

Iranian Haft Tappeh sugar workers' strike resumes; Zimbabwe's doctors' five-week strike continues

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Middle East

## Striking Iranian sugar workers arrested

On Sunday, on the fourteenth day of their strike, 14 Iranian workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane production facility were arrested. Eleven workers were arrested on their way to a meeting with a parliamentary commission in Tehran, while the other three were arrested at the facility.

The Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' union members have undertaken a series of walkouts and mass protests in the thousands over the last three years over job losses, pay and conditions as well as a demand for the company to be taken back into state ownership.

Haft Tappeh is the oldest sugar factory in Iran. Since it was privatised in 2015, wages and conditions have deteriorated.

Exports of Iran's crude oil have been slashed by 80 percent due to US sanctions, reimposed just over a year ago. The prices of food, housing and necessities have soared, while there is a shortage of medicines.

## Jordanian teachers' strike ends as union agrees divisive pay deal

After a four-week strike, Jordanian teachers returned to work on Sunday.

The Jordanian Teachers' Association members were seeking a 50 percent pay rise across the board. The union accepted a 35 percent increase for the lowest paid teachers, rising to 75 percent for the highest paid.

Unemployment in Jordan is 20 percent, with inflation rising due to a 3.7 percent tax on basic commodities. The streets of Amman saw mass protests last year because of IMF-dictated austerity.

Europe

## Strike by Italian airline pilots and cabin crew

Pilots and cabin crew working for the Italian airline Alitalia held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. The action led to the cancellation of around

200 flights, a third of those scheduled.

The Anpac, Anpav and Anp trade union members were protesting working conditions and uncertainty regarding the future of the airline.

Alitalia went into bankruptcy in April 2017, but has been kept financially afloat by the Italian government. October 15 is the deadline for rescue plans to be presented. The Italian government is pushing for US-based airline Delta to increase its current 10 percent stake to 15 percent. Currently Italian state railway company Ferrovie dello Stato, motorway infrastructure group Atlantia, and Chinese airline China Eastern have expressed interest.

Alitalia workers fear the restructuring will hit jobs and working conditions.

## Lecturers strike at UK midlands college

UK college lecturers at Nottingham College have been on strike this week following 15 days of strikes earlier this academic year.

After merging New College Nottingham and Central College Nottingham, the college management sought to impose new contracts. Those refusing to sign have been threatened with dismissal. Under the new contracts staff could end up £1,000 a year worse off, have their holiday entitlement cut and face a more intense workload. The University and College Union accuses the college management of reneging on a promise to limit teaching hours to 24 hours a week.

College staff at Nottingham, along with other college lecturers, have seen their pay eroded, not having had a pay rise since 2010. They have voted to hold a further 15 days of strikes throughout November.

Lecturers at over 147 universities across the UK are currently balloting until the end of October for strike action over pay, casualisation and pensions.

## Outsourced staff at UK's London University to be balloted for strike

Around 300 UK workers employed by University College London (UCL) are to be balloted for possible strike action. The outsourced workers provide cleaning, portering and security services at UCL. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members are demanding they be directly employed by UCL and enjoy the pay and conditions of those currently directly employed.

## Staff at UK legal firm, Thompson, to strike

UK workers at trade union solicitors Thompson have voted by a nearly 90 percent majority to strike on October 18.

The GMB union members are seeking a 3.5 percent pay increase. Thompson's initial offer of one percent was increased to two percent after the intervention by government mediation service Acas.

Last year, Thompson posted an operating profit of £13.3m, up by 80 percent on the previous year. Picket lines are expected to be set up at Thompson offices in London, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds among others.

### **Planned stoppage by library and museum staff in Bradford, England**

Fifty UK library and museum services workers are to strike in Bradford, England. The proposed strike dates are for two days beginning October 21 followed by a three-day stoppage beginning November 5. A four-day strike is scheduled later in November and a five-day strike at the beginning of December.

The Unite union members voted by more than 75 percent for the action. They are opposing Labour-controlled Bradford City Council's plans to cut funding for the library and museum services by 65 percent, nearly £1 million this year and over £1 million next year. The proposed cuts would lead to job losses and cuts in services.

### **Striking outsourced workers at London government office win London Living Wage**

Workers at the UK outsourcing company, Aramark, providing catering services at the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) office in Westminster London returned to work Monday. They had been on all-out strike since July demanding to be paid the London Living Wage of £10.55 and improvement in their holiday and sickness allowances.

They returned after the company agreed to pay the London Living Wage figure. The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members had previously turned down a £9.05 an hour offer.

An article on the *Civil Service World* website, dated October 4, noted PCS concerns "over conditions that may be attached" but no details were given. Outsourced workers employed by ISS at BEIS, who provide cleaning, portering and security services at BEIS are still out on strike over the same issue.

### **Norwegian fast food delivery workers win pay rise after five-week strike**

The five-week strike of over 100 Norwegian fast food delivery workers employed by Foodara in Oslo has ended with a deal with the Fellesforbundet union.

The workers walked out on August 20 to demand a pay rise and allowances for equipment and clothing. The strike then spread to Trondheim with the numbers on strike doubling.

The deal includes a €1,500 a year pay rise for full-timers. The food delivery workers used social media to garner public support during the stoppage.

### **Irish airline catering workers face job cuts**

Around 250 catering workers employed by Irish airline Aer Lingus face threats to their jobs. Aer Lingus wants to subcontract its current inhouse catering role to an outside company. Aer Lingus is due to have talks with the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union over the possible redundancies.

### **Strike by Maltese physiotherapists**

Physiotherapists working at St Luke's hospital in Malta went on strike Wednesday. The Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses members are protesting delays to refurbishment of the physiotherapy department in the hospital.

The US company Steward Health, which runs the department, had originally said the refurbishment would go ahead in August, with completion by the end of this month. The refurbishment, however, has not started.

Africa

### **Zimbabwe doctors continue five-week walkout**

Zimbabwe doctors on strike for five weeks held a march and demonstration Monday from the Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals to the Health Service Board office. They are demanding their wages are pegged to the US dollar.

A recent government offer of a 60 percent increase in allowances was rejected. With inflation at a runaway 500 percent, doctors cannot even afford to travel to work.

The Zimbabwe Health Minister is appealing to the labour court to illegalise the dispute. A junior doctors' representative said doctors were not scared of government threats, but feared starvation, and would continue their stoppage.

Medical lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe held responsible for inciting the strike and leading demonstrations have been suspended without pay and benefits and face disciplinary proceedings.

Doctors are also striking against the lack of provision of medicines and equipment in hospitals that used to be the envy of Africa.

The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association (ZHDA) split from the Apex Council (civil service union federation), which accepted the government's offer of 60 percent allowance increase. The ZHDA has no bargaining rights outside the Apex Council.

### **Swaziland monarchy employs lethal force against public sector strikers**

Public sector workers on strike demonstrating on the streets of Manzini in Swaziland were attacked by armed force last week.

The workers are on strike for an 8.75 percent pay rise. The police and

Operational Support Services Unit attacked a peaceful demonstration of around 8,000 at the close of a three-day strike. An estimated 17 people were injured with some reports of live fire being used.

The monarchical regime said it cannot concede a pay rise because it is broke and is pressing the courts to declare the strike illegal.

### **South African firefighters' work to rule ended with union agreeing to go to labour court**

A Cape Town firefighters' work-to-rule dispute at 30 fire stations has been suspended by the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) in favour of arbitration.

The firefighters' grievance over unpaid overtime will be addressed by the labour court, to be convened on November 29.

SAMWU agreed that firefighters will work to contract, while the courts have lifted suspensions on workers defying the government defined "contract" until the November decision.

Firefighters were to return to work on Tuesday.

### **Half a million South African security guards threaten strike**

South Africa's 500,000 security guards are threatening to strike for a substantial wage increase.

Nine unions representing the private security guards have called on the arbitration services to intervene with their employers, the South African National Security Employers' Association (SANSEA).

The guards want an increase for the lowest paid from R4,377 to R7,500, and increases for the two higher grade levels. SANSEA is offering a five percent increase, after an initial offer of 1.1 percent, which a union spokesman said represents R1.86 a day.

### **University of Johannesburg in-sourcing strike continues**

Cleaners, porters and support staff are continuing to strike at South Africa's University of Johannesburg over equal pay and in-sourcing. Around 700 workers walked out on October 4 demanding a long-running dispute over direct employment for contracted workers be resolved.

In 2015, an agreement was reached after student strikes in support of the workers and demonstrations to bring casuals on to the books, but it was never implemented.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members carry out security, cleaning and other support work. The union claims the university is acting outside the law.

### **Planned strike by South African airline food supply workers blocked by court**

A planned stoppage by airport catering workers' at Air Chefs in South Africa was called off by a court ruling on Monday ordering workers to stay on the job.

The NUMSA members supply food at OR Tambo airport, Cape Town international and King Shaka airport in Durban for flight operators South African Airlines (SAA), SA Express, SA Airlink, Mango Airlines, Air Mauritius, and Swiss Airlines.

The strike call was in response to Air Chefs' withdrawal of interim bonuses, which have been an integral part of wages for the last ten years.

Air Chefs is a subsidiary of SAA. Pilots at SAA have threatened to strike over incompetent management and corruption.

### **Lesotho teachers' pay docked after strike**

The salaries of around 4,000 Lesotho teachers have been cut in retribution for strike action.

The Lesotho Association of Teachers (LAT), Lesotho Teachers Trade Union (LTTU) and the Lesotho School Principals Association (LeSPA) members ended a walkout in February when the government promised to address their demand for an 8 percent pay rise.

They came out again on August 12 when this was ignored but returned to work on the unions' assurances that the government would pay the increases next year when they could afford it.

The government reduced last month's pay to expenses only, employing the no work-no pay rule.

### **Zimbabwe pensioners protest after payments withheld**

Zimbabwe pensioners from across the country demonstrated at the Peoples Own Savings Bank head office in Harare October 3. They have not been paid their monthly allowances for months and cannot afford medicines to keep them alive.

It is reported that some are being forced to turn to traditional healers.



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