognition**

Cabin crew at Irish airline Stobart Air have balloted for industrial action in opposition to the airline’s refusal to recognise their right to unionise. The ballot was due to end Wednesday.

The cabin crew want the company, which employs around 600, to give negotiating rights over pay and working conditions to Forsa. Stobart turned down an invitation for talks over union recognition by the Workplace Relations Commission.

In an indicative vote, two thirds of the crew rejected a pay proposal saying it fell short of the norm among other Irish airlines.

Middle East

### **Israeli firefighters announce strike**

On Monday, Israeli firefighters announced their intention to strike. They are protesting the refusal by Fire and Rescue Service head Dedi Simchi to honour previous working condition agreements. They will only provide emergency cover.

Firefighters held protests in August last year over the same issue, including a big demonstration outside the parliament building in Tel Aviv.

### **Syrian fertiliser factory workers protest**

Dozens of workers at a Russian-controlled phosphate factory in the city of Homs recently held a demonstration outside the factory. They were demanding a pay increase and cut in working hours. They also want to be paid in US dollars.

The protesters were dispersed and reportedly beaten by Russian military police called in by factory management.



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