

Spanish Nissan strike against job losses; Italian electrical workers threaten stoppage against redundancies; South African hospital wildcat strike for PPE

## 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 at Spanish Nissan factory continues

An indefinite strike by 40 Spanish autoworkers at Nissan's Zona Franca and Montcada sites in Barcelona began on May 4. This was the first day of Nissan's operation in Spain following the end of lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strike was called to protest Nissan's plans to reduce its worldwide car production by 20 percent. Workers fear production in Europe could end altogether. For Spain this would mean the loss of 3,000 Nissan jobs and around 20,000 in related companies and industries.

The unions, including the Stalinist CCOO, describe the small-scale strike actions as strategic. The strike at the two small production units created a bottleneck leading to a complete halt of production. Picket lines obeying social distancing rules are taking place.

Car workers internationally face attacks on their jobs. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis many international auto companies had announced job cutbacks. Nissan, after announcing in 2019 plans to cut 12,500 jobs, now plans to cut a further 20,000 jobs worldwide in Japan, the UK and India.

Autoworkers in the US are widely opposed to the premature reopening of the auto plants pushed by the UAW union. Autoworkers must adopt an international strategy to oppose the attacks on jobs and conditions.

### Italian workers at US multinational threaten walkout over redundancies

Italian workers at US-based multinational electronics company Jabil are threatening strike action against redundancies. Jabil made 190 workers at its Marcianise plant near Naples redundant on Monday.

Jabil employs 200,000 worldwide in 120 factories. It employed 700 in Italy but sought to reduce this number by half. It shed 160 jobs through voluntary redundancies and redeployment, with the remaining 190 being sacked on Monday.

The FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL and UILM unions at the plant promised

strike action, declaring the sackings illegal. In response to the pandemic the Italian government set up a support package for companies, banning layoffs until mid-August.

### Strike ballot of refuse workers at council in Medway, south-east England

Refuse workers employed by UK subcontractor Medway Norse were balloted for strike action, with results pending. The company is jointly owned by Medway council in Kent, for which it provides refuse collection services.

On March 30 the Unite union members walked out over lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) in view of the pandemic. The company agreed to provide PPE but then reneged. Workers organised a drive-by protest past the council offices, after which eight of them were suspended and the rest put under investigation. The company also derecognised Unite and instead recognised the GMB union.

### Strike ballot by UK logistics staff in northern England

UK workers facing the closure of DHL depot in Tinsley, Sheffield are to be balloted for strike action. Two hundred jobs are threatened by courier service DHL in July.

Under threat are jobs of driver and warehouse workers, Unite union members, many with years of service at the depot. Currently the workers are furloughed under the government's COVID-19 scheme, whereby they receive 80 percent of their wages. The depot delivers for brewers such as Whitbread, Coors and Carlsberg.

### Icelandic airline proposes creating company union to overcome cabin crew resistance

Flight attendants have rejected a proposal by Icelandic airline Icelandair,

which is currently negotiating new contracts with its staff. Unions representing pilots and mechanics have accepted the new contracts.

Icelandair, like all airlines, has been badly hit by the pandemic. It is operating a skeleton service with the Icelandic government offering financial support to maintain the service until June 27. The company laid off 240 of its 3,400 staff at the end of March, and a further 2,000 in April. Remaining staff have had pay or hours cut.

The Icelandic Flight Attendants Union (FFI) members rejected proposals whereby flight attendants would retain their current pay but would work longer hours. FFI said this would be equivalent to a 40 percent pay cut.

The airline wants a quick settlement prior to a proposed public stock offering in June amounting to ISK29 billion. The airline proposed setting up a company union for flight attendants to push through its attacks, preferable to outsourcing flight attendant roles.

On Monday news website *Icelandmonitor* reported Icelandair CEO Bogi Nils Bogason saying he expects to be able to reach an agreement with the FFI shortly.

### **Cabin crew at German airline fear government bailout will not protect their jobs**

The German government is currently in discussion with German airline Lufthansa over a bailout, in which the government would hold a 20 percent share in the company. The airline faces financial difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic.

Cabin crew fear any bailout will not safeguard their jobs. A May 22 *Financial Post* news item quoted the faint-hearted pleas of a UFO union spokesman talking to Reuters TV, "We would really wish that the government, when it provides money to help Lufthansa, would also help the employees."

### **Turkish forestry workers oppose COVID-19 donation campaign**

Turkish forestry workers forced Turkish Directorate of Forestry to drop plans to collect compulsory COVID-19 donations, which would have meant a pay cut. The Civil Servants Union of Agriculture, Forestry, Husbandry and Environment Sectors members also forced the directorate to rescind proposals for work assessment based on work colleagues' appraisal.

### **Protest by Iraqi gas workers over non-payment of wages**

Workers at the Basra Gas Company (BGC), in which Shell holds 44 percent stake, held a protest on May 18 after not receiving their salary for May. For several months their salary payments were delayed. Workers have repeatedly demanded BGC take measures to ensure they get their wages on time.

### **South African health workers strike for protection against coronavirus risk**

There was further wildcat strike action by South African doctors and nurses at a hospital in Eastern Cape on May 20.

This is the second time since the COVID-19 lockdown that workers at the Mpiliseni Hospital in Sterkspruit stopped work to demand safe working conditions. They initially returned to work after management promised to supply PPE). However, this did not materialise.

A workers' representative said, "People are dealing with blood. They cannot work without gloves." Doctors are also threatening to leave because they are not being given promised financial assistance with accommodation.

At another clinic in Ngcobo, Eastern Cape, health workers were forced to buy their own PPE due to shortages. They have been without protection for the last two weeks even though 11 people in the small town tested positive for COVID-19.

In South Africa there are 21,343 confirmed cases of COVID-19, of which 10,104 people have recovered and 407 died.

### **Blackleg unions work during workers' protest action at South African hospital**

South African union shop stewards worked while support staff at Helen Joseph Hospital in Johannesburg protested on Friday and Monday. The staff are demanding PPE and testing for COVID-19 after five nurses were infected.

The wards where the nurses worked were not shut down or decontaminated and support workers were expected to go on working while management insisted that there was not enough money to buy PPE.

The workers' spokesperson stated that the union did not support their action and the shop stewards had continued to work: "They just pass by and greet us."

### **South African gold miners demand to be tested as 164 workers contract coronavirus**

Mineworkers are demanding to be tested after 164 South African miners tested positive for coronavirus at the Mponeng gold mine in Merapong, Gauteng Province. The mine was forced to close on Sunday. Mponeng, owned by AngloGold, is the world's deepest mine at 4 km.

Underground mines are a high infection risk for miners due to the confined conditions of their work.

Most of the infected miners were asymptomatic, worrisome for workers' future safety as the country's lockdown is eased again at the beginning of June and more return to work.

The companies argue miners should not be singled out for the expense of testing when there is no full testing in the country.

### **Schools not ready to reopen, say teachers and parents**

Teachers, parents and governing bodies say many schools in South Africa are ill prepared to reopen on the set date June 1. Schools were closed when the country's lockdown started in March.

Education Minister Angie Motshekga was accused of arrogance after her announcement on Tuesday that the Department of Basic Education

was ready to reopen schools safely, despite a legal challenge to halt the government's plans from one teachers union.

### **Nigerian health workers walk out in defiance of government threats**

Over 11,000 health workers in the Nigerian state of Kaduna began a week's strike action May 23 despite a government ultimatum threatening their jobs. The state authorities denounced the strike as blackmail.

The strike is in response to a deduction of 25 percent from all government employees' salaries. Strikers are demanding the repayment of the 25 percent taken from them in April and the cancellation of future deductions.

### **Nigeria: Doctors in Lagos in stay-at-home strike**

Nigerian doctors in Lagos are mounting a stay-at-home strike. Along with other essential workers, they are being harassed and arrested by the police and security services if they are caught travelling to work or home outside the 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew imposed to contain the spread of coronavirus. The state government is giving conflicting instructions.

There are 8,344 confirmed cases in Nigeria with 249 deaths.

### **Namibian transport workers face 50 percent pay cut**

Over 700 workers at FP du Toit Transport, one of Namibia's largest transport companies, are up in arms after being told they will receive only half their usual pay.

The company is blaming the coronavirus lockdown and a resulting loss of business for the pay cut.

FP du Toit Transport has been in business for 52 years, employing thousands, and has a fleet of 560 vehicles. The owner brought an affidavit to Windhoek High Court to promote a legal challenge against regulations forbidding employers from cutting staff pay, dismissing them or enforcing leave in response to the pandemic.

At its Ambatovy factory site in Toamasina the company employs around 3,000 workers, with 60 percent of them on forced leave for six months. About 1,200 workers at the Moramanga mining site are facing a similar ultimatum.

### **Madagascan workers oppose forced leave on reduced pay**

Around 60 percent of the workers at Tamatave Mine in Madagascar are opposing instructions to take forced leave for six months on reduced pay after seven workers tested positive for COVID-19. There are 582 confirmed cases in the country and two fatalities.

Madagascar's labour code states that before a company makes its workers unemployed, it must engage in consultation with the unions.

### **Kenya: More universities announce pay cuts as courts rule they are illegal**

The Pan Africa Christian University in Kenya announced it would implement a pay cut from May to August of 80 percent, citing a fall in its revenue.

This was despite a court ruling against Egerton and Kisii Universities that the pay cuts they imposed in April were illegal.



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