

Workers in France march against government labour laws; Sudan hit by strikes; unions betray South African Cell C strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 May 2019

Europe

French workers march against new government labour laws

Tens of thousands of workers marched through Paris on May 9 to protest the French government's changes to labour legislation. The changes would lead to the loss of 120,000 jobs, increase casualization, attack employment rights and reduce pension entitlement. The march in Paris was the largest of a number that took place nationally.

The protest was organised by nine unions including the Stalinist CGT, the CFDT and the FO. After six months of "yellow vest" protests, the unions called the demonstrations out of fear they will lose control of the anti-government protest movement.

French taxi drivers in Cannes hold blockade

Taxi drivers in the southern French city of Cannes blockaded the airport on Tuesday. The blockade, in protest over the use of online hailing apps, coincided with the start of the Cannes film festival and led to disruptions at the airport. Police were called in to break up the protest.

The leader of the Cannes taxi union told *The Local* that the taxi drivers suspended the protest in the afternoon but would resume today if the authorities in Cannes do nothing about regulating the use of hailing apps.

Polish Amazon workers' threaten strike over pay

Polish Amazon workers are threatening to strike for a doubling of their current wages of around \$5 an hour and improved working conditions. A company representative met with workers' representatives last week. Around 1,000 Polish Amazon staff are trade union members.

Dutch public transport workers set strike date

Train drivers and public transport workers in Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam are set to hold a 24-hour strike on May 28. Other regional transport workers may join them.

The FNV union members are demanding the age for retirement is not extended beyond 66 years and that pensions rise in line with inflation.

Workers at hospitals in Merseyside, UK vote to strike

Workers employed by ISS Mediclean at the Royal Liverpool hospital and Broadgreen Hospital on Merseyside voted unanimously to strike. They provide catering, cleaning and portering services.

The GMB union members are seeking pay parity with other National Health Service staff directly employed by the hospitals. ISS staff earn the minimum wage of just £8.21 an hour. The company says it can only afford a pay rise of 8p an hour. ISS recently paid out £30 million to shareholders.

Academic staff strike at two UK sites

Lecturers at West Thames College in London took further strike action Wednesday and Thursday after college management failed to make an improved pay offer. Lecturers' wages have fallen by 25 percent over the last decade, so they now earn £7,000 a year less than secondary school teachers.

In a separate dispute, academic staff at Winchester University are to strike on May 28 and 29 and from June 3 to 5. They will also boycott open days and refuse to cover absences. The University and College Union (UCU) members are opposed to plans by the university to cut 40 full-time posts.

The UCU is calling for job losses to be achieved through voluntary redundancies.

The union is opposed to national strike action at the hundreds of colleges in the UK, despite staff suffering universal pay cuts. Instead token strikes have been held at just a few universities.

Last year, the UCU sold out the national strike of 50,000 university lecturers, librarians, administration staff and technicians fighting to defend their pensions and conditions.

Teachers strike at UK London school against academization

Teachers at the John Roan Secondary school in Greenwich, London took industrial action Tuesday. The strike was part of a campaign against plans to turn the school into an academy.

Academy schools, introduced by Labour then expanded under Conservative governments, are publicly funded though privately run.

Following a picket at the school, the National Education Union members went on to lobby the Education Department in Westminster. The lobby was attended by parents from John Roan school and other schools fighting academization.

Support staff at UK nuclear plant Sellafield to continue industrial action

The 180 workers at support services company Mitie at the Sellafield nuclear site in northwest England are due to begin a 10-day strike on Sunday.

The Unite union members are demanding a pay rise, having rejected an £8.21 pay offer from the company. They ended a 10-day strike on Monday, bringing to 16 the number of days of action taken so far.

UK driving agency staff vote to strike

Workers at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in the UK have voted by a more than 80 percent majority to strike and by 90 percent for action short of striking.

The DVSA is responsible for vehicle and driver licenses among other duties.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members have been involved in an ongoing dispute over travel and working time, following restructuring. The union said driving examiners, for example, will undertake more sustained action, with details to be announced.

Middle East

Iranian sugar workers arrested after strike

Workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane mill in Shush, southwest Iran, held a strike on May 9. They were protesting nonpayment of the last two New Year bonuses and demanding pensions due.

Since being privatized in 2015, working conditions at the mill have deteriorated. Workers held a rally at which police arrested 20 of them.

Strikes shut the mill for two months in December and January over privatization and wage arrears.

Africa

Sudanese power workers strike to demand changes in management

Staff at the Sudanese Electricity Distribution Company (SADC) in

Khartoum began an indefinite strike on May 12 to demand changes in management after repeated power outages.

Some demonstrators outside the SADC headquarters were injured and others suffered suffocation from tear gas when government forces tried to disperse them.

Others involved in the generalized rebellion in Sudan include workers at the Sudanese Mining Company, who began an open-ended strike on Sunday, and Sudanese Airline workers who protested in Khartoum Monday.

Sudanese port workers return to work, end roadblocks

Sudanese temporary workers at Port Sudan on strike since last week have returned to work, ending the roadblocks on all the roads accessing the port.

The workers went on strike to expedite procedures for being made permanent employees, due to commence at the start of May. They warned that if the state government reneged on promises they would restart their strike and reinstate roadblocks.

South African telecom workers' strike sold out by union

Striking South African workers from the Cell C phone company were ordered to return to work on May 13 by their union. The union claimed that it would solve grievances when employees returned to work.

The 1,300 Information Communications and Technology Union (ICTU) members went on strike for nearly three weeks over unpaid bonuses. Management has paid itself bonuses of R100 million since the beginning of this year.

On May 9, police in Gauteng clashed with striking workers in Sandton. Police used rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.

The ICTU claimed that no one would be victimized, but the company has been sacking workers by means of a Whatsapp message or email.

South African farmworkers at Oak Valley Estate strike

South African farmworkers from wine producer Oak Valley Estate in Grabouw have been on strike since May 6. They are demanding a living wage of R250 per day (up from R162), the end of labour brokering and single-sex hostels to be replaced with family homes.

Public order police cleared strikers and protesters blocking the N2 highway near Sir Lowry's Pass on Monday morning.

South Africa's lawyers prepare national strike

South African Lawyers and support staff at the Legal Aid SA public legal agency planned demonstrations at the Braamfontein offices on Wednesday. They are calling for a national strike should management not respond to their grievances. Unaddressed for years, these include lack of work-place security, monstrous, debilitating and crippling workloads, and

bullying.

Last year, the workers obtained a strike certificate from the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

With 80 percent of the accused in all civil and criminal cases defended by the agency, one of the lawyers heading leading the action, Michael Motaun, said, "No courts would operate during the strike."

Clients who lost their cases often attack lawyers. Some handle five trials a day, compromising quality at the expense of the accused.

Bus strike ends in Soweto South Africa

A national strike by 17,000 South African bus drivers ended after more than three weeks with a 9 percent salary increase agreed May 10, backdated to April 17. An 8 percent increase was agreed for next year.

The majority of drivers are members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union.

South Africa's Vaal University of Technology staff on pay strike

South African lecturers, cleaners and security guards at the Vaal University of Technology, Gauteng went on strike May 10 for salary increases. The university was brought to a standstill, affecting 22,000 students ahead of mid-year exams on June 14.

A written response to staff promised by the University Council for May 2 failed to materialise following the resignation of nine members due to allegations of corruption by senior management. The council said it had insufficient members for a quorum and so could not make decisions on staff demands. It promised a special council meeting on May 17 to address the issues.

Doctors in Nigeria threaten strike action over pay arrears

Nigerian doctors are threatening strike action if they do not receive pay arrears within 40 days.

Resident doctors at the Anambra State Government Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Teaching Hospital began an indefinite strike on Monday over poor working conditions. They lack modern equipment and diagnostic facilities. Doctors are paid 50 percent less than their counterparts elsewhere.

Somali students protest over cancelled exams

Students took to the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia on Tuesday protesting the cancellation of National Secondary exams, affecting more than 31,000 students. Exam papers had been leaked on social media platforms.

Students demanded the firing of the education minister who said social media would be blocked for five days when exams are retaken on May 27.

College lecturers in Gambia in sit-down pay strike

Lecturers at the Gambia College have begun a sit-down strike to demand a pay rise of 50 percent and an end to delays in their salary payments. They are also demanding payment of unpaid salaries from last month. The action is the second such strike in the last seven months.



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