

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 May 2019

## Tunisian regional general strike in response to deaths of agricultural workers

A regional general strike was called in Sidi Bouzid Monday by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) over the deaths of 12 agricultural workers, including seven women who died when being transported on the back of a lorry. Twelve other workers were injured. This is only the latest in a series of incidents of agricultural workers killed and injured when being transported in unsafe conditions. In the Ragada region Kin Kairoun nine farmworkers had fallen from a lorry van that was taking them to a worksite. The UGTT urged authorities to declare a regional day of mourning in memory of the victims.

## Israeli ceramic workers protest factory closure

Employees of the Harsa ceramic factory in the city of Beersheba in southern Israel held a protest outside the factory on Monday. The company plans to close the site, which has operated for 70 years, with the loss of over 100 jobs in a move to Turkey. Security staff prevented workers entering the site. Europe

## Ukrainian mineral workers strike

As of last week, 300 workers at the Ukrainian Prosco china clay company have been on strike for a month. The PROFBUD union members are owed back pay since January. They are paid the minimum wage rate.

## UK travel safety staff on London Overground rail to strike

UK travel safety officers working on the London Overground rail network will hold a 24-hour strike on May 16. They will also work to rule between May 13 and 18. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are protesting a pay freeze which has left them on the verge of poverty. They have previously taken strike action over the issue. The workers act as security staff and are responsible for passenger safety.

## UK rail workers protest

A UK protest was held outside the offices of Keolis on April 26, organised by the RMT. It was staged to mark the third anniversary of the beginning of the dispute over driver only operated (DOO) trains on Southern Railway. Keolis is a part owner of the train operating company (TOC). The expansion of DOO will eliminate the jobs of 6,000 rail guards and threatens passenger safety. TOCs across the country have imposed DOO in conjunction with the Conservative government. While rail workers came out in opposition to DOO, the RMT called limited strikes on a regional basis, dissipating the struggle and finally wrapping it up. The last stoppage was at Northern Rail, suspended in February this year after 47 strike days. The company describes ongoing talks with the union as “about what the future role of the conductor looks like” and “operational models moving ahead.”

## UK Teachers' union calls off further strikes at school facing loss of sixth form

Around 40 UK teachers at Bradfield school in Sheffield held a one-day strike at the end of March over plans by the academy to close its sixth form and make 15 teachers redundant. The threatened cuts were driven by financial problems. The school may be taken over by the Tupton School Academy Trust that runs eight schools across the city. The National Education Union has called off further industrial action after promises that redundancies will be on a voluntary basis. Parents who spoke to WSWs were angry at the proposed cuts to provision and the union's sellout.

## Airport security staff at Luton UK airport strike

Around 120 security staff at Luton airport began a five-day strike Wednesday to be followed by a strike from May 7 to May 13. The Unite union members voted by over a 90 percent majority for action. They are opposed to a new shift pattern that would mean working an additional 15 days a year.

## Ferry staff in UK capital to hold series of strikes

The 31 staff working on the Woolwich Ferry service across the Thames

in London have voted to hold a series of strikes. The service is run by Briggs Marine Contractors on behalf of Transport for London. The ferry carries around 2.5 million passengers and one million vehicles over the river each year. The Unite union members will hold 24-hour strikes on May 17, 20, 24, 28 and 31. A further five days of strikes will be held in June. They want a six percent pay rise, oppose staff shortages and have health and safety concerns. Two years ago, the ferry workers held strikes over a row over allegations of bullying by the ferry operators.

### **Outsourced workers across UK plan protests**

Staff working for the outsourcing company ISS will hold a series of protests across the country at schools and hospitals where ISS holds a catering, cleaning and security services contract. Nationwide, the company holds around 60 contracts. ISS plans to change the pay cycle, meaning already low-paid GMB union members will not receive a pay packet between April 18 and May 9.

### **Council staff at West Midlands town of Sandwell to take industrial action**

Fourteen staff working for Sandwell Council in the UK's West Midlands are to begin industrial action on May 10. A ballot vote was unanimous in favour of action. The Unite union members are protesting a botched job evaluation exercise. The workers, who are front-line customer assistants, will refuse to deal with enquiries and information exchange requests.

### **UK football club players threaten strike**

Players at Bolton Wanderers football club in northwest England have threatened not to play in the last games of the current football season. The club has been relegated from the second-tier championship league and is having financial problems. The PFA union members and coaching staff have gone unpaid.

### **UK's Southampton Hospital security staff vote on pay offer**

A planned 48-hour strike due to begin Friday by 21 security staff at Southampton Hospital in southern England has been suspended. The Unite members took strike action on Good Friday and April 5 over pay and security concerns. The employer, outsourcing Mitie group, made a new pay offer which is being voted on. The result will be announced on May 17.

### **Teachers in Latvia and Lithuania demand higher wages**

Last week, teachers in Latvia called on the government to increase wages by May 16 or face possible strikes. Forms of action proposed include a warning strike in May and an all-out strike in September, when schools resume after the summer break. Teachers in Lithuania are also demanding higher wages. Following a strike in December, the Latvian government is in negotiations with the Lithuanian Trade Union of Education Workers. Teachers are prepared to resume industrial action if there is no progress. They are also calling for smaller class sizes. A 17-day strike by 300,000 teachers in Poland was suspended by the trade unions that forced a return to work Monday.

### **Unions at Bombardier Northern Ireland accept voluntary redundancies**

The Unite and GMB unions have called off strike ballots at the Bombardier aerospace plants in Northern Ireland. The company planned 400 compulsory redundancies at its two sites in Northern Ireland. Now the company has agreed to carry out the job cuts through voluntary redundancies and offered to reinstate 32 sacked workers, the unions agreed to cooperate with management in reducing the workforce.

### **Coca Cola workers in Ireland consider industrial action**

Workers at the Coca Cola concentrate production plant in Ballina in County Mayo are considering industrial action. The company is ignoring a Labour Court ruling to recognise the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union for negotiating purposes. In January the company announced plans to reduce its 200-strong workforce at its plant in Drogheda in County Louth by a quarter. The company said it wanted to outsource some services.

### **March in Brussels calls for a fairer Europe for workers**

On April 26, 8,000 workers marched through Belgium's capital Brussels and held a rally outside the European parliament. Around half the marchers came from France and Belgium, with the remainder including workers from Germany and Italy. It was organised by the European Trade Union Confederation under the slogan "A fairer Europe for workers," timed to coincide with upcoming European elections.

### **Belgian workers protest unsafe working**

On Monday, Belgian workers protested outside the parliament in Brussels. The ACV-CSC Christian trade union confederation members were protesting workplace deaths and made a call for improved health and safety conditions. Africa

### **South Africa Cell C workers "illegal" strike continues**

Workers at South Africa's Cell C mobile phone company are continuing their strike to demand last year's unpaid bonus. The Labour Court made the strike illegal. The company has threatened to sack the 1,300 strikers and sue the Information Communication Technology Union (ICTU). Cell C workers joined a solidarity picket alongside striking Tiso Blackstar Group journalists.

Tiso Blackstar has a 40 percent stake in Cell C. It owns Business Day, Sunday Times, Financial Mail and The Sowetan newspapers. Workers at both companies are in the ICTU. The 200 Blackstar workers are on a go-slow for a living wage and owed bonuses. The ICTU called off indefinite action due from May 6 in favour of negotiations.

### **South African water workers strike over privileged pay to ex-military veterans**

Workers in the South African water industry are on strike demanding pay comparable to military veterans in the industry. In 2016, veterans from the Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association, the African National Congress armed division, alongside the Azania People's Liberation Army veterans of the armed wing of the Pan African Congress, were brought into the public sector. They were paid at grade 10 while workers are generally paid at grade four.

The eThekweni municipality is applying to the courts to make the strike illegal. Armed police discharged stun grenades against the protesters. Government officials fear a strike by water and power workers, depriving homes of electricity and water through to the elections on May 8. Many areas around Durban have been without water for over a week. The South African Municipal Workers Union members are scapegoated for the country's water crises, the product of years of drought and dilapidated infrastructure with a 35 percent leakage rate.

### **South African miners' union faces deregistration after selling out Sibanye Stillwater strike**

After selling-out South Africa's gold miners' five-month strike at Sibanye Stillwater Gold, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) is threatened with deregistration. The government is anxious to destroy a union seen as an opposition to the pro-African National Congress National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

The government accuses the union of not carrying out annual congresses and demands an explanation in 60 days. The AMCU agreed a deal on behalf of 15,000 strikers little better than the "slave labour" deal signed with three other unions—the National Union of Metalworkers, Solidarity and UASA—an extra R4,000 pay-out. The miners wanted an increase of R1,000 a month over three years. Platinum miners were on the verge of joining the action over separate wage negotiations.

The union has also agreed to aid restructuring as Sibanye takes over Lonmin, threatening 7,000 jobs. It will not oppose disciplinary action against strikers and has committed to productivity increases to recover production lost during the strike.

The AMCU has 250,000 members nationally, with 70 percent representation in Lonmin, the site of the Marikana massacre by police in 2012 green-lighted by former NUM leader and multi-millionaire Cyril Ramaphosa, who was made ANC president in 2017 and is now president of South Africa. In March, the AMCU threatened to call out workers at all South Africa's platinum and coal mines alongside the gold miners until a

court ruling banned the action. Deregistration means companies employing AMCU members would not pass along members' contributions to the union.

### **South African judicial workers demand improved wages and conditions**

Workers at the South Africa department of justice are ready to strike over wages and conditions. The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), however, is prevaricating over making the strike call, despite holding a strike certificate since last year.

The workers are complaining about work safety in the Cape Town and Johannesburg filing offices, where the roof leaks and the rain falls onto important documents. The workers want vacant positions filled, casuals brought into permanent employment and a senior manager to negotiate with.



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