

Union sells out municipal workers' strike in Reykjavik, Iceland;  
Lebanon: hospital strike in Beirut over government inaction over  
Covid-19

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

13 March 2020

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

## **Municipal workers' union in Icelandic capital calls off strike**

The Efling union called off a three-week stoppage in Iceland's capital Reykjavik involving around 1,800 low paid, mainly female municipal workers on Monday. Workers involved included nursery staff, cleaners, garbage collectors and road maintenance workers.

The union and Reykjavik city agreed terms, according to the mayor, identical to those on offer prior to the strike, including a pay rise weighted in favour of the lowest paid, and a reduction in working hours.

As the workers in Reykjavik returned to work, around 300 Efling members working in municipalities adjacent to the capital began their walkout Monday for a wage increase.

## **Teachers at UK sixth-form colleges walk out**

Teaching staff at 34 sixth-form colleges and academies for 16-19-year olds in the UK held a one-day strike Tuesday. It was the sixth strike carried out by National Education Union (NEU) members. They are seeking a pay increase to resolve staff shortages in the sector. They are also demanding increased funding. Cuts over years have left the sector in a parlous state.

Over a third of sixth form colleges took part in the action across the UK, including Hills Road Sixth Form College Cambridge, Blackpool Sixth Form College and Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College.

## **Strike by rail food workers in UK capital**

Workers at Rail Gourmet based at Paddington station in UK capital London are to strike for three days from Wednesday. They prepare food sold on rail journeys. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union

members are protesting dangerous working conditions.

## **Refuse workers in London borough strike**

Around 250 refuse collectors at outsourcing company Veolia began an eight-day strike on Monday. Veolia provides refuse collection and disposal services for the London borough of Tower Hamlets. Picket lines were set up at depots in Canning Town and Bow.

Around 150 Unite union members are owed £9,000 in holiday pay arrears. They voted by a more than 95 percent majority for action.

## **London Transport revenue staff vote to strike**

Revenue Control Inspectors (RCI) employed by Transport for London across the capital's rail network have voted by a 97 percent majority to strike. The RMT members are opposed to the introduction of a new job role of Revenue Collection Officer, who will have less responsibility than RCIs but be paid £10,000 a year less. The introduction of the new grade threatens the pay and conditions of RCIs.

The union have set no strike date, but it may take place March 27.

## **Turkish journalists protest over arrests**

Protests were held across Turkey on Tuesday opposing recent arrests of journalists and news managers who criticised government policies. The protests by the Journalists Union of Turkey (TGS) members took place in Istanbul, Ankara and several other cities.

According to TGS, over 90 journalists are currently in jail for publishing articles critical of the government.

## **Cypriot electricity power workers to strike**

Workers at the Electricity Authority of Cyprus (EAC) will strike for 24 hours on March 18, followed by a 48-hour strike on March 26.

Workers are striking over issues including funding of the employees' health fund and staff shortages. They have held short strikes including two-hour and an eight-hour strike over the last few months over the outstanding issues.

#### **Staff at Lebanese hospital strike over inadequate Covid-19 response**

Staff at the Rafik Hariri University Hospital (RHUH) in Greater Beirut declared an open-ended strike, which began Thursday. The RHUH has been at the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus epidemic in Lebanon.

While they are battling to cope, they are accusing the government of neglect. The hospital has to cope with outdated equipment as well as leaving employees unpaid.

As of this writing there has been 61 confirmed cases in the country with two deaths resulting from the Covid-19 outbreak.

#### **South African workers oppose cheap labour scheme in Pretoria and Johannesburg**

Workers employed on South Africa's cheap labour Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) demonstrated against terminations.

The demonstrators marched on the Department of Infrastructure and Development offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg, opposing the termination of their employment on March 31. They were informed by text. The workers are demanding full-time employment.

EPWP workers petitioned the Pretoria authorities for this in a protest on February 12. Officials promised to reply but did not.

Many workers have been on the EPWP since 2013. If they were in a proper job they should by law have been on the books after three months.

#### **Unions at South African Airlines join company job-cutting talks**

South African Airlines (SAA) announced that the unions would join the company in talks on wage cutting and the destruction of 2,200 out of 4,708 jobs in a salvage plan proposed by SAA. The company plans to reduce its aircraft fleet from 49 to 19. SAA is indebted to the tune of R26 billion accumulated over six years.

Negotiations with eight unions will start Thursday to conclude in April.

The unions said they just received the airline's proposal and were going to decide their response soon. The National Transport Movement's [NTM] president, Mashudu Rapheta, said the NTM would "do everything humanly possible and within the ambit of progressive collective engagements with the BRPs and all relevant stakeholders to minimise the negative impact of the business rescue." This means a laying-off scheme, voluntary redundancies and redeployment of skilled workers to other state-run companies.

#### **South African chrome miners in Rustenburg continue sit-in**

South African miners occupying a chrome mine in Rustenburg are being denied food. The one hundred and forty-two miners have been on a sit-in at LanXess Chrome Mine since February 17, accusing managers of corruption and demanding they are sacked.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members accuse senior mine managers of outsourcing work to contract companies owned by managers. Workers also want safe working conditions and a living wage.

Relatives and fellow workers are prevented from providing occupying workers with provisions.

One hundred and twenty-six surface workers out of an overall workforce of around 1,500 support the underground strike saying they will not resume work until the CEO meets the protesters.

A similar occupation by 300 miners was carried out last year when a manager was caught demanding sex for jobs. The mine CEO refused to sack the offending manager but sent him on leave.

#### **South African farm workers demonstrate over evictions**

Farm workers in South Africa's Drakenstein municipality demonstrated Friday last week in opposition to evictions.

Around 150 workers, mainly women organised by the Women on Farm Projects, demanded the authorities share the land with the farm workers. They denounced uncontrolled evictions and the lack of housing provided after eviction.

They are placed in temporary accommodation, which often consists of informal settlements lacking clean water or sanitation.

Drakenstein authorities have not yet replied to the workers' demands.

#### **South African firefighters' union loses court action after calling off industrial action**

The Cape Town firefighters' union's appeal to the South Africa labour court over unpaid working hours has failed.

Last year, the South African Municipal Workers Union suspended a go-slow over unpaid overtime, to await a labour court ruling.

The labour court advises a new contract is negotiated. The union says it disagrees with this and will appeal against it.

#### **Zimbabwe nurses demonstrate against hospital conditions**

Angry nurses held a demonstration at the Mpilo hospital in Bulawayo on Monday protesting conditions in the hospital.

Medical staff complained of ill treatment by the management while senior office holders, reported *NewZimbabwe.com*, "enjoy lucrative benefits from the government."

Public sector workers, including medical staff, have taken months of strike action to demand wages are paid in US dollars. With inflation at 600 percent, workers cannot afford travel costs to work.



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