

Zimbabwe unions threaten general strike as walkouts spread in Nigeria

# 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.

## Strike by lecturers at Bradford College

Lecturers at Bradford College in northern England began a three-day strike on Wednesday. They are protesting plans by the college to cut 131 jobs to overcome financial problems and also low pay. It will mean that the lecturers will have taken ten days strike action this year.

Bradford College staff along with other college staff in the UK had taken strike action over a pay offer that would leave faculty falling still further behind school teachers in terms of pay. With hardly any pay increase over the last 10 years, college lecturers have seen their real salaries eroded. Staff that have taken action have been left isolated by the University and College Union (UCU).

The UCU is seeking to dissipate the anger of college staff over pay and job cuts. UCU regional official, Julie Kelly, told the Bradford Telegraph and Argus, "Other colleges have shown what can be achieved when they engage seriously with us on pay and jobs and if Bradford wants to avoid serious disruption then it urgently needs to work with us..."

## Workers to strike at Drax power station UK

Around 400 power supply workers at the Drax power station in North Yorkshire have voted to hold a series of six 48-hour strikes over the next six months. The first strike is due to begin July 14. Drax is the UK's largest power station, producing seven percent of the country's power output. Unite union members have rejected a 2.8 percent pay offer for 2018 and 2019 in a proposed two-year deal. The union says it is prepared to hold further talks to avoid strike action.

## Health visitors in eastern England set to strike

Health visitors working for Lincolnshire County Council have voted by an 84 percent majority to strike. The 58 health visitors are set to hold a

48-hour strike on July 15 followed by 24-hour strikes July 19 and 22 and a further 48-hour strike on July 25.

The health visitors, members of the Unite union, are protesting the erosion in pay since their employment was transferred from the National Health Service. They have lost around £2,000 a year in pay since the transfer in 2017.

They are also protesting the increasing workload they face. Health visitor numbers are falling not only in Lincolnshire but nationally, putting pressure on those remaining and necessitating cuts in services to vulnerable clients.

## Strikes at one Scottish airport called off and suspended at another

Strikes have taken place at two Scottish airports, both run by AGS. Both disputes related to pay and pensions. AGS wants to end the pension scheme despite an Acas mediated agreement in 2016 to maintain it. Those who had taken part in the strikes, members of the Unite union, work as firefighters, operations and technical staff.

The 300 staff at Aberdeen airport voted on Monday by a 60 percent majority to accept the latest offer from AGS. Proposed strikes on June 29 and 30 were called off as talks began. Details of the offer were not available as of writing.

Around 400 airport staff at Glasgow have been taking action over the same issues. A proposed strike for Wednesday was suspended to allow for talks between AGS managers and the Unite union. However, a four-hour strike called for today is set to go ahead with further partial strikes scheduled between July 11 and 15.

## UK rail staff to be balloted for national strike over attack on pensions

Around 40,000 UK rail workers employed by the 23 train operating companies (TOCs) that run services across the country are to be balloted in the next few weeks for strike action. If a vote in favour is delivered, action would begin at the end of August.

The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union are facing an attack on their pensions. The TOCs face a £5-6bn shortfall in their pensions pot that rail workers fear will be resolved at their expense. Should the strike go ahead, it would be the first national strike in over 20

years.

### **Cleaning staff at UK southwestern rail company to strike**

Cleaners working for outsourced company ISS, servicing Hitachi trains on the Great Western Railways network, are to hold a 48-hour strike. The RMT members are to begin their strike on July 9. They are opposed to the proposals by ISS to change the shift patterns that will mean working an additional 60 shifts a year. The cleaners voted unanimously to take the action.

### **Industrial action by healthcare staff at Scottish health authority**

Pharmacy staff working for the Tayside Health Authority in central eastern Scotland voted overwhelmingly on a 90 percent turnout for strike action. The members of the Unite union are opposed to the results of a regrading scheme that has left them financially worse off. If the strike goes ahead it will begin July 22.

Meanwhile, healthcare assistants at the Tayside authority are threatening to work to rule after missing out in a regrading exercise. Under the regrading, around 150 staff will be put in band 3 and receive up to £2,000 a year increase, backdated in some cases to 2015. Other health care assistants, currently on band 2, will not receive the increase, but they consider themselves to be carrying out similar duties to the band 3 staff.

### **Strike by staff at retail distribution centre in southeast England**

Around 100 staff at the Sainsbury's supermarket distribution warehouse in Waltham Point in southeast England held a one-day strike on June 27. They took the action in response to the company's plans to change its absence policy without union consultation.

Over 1,000 staff work at the facility. USDAW union members voted by a more than 70 percent majority for the action. The strike was the first in a planned series of 24-hour strikes.

### **Consumer goods production workers at English Midlands factory to begin overtime ban**

Workers at Reckitt Benckiser factory in Derby are to begin an overtime ban and work to rule on July 11. The factory produces household cleaning and health products. The 160 Unite members at the factory voted overwhelmingly for the action. They are opposing management plans, which would result in them working an extra four weeks a year.

### **UK science museum staff vote to strike**

Nearly 200 staff working for the Science Museum Group (SMG) have

voted by an 80 percent majority to strike. They work at the group's five sites across the country—in London, Shildon, York, Manchester and Bradford. They include the Media museum in Bradford, the Rail museum in York and the Science museum in Manchester. The staff, who are members of the Prospect trade union, are opposing the proposed 1.5 percent pay increase offered by the SMG. Any strike action would take place in late summer.

### **Work to rule by ground handling staff at Brussels airport**

Ground handling staff working for Swissport at Brussels airport undertook work to rule action on Tuesday that led to flight delays. They took the action to highlight poor working conditions and heavy workloads.

### **Strike by Greek seamen goes ahead**

Greek seamen held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. It meant ships, including ferries, failed to leave harbour. Many of the Greek islands rely on the ferries for maintaining supplies and communications. The members of the PNO union are opposed to the two percent pay rise offered by SEEN, the shipping companies' association. The seamen are seeking a five percent pay rise.

The last strike to shut down ferry services to outlying islands in Greece was in September 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 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 threat by Maltese air pilots**

The union representing pilots working for the national airline carrier Air Malta are threatening to take industrial action beginning next week. The pilots are awaiting the outcome of talks between the government and union representatives. The issues the pilots are concerned about include work schedules, pilot shortages over the busy summer period and availability of leave.

Air Malta pilots also have concerns over the security of their jobs as Ryanair plans to set up a subsidiary in Malta called Malta Air.

### **Ukrainian miners continue protest over wage arrears**

Ukrainian coal miners working for state owned Pivdennodonbaska group at their mine in Vuhledar in the Donetsk region are continuing to protest over wage arrears. They are in their second week of a blockade of

the Volnovaha to Donetsk highway.

On Monday miners working for the state-owned Selydivvugillya mining group held a protest outside the offices of the group. They too were protesting over wage arrears.

### **Strike at Israeli airport called off after labour court ruling**

A strike by staff at Ben Gurion airport due to take place Tuesday was called off after the Regional Labour Court in Tel Aviv issued an injunction. Workers who man border-crossing stations at the airport had proposed the action because they are owed money over several years as the treasury had not updated their salaries in line with new contracts.

### **Zimbabwe unions oppose general strike call**

The Zimbabwe trade union federation has said it will declare a general strike if the government does not scrap or review its recent currency decree. However, it denied sanctioning a general strike beginning Monday this week.

A general strike and demonstration call for Monday was put out by a group, Tajamuka, associated with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. It was ignored by workers and was denounced by the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the rural teachers' union.

Meanwhile the ZCTU says it is to organise a mass demonstration against the government's ban on the use of all foreign currencies for trading in the country, and the reintroduction of the Zimbabwe dollar. The foreign currency ban cuts across the demand by workers that their wages be paid in US dollars. However, it has yet to set a date for the demonstrations.

The Zimbabwean government introduced the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar in February. Rapid inflation has destroyed its value.

### **Nigerian dockworkers to strike over oil giants' refusal to pay owed wages**

Nigerian dockworkers were due to begin a national strike on Wednesday over unpaid wages. Dockworkers, who have been contracted to work at ports and inland sites for the International Oil Companies (IOC), have not been paid since June 1. The government's Nigerian Port Authority labour scheme supplies contracting labour for stevedoring and dock-related tasks for IOC companies. IOC companies that use the service include Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell and Total.

A warning strike notice issued by the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria ran out last week with no sign of the unpaid wages and so the strike began this week. In addition to the unpaid wages the Nigerian government claims the IOC owe \$20 billion in unpaid taxes and royalties.

### **Nigerian Medical scientist set to strike over the undermining of their profession**

Nigerian medical scientists are threatening a national strike over the appointment of doctors to ministerial posts in the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Their complaint against Buhari has been upheld in legal judgements in 15 Nigerian states.

They fear that the appointment of medical doctors as ministers in the government will undermine their case against doctors transferring into the medical science roles after completing a short course. Medical scientists fear such an influx of doctors into the medical science profession will undermine the profession. The National Union of Allied Health Professionals is supporting the medical scientists' case.

### **Long running salary structure strike continues at Lagos Polytechnic Nigeria**

Non-academic staff unions are continuing their five-month-old strike at the Lagos Polytechnic over issues related to the CONTISS 15-point salary structure, which covers non-academic staff in tertiary institutions. Strikes have been taking place since the salary structure was introduced in 2016.

The unions involved are the polytechnic branch of Non-Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (NASUP) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnic (SSANIP) who have been on strike since January.

They are calling for the sacking of the polytechnic rector and his managerial team and calling for an investigation into alleged financial mismanagement.

### **Nigerian senior civil servants to strike over unimplemented agreements**

Nigerian senior civil servants working at the National Insurance Commission are threatening to strike this week over 2018 contractual agreements, which have not been implemented. The Association of Senior Civil Servants (ASCS) gave a seven-day strike notice last week.

They will invoke the strike if their employer does not implement the agreements with the association in 2018, and work to public service rules. The agreements include promotion opportunities, implementation of fuel allowance and amnesty for strikers.

### **South African chrome miner's sit-in called off**

A strike by around 290 South African chrome miners ended last week after their union gained recognition. Members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) stayed down Lanxess Chrome Mine in Rustenburg for nine days protesting sexual harassment, victimization and calling for recognition.

The miners ended their sit-in after three days thinking an agreement had been reached, but resumed their sit-in when they found out that was not the case. Twelve of the miners had to be hospitalized in the course of the strike.

According to recent reports a NUMSA spokesman said the mine captain accused of sexual harassment has been suspended and 56 miners, dismissed for striking in 2018, are to be reinstated and an agreement was made on union recognition.

The union accepted that the reinstated miners would be issued a

management warning, to last six months, opening up opportunities for management to sack the miners based on trumped-up charges.

### **South African rail workers go on short wildcat strike**

A short protest strike caused chaos on South Africa's Cape Town Metro railway system Thursday last week. It led to massive disruption for early morning commuter travellers. According to Metro management two issues led to the strike, one being the death of a pedestrian and the other undisclosed.

Management said the dispute was settled after an hour when they addressed the workforce.

### **South African workers threaten to strike for wage payment from bankrupt municipalities**

The South African council workers union has threatened to strike if municipalities do not pay wages on time. Several municipalities have not paid wages over the last month or two. Overall 30 municipal authorities have paid late or not at all. Municipal authorities are in crisis, with some only receiving half their due income.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) has said its members will not work if they are not paid. It has demanded compensation for late payment.

Currently the Municipal Demarcation Board is looking at merging several municipalities, which would impact on jobs.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, which has members in local authorities, is opposed to amalgamations that would lead to the loss of 30,000 jobs when departments are already short staffed.

The crisis in the authorities is having a knock-on effect on water and power producers, who they are unable to pay, threatening many thousands more jobs.

### **South African Kruger Park workers continue their protest for unsocial hours payments**

Around 2,300 workers, most of the Kruger National Parks staff, went on strike Sunday in an ongoing dispute over overtime and holiday payments. They are seeking premium payments for working unsociable hours, i.e., Sundays and holidays.

According to South Africa National Parks management the park was working normally after they drafted in army, police and volunteer rangers. However, many of the access gates to the five-million-acre park were affected.

### **South African cleaners in Kimberley strike over threat to jobs and conditions**

Cleaning staff working at the Department of Social Development (DSD) office in Kimberley in Northern State came out on unofficial strike on

Monday. They were opposed to plans by DSD to replace the directly employed cleaners by an outsourced contractor. The strikers were closely monitored by police as they locked out DSD staff attempting to enter the building.

### **South African OAPs go on hunger strike to support their care home staff**

Residents at the Vermont Old Age Home in Hornlee, Knysna went on hunger strike on June 16. They did so in support of staff at the home, who are underpaid and overworked.

There are staff shortages at the home and staff have not had a pay increase or bonus for the last three years. The residents subsequently abandoned their hunger strike as it was affecting their health and had no impact on management. According to the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, the home's management has refused to meet with them.



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