

Greek dockers plan 24-hour strike; Irish health workers strike; sit-in strike at South African chrome mine

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### Europe

#### Greek dock workers set to strike

Greek dock workers have announced a 24-hour strike on Wednesday July 3. The strike is expected to heavily impact ferry services in the busy tourist season. The PNO union called the strike in opposition to a proposed new collective labour agreement by ferry company management. The agreement covers pay and proposals on the size and composition of crews.

The last strike to shut down ferry services to outlying islands in Greece was in September of last year, when PNO called a 24-hour strike among ferry crews demanding a 5 percent pay increase after eight years of wage freezes.

The ferry industry, which connects the mainland to hundreds of scenic Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, plays a crucial role in Greece's tourism industry, which accounts for 25 percent of the country's GDP. Since the financial crisis in 2008 and the sovereign debt crisis which followed, the number of foreign visitors to Greece has more than doubled, from 15 million in 2005 to 32 million in 2018.

#### Strike by 10,000 Irish healthcare workers

A 24-hour strike by Irish health workers took place on Wednesday. Around 10,000 staff took part across around 40 hospitals and health facilities.

Health care assistants, maternity care assistants, technicians, catering, porters and household servicing staff took action after the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) failed to implement in full the results of a job evaluation scheme. If implemented, staff would be entitled to payments of between €1,500 and €3,000.

The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) called off a 24-hour strike last week in favour of talks with the HSE. The talks, under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission, failed to reach an agreement. According to SIPTU, the government Department of Public Expenditure offered only €1.2 million to settle the job evaluation

payments. SIPTU estimate €16.2 million is needed to cover the settlement.

The strike led to the cancellation of around 4,000 day-procedure appointments and several hundred elective procedures. Three days of consecutive strike action are planned for next week.

#### Norwegian oil platform strike planned

Norwegian offshore oil platform workers are due to walk out today over a pay dispute. Around 900 Industri Energi members together with around 600 members of the Safe union are to take part. Talks under the auspices of a mediator appointed by the government were taking place this week between the unions and the Norwegian Shipowners' Association.

Around 15 oil installation platforms will be affected, involving workers who carry out drilling and catering services on the rigs.

Although oil and gas production in the North Sea is in decline, it remains one of the world's major petroleum producing regions, with most of the reserves divided roughly equally between Norway and the United Kingdom. Oil and gas accounted for more than half of Norway's exports in 2017.

#### London underground rail workers in UK protest against cuts

Last week, UK rail workers on London underground rail protested outside the city hall headquarters of London Labour Lord Mayor, Sadiq Khan.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members were protesting the failure of the administration to restore cuts in funding that threatens safety on the underground network.

Also this week, beginning Wednesday around 2,000 RMT members who work in engineering, signaling, electrical, track and control services on the underground are being balloted for strike action. The ballot will run until July 16. Workers fear that the Transport for London's "Transformation Programme," if implemented, will be used as a pretext to carry out cuts and threaten safety.

#### RMT calls off strike at UK rail franchise

The RMT has ended a five-day strike at the UK rail firm South Western Rail (SWR). The stoppage was over plans by SWR to extend the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, or trains run by only the driver with no conductors or other staff. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

Similar action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years by the private train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

### **UK rail workers at Northern Rail threaten pay strike**

Rail staff, comprising clerical, professional and technical workers at the Northern Rail company, part of the Arriva transport company, are seeking an improved pay offer.

On June 17, Arriva North proposed a 2.1 percent pay rise from April with an additional 0.4 percent from October. The Transport Salaried Staffs Association members have rejected this as it is below the rate of inflation and have told Arriva North that if an improved offer is not forthcoming before today, they will be in dispute.

### **Union postpones strike by bus drivers in northern England**

A planned 24-hour strike by around 900 UK drivers at First Bus in South Yorkshire has been called off by the Unite union on the excuse that it would have coincided with Armed Forces Day. A 24-hour strike planned for Monday will go ahead.

Bus drivers voted by a near 70 percent majority for action. They were protesting the company's imposition of a one-year pay freeze beginning last month. Talks between Unite and the company took place on Wednesday.

### **UK food retail company drivers vote over outsourcing plans**

Drivers and mechanics working for the UK supermarket company Morrisons have been balloted for strike action. The ballot closed Monday, but the result is yet to be announced.

The approximately 400 workers are opposed to plans by the company to outsource their jobs to Pullmans. The drivers and mechanics are based at three sites in Cheshire, County Durham and West Yorkshire. Morrisons is attempting to impose the outsourcing without consultation with the union.

### **Strikes at Scottish airports over pay and pensions**

About 500 Scottish workers including security, firefighters, operations staff and technicians at Glasgow airport are continuing their strikes.

The stoppages are in protest over pay and pensions. AGS, the company running the airport, has offered a 1.8 percent pay increase and wants to close its final salary pension scheme. In 2016, AGS promised under the auspices of the government mediation service ACAS to keep open its

pension scheme for existing members.

Unite members at the airport voted by an over 90 percent majority on three-quarters turn-out to take the action. A four-hour strike took place Tuesday and Wednesday with further four-hour strikes proposed for today and Sunday.

Staff at Aberdeen airport employed by AGS have also been taking action protesting pay and pensions. The workers had been balloted on a new offer by AGS but rejected it. The rejected pay offer was for a 3 percent rise, as offered before, but with a new one-off payment of £600 for full-time employees, and a previously offered bonus was withdrawn. As at Glasgow airport, AGS was unwilling to withdraw its plan to end the current, superior pension scheme.

### **Strike threat by drivers at Scottish bus company**

Around 1,700 Scottish bus drivers at Lothian Buses, which covers Scotland's capital Edinburgh, have voted to strike by more than 90 percent on a 60 percent-plus turnout.

The strike threat is over a long-running dispute over workplace relations and a hostile attitude by management. Talks between Unite and Lothian Buses are due to take place today under the auspices of ACAS, the government mediation service. The stoppage would take place in August.

#### **Middle East**

### **Protest by Iranian pensioners**

Hundreds of Iranian pensioners protested outside the Iranian parliament on June 18 to demand pension and wage increases to counteract inflation.

Under Iranian law pensions are meant to be 80 percent of workers' pay, but the Iranian government routinely ignores this.

### **Palestinian strike and protests in Gaza**

Thousands of Gazan workers went on general strike Tuesday and Wednesday, closing public institutions.

The strike coincided with a US sponsored economic workshop that took place in Bahrain. The US is touting a bogus and unfunded promise of a \$50 billion investment and infrastructure plan to buttress the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and its blockade of Gaza.

Unemployment in Gaza exceeds 50 percent.

### **Baggage handlers strike at Moroccan airport**

Baggage handlers at the Mohammed V airport in Casablanca went on strike June 21. Over the past three months they have staged walkouts for a pay increase. They work for the General Private Interim (GPI) firm, which is subcontracted to Royal Air Maroc, the Moroccan national airline.

#### **Africa**

## **South African chrome miners sit in at Rustenburg mine over harassment and sackings**

South African miners began an illegal sit-in strike at the Lanxess Chrome Mine in Rustenburg on June 19.

Two hundred and eighty National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members are on a sit-in to protest against sexual harassment, to demand the lifting of sackings and for the right to join a union.

The alleged sex offender, a mine captain protected by management, was trading permanent employment for sexual favours. He has since been sacked.

The sit-in is continuing until the reinstatement of 50 miners sacked for their involvement in a 2018 strike. Miners' wives picketed the company gates, stopping traffic going in and out, and brought food and water for their spouses.

## **South African union shuts down strike of Kruger National park workers**

A strike at South Africa's Kruger National Park ended Sunday without resolution. Health and Other Service Personnel of South Africa (HOSPERA) shop stewards agreed to a return to work without workers' demands being met, pending further discussions with management.

The strike was over premium payments for Sunday working. Two thousand workers are employed on the national park, which is bigger in size than England.

## **South African security guards protest mass sackings**

Around 200 South African security guards demonstrated June 20 outside city hall in Msunduzi province to protest redundancies.

Half the 732 guards employed by Khuselani Security Agency (KSA) were sacked when the company lost its municipality contract to Royal Security. Some of the workers had been employed at KSA for more than 10 years.

## **Zimbabwe miners demand wage increase to compensate for runaway inflation**

Zimbabwe miners are demanding a pay increase and to be paid in dollars.

Diamond mining is the major currency earner in the economy and business transactions are usually paid in US dollars.

Zimbabwe's new national currency, the RTGS dollar or "zollar," was first implemented in February and is losing its value due to runaway inflation nearing 100 percent. Workers are unable to pay for basic necessities and are left destitute. An 80 percent wage increase last January for miners has been completely eroded by inflation.

## **Zimbabwe nurses' union retreats from all-out strike**

A planned all-out strike by Zimbabwe nurses due from Monday was called off by the Zimbabwe Nurses Association (ZINA).

ZINA is now having talks with President Emmerson Mnangawa, who promised to review their wages. Nurses are only turning up for work twice a week, because they cannot afford travel costs as inflation is eroding their wages. The union has issued another 10-day strike notice if the review is not carried out.

The government has rejected the call for wages to be paid in foreign currencies like the US dollar and will only recognise the interim currency, the RTGS dollar.

## **Striking Kenyan doctors sacked**

Sixty-one striking Kenyan doctors at the Nanyuki Teaching and Referral Hospital were sacked last Friday. The doctors went on strike June 3 to demand the implementation of a collective bargaining agreement and a promotions policy.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union (KMPDU) members also want back pay for those who qualify for promotion.

The Laikipia county governor said there were no resources to accommodate the doctors' demands. Doctors are not paid for study leave.



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