

South African municipal strikers defy unions; strike continues by South African workers at Cell C phones

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 May 2019

Africa

### Workers defy South African unions' attempt to call off municipal workers' unofficial strike

South African workers are defying attempts by the unions to end their wildcat strike in eThekweni municipality. After meeting with management on Tuesday, the unions, who refused to support the strike from the outset, now declare the strike over.

The action begun April 30 at the Water and Sanitation Unit and Durban Solid Waste departments was over privileged pay for recently employed ex-military personnel. Veterans are promoted to pay scale 10, more than double their previous R9,000 wage, while long standing workers remain on scale 4.

The South African Municipal Workers (SAMWU) and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union members blocked roads with rubbish. Electricians and garbage collectors also joined the action.

The Durban city officialdom say domestic premises and hotel accommodation, in the tourist and conference season, could be without water and electricity.

The South African Police Force arrested over thirty protesters while scabbing on the strike. Online news reporter Times Live said, "Durban metro police have become street sweepers, waste collectors and refuse truck drivers. Coupled with cleaning the streets, the cops have also undertaken duties of collecting waste, putting out fires and even driving water tankers to supply residents who have had no water."

Police killed one striker, according to SAMWU.

The central and provincial governments are threatening to deploy the South African National Defence Force if strikers do not return to work.

### Striking South African cell phone workers dismissed

Workers on unofficial strike at the South African Cell C phone company have been suspended and are threatened with dismissal. The 1,300 Information Communications and Technology Union (ICTU) members went on strike last week over unpaid bonuses. Management has paid itself bonuses of R100 million since the beginning of this year.

Despite their strike being declared illegal by the labour court, strikers

joined a solidarity picket of striking Tiso Blackstar Group journalists last week.

Tiso Blackstar has a 40 percent stake in Cell C and owns as a part of its portfolio, *Business Day*, *Sunday Times*, *Financial Mail* and *The Sowetan* newspapers. Cell C has acquired junk status by Standard & Poor's. Online news reporter fin24 reported that Tiso Blackstar is in financial difficulties and has planned a restructuring programme involving redundancies.

An all out strike by ITCU members at Cell C was to start Monday and a demonstration at the company on Tuesday, but there have been no further reports.

### South African health workers and paramedics demonstrate over long hours and dangerous conditions

South African paramedics and health workers demonstrated May 2 through the centre of Cape Town over long hours and dangerous working conditions.

Although their contract is a 45-hour week, they often work 60. They can be sent out without a security guard. Paramedics are sometimes robbed and even murdered at work.

The National Public Service Workers Union members handed in a memorandum to the Acting Director of Labour Relations at the Western Cape Health Department in Cape Town.

Health workers who are seconded to NGOs are paid below the minimum wage. They are demanding to be employed by the Western Cape Health Department.

### South African building workers strike over training fund

South African building workers went on strike at the construction site of the new Noninzi Luzipho Primary School in KwaNobuhle Township this week. They are demanding the funding set aside for training be used as such.

A local worker said, "We fought hard to have this school, but now they are fighting for certificates." He was concerned that when the project is complete the workers will come away without recognised skills and no prospect for further employment.

Strikers claim that the R600,000 training fund is being used to make pay

rates up to an hourly rate of R22, R2 above the minimum wage introduced last year.

### **Union cancels strike threat by South African election workers**

The strike threat by election workers overseeing South Africa's May 8 general election was called off by the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union.

The workers are demanding that recommendations made three years ago on salary categories and pay arrangements be implemented. They also want transport provided to and from polling stations to drop off and pick up vote collecting boxes.

The Independent Electoral Commission officials said they will resolve workers' grievances in September.

### **Nigerian university staff demonstrate to recover cut allowances**

University staff demonstrated Monday at Nigeria's University of Ilorin over cutbacks. They locked the entrance gates after new management refused to discuss their grievances.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, the Non-Academic Staff Union and some Academic Staff Union of Universities members are demanding allowances be reinstated.

Allowances for field trips and organizational responsibility have been cut since the beginning of the year. Provisions of a bag of rice per person have been reduced to one bag between two.

### **Sudan flour company workers strike over wages and conditions**

Sudanese workers at the government owned flour company in the Port Sudan area are continuing their strike begun May 2. They are demanding a pay rise and improved conditions.

The strike halted production at the Gulf Factory subsidiary. The action is part of the mass opposition against the austerity of the previous al-Bashir regime and the current military rulers.

### **Europe**

### **Uber drivers in UK cities join worldwide strikes**

UK drivers working for the ride-share company Uber held a strike on Wednesday, refusing to respond to requests on the Uber app. Protests by Uber drivers in America and internationally took place the same day.

The boycott was between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. Drivers in Glasgow, Birmingham, Nottingham and London took part. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members are demanding an increase in fares from £1.25 a mile to £2 a mile and a reduction in Uber's commission from 25 percent to 15 percent.

Despite UK court rulings that Uber drivers are entitled to rights such as the minimum wage and holiday pay, the company insists they work on a self-employed basis. Uber is due to launch a \$90 billion initial public

offering on the stock exchange today making its investors extremely rich.

In a separate dispute, licensed taxi drivers in Birmingham have been holding go-slow protests each day this week with plans to continue next week. This is in response to Birmingham City Council's clean air zone charges that will hit taxi drivers' earnings. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are demanding the council re-open talks over the issue.

### **Wildcat action by post office workers in two UK towns**

UK post office workers at two Royal Mail offices staged unofficial walkouts last week. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) members walked out of the Medway mail facility in Kent and from a delivery office in the Scottish town of Paisley. According to the CWU, the Medway strike was in response to "unacceptable behaviour."

### **Underground rail maintenance staff in UK capital to strike**

Around 1,000 UK maintenance and engineering workers at the London Underground rail system are to strike from Friday, May 17, until Monday, May 20. They are opposing London Underground's plans to cut the number of routine inspections of rolling stock. This would impact on safety and jobs.

Workers, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, voted by a 90 percent majority to strike. They will also work to rule regarding risk assessments at work.

### **Strike by West Thames College lecturers in UK**

UK lecturers at the West Thames College in London went on strike Tuesday and Wednesday. The action was backed unanimously in a recent ballot.

University and College Union (UCU) members were protesting against pay restraint, which over the last decade has left them 25 percent worse off in real terms. College lecturers earn around £7,000 less than school teachers.

According to a recent Further Education and Workforce Data report, lecturers' median pay has fallen as the percentage of lecturers employed on a casual basis has increased—from 7.4 to 9.9 percent over the last year for which figures are available. The number of zero-hours contracts increased from 3,323 to 3,501 over the same period.

Last week lecturers at Lambeth College and New City College in London struck over the shortfall in pay.

UCU members across the UK have taken action over recent months. Lecturers at 13 colleges walked out in January, while those at nine colleges walked out last month. Last year, after 14 days of industrial action, the national strike of 50,000 university lecturers, librarians, administration staff and technicians to defend their pensions and conditions was betrayed by the UCU.

### **Union accepts voluntary redundancies at northwest UK oil refinery**

UK workers at the Essar oil refinery site at Ellesmere Port voted by a 98 percent majority to strike to oppose 155 job losses out of a workforce of 500.

After negotiations between the Unite union and management, the job cuts will be imposed through “voluntary redundancy” and redeployment.

### **Strike of outsourced workers at UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office premises**

Workers at outsourcing company Interserve in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) building in King Charles Street London held two days of strikes last week. The Public and Commercial Services union members are opposing plans by Interserve to change their payment day from the 28th of each month to the 11th. They are also opposing threatened redundancies and contractual changes. The workers provide cleaning, portering, maintenance and other services at the FCO building.

### **Strike at UK West Midlands Sandwell council called off**

Proposed industrial action by 14 UK council workers at Sandwell in the West Midlands due today was called off. The strike threat was in response to a botched job revaluation exercise that workers said failed to take into account the demanding nature of their duties. The council have offered the Unite union members a £4,000 per year pay increase and two extra days leave.

### **Outsourced library staff at London council strike consideration**

Library staff at Bromley council in southeast London are being balloted over a pay dispute. The 45 Unite union members employed by outsourcing company Greenwich Leisure Limited are seeking a six percent pay rise.

Greenwich Leisure has contracts to run services in 16 London borough councils.

### **Workers at Irish Coca-Cola plant to be balloted for strike**

It was announced Tuesday that workers at the Coca-Cola manufacturing plant in Ballina in County Mayo, Ireland, are to be balloted for strike action. The plant employs around 400 workers. The Services, Industrial Professional and Technical Union members are seeking collective bargaining rights.

Coca Cola have not conceded to two Labour Court rulings in favour of the workers' rights to collective bargaining.

### **May Day protests in Germany**

Tens of thousands of German workers joined May Day marches on May 1. The chairman of the German Trade Union Confederation promoted illusions in the European Union, claiming it stood for peace and prosperity. Addressing demonstrators at a rally in Leipzig, he urged them to vote in the upcoming European elections.

### **Middle East**

### **Turkish workers commemorate May Day**

Turkish workers took part in May Day rallies throughout the country. Authorities refused permission for a rally in Istanbul's Taksim Square.

Instead, tens of thousands rallied in a market space in the Bakırköy district, organised by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions among others. Members of the largest trade union confederation, Türk-İş, held a rally in the northwest province of Kocaeli. Protesters held banners opposing the Turkish government's plans to change redundancy payment legislation.

### **Strike of Tunisian fuel distribution workers**

Fuel distribution drivers in Tunisia began a three-day strike on May 2. On May 3, the government ordered army drivers to deliver fuel as the strike began to hit fuel service stations. The drivers are seeking a \$100 a month pay raise.

### **Further demonstrations in Algeria**

Thousands of Algerian students congregated around the postal office in central Algiers on Tuesday, the first day of Ramadan. Students held rallies in other cities across the country, continuing the protests against the military dictatorship.

### **Iranian workers celebrate May Day**

Iranian workers, teachers, pensioners and students took part in a May Day rally outside the Iranian parliament on May 1. It was organized by four trade unions. The government state security staff responded by arresting large numbers of those taking part.

### **Lebanese bank workers strike suspended**

Lebanese central bank workers began an indefinite strike on May 3. This Tuesday the strike was suspended for three days.

The strike was to protest austerity measures by the government including slashing the benefits of central bank workers. The government is introducing austerity to qualify for international loans.

On Monday, the Beirut stock exchange was forced to close.

## May Day march in Moroccan capital

Members of around a dozen trade unions and rights organisations took part in a May Day rally in the Moroccan capital of Rabat. They marched to Parliament where they rallied until 3 p.m. Some teachers organised by the Cell 9 Coordination continued their protest before being broken up by riot police.



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