

Spanish workers protest Nissan job losses; South African Macsteel metalworkers walk out against pay cut; strike threats by hospital workers in UK, Iceland

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 June 2020

Europe

Workers protest Nissan plans to cut 3,000 jobs with closure of three factories in Spanish city of Barcelona

Hundreds of Spanish car workers took to the streets May 28 as Nissan announced the closure of its three factories in Barcelona with the loss of 3,000 jobs. 20,000 jobs will go in the supply chain. Workers blocked roads and burned piles of tyres in protest.

To date the company has laid off 4,000, of which 600 have been in Spain.

Forty workers at Nissan's Zona Franca and Montcada took strike action beginning May 4—the first day of production in Spain following the end of lockdown due to the pandemic. The strike was called to protest Nissan's plans to reduce its worldwide car production. Workers fear production in Europe could end altogether.

The unions, including the Stalinist CCOO, described the small-scale stoppages 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 took place.

After announcing in 2019 plans to cut 12,500 jobs, Nissan plans to cut a further 20,000 jobs in Japan, India and the UK. The plant in Sunderland, northeast England employing 6,700 is under threat if a no-deal Brexit goes through.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis many international auto companies had announced cutbacks. This week luxury car manufacturer Aston Martin announced 500 redundancies while the UK- and Ireland-wide car dealership Lookers said it will cut 1,500 jobs and close showrooms. Demand for new cars is 10 percent of its pre-COVID-19 levels.

Strike by Dutch steel workers

Around 100 steel workers at the Tata IJmuiden steel plant in the Netherlands held an unofficial walkout May 26 over plans by the company to cut 1,000 steel jobs in the country. They held a picket at the entrance to the plant.

The FNV union was to hold a rally Thursday to discuss further action including strikes.

Icelandic nurses to vote on strike

Around 2,500 nurses in Iceland are to vote on possible strike action. The Icelandic Nurses' Association (FIH) members have been without a contract for over a year.

FIH and the state employer came to an agreement in April after talks, but the agreement was rejected by the nurses. Balloting is due to finish today. If the strike takes place it will begin on June 22. Surveys of nurses show half are prepared to go on all-out strike and two thirds would refuse to work overtime.

UK medical couriers' vote to strike after staff sacked for raising safety concerns

UK medical couriers working for London-based The Doctors Laboratory (TDL) have voted overwhelmingly for strike action against 10 staff redundancies. TDL, a subsidiary of Australian Sonic Healthcare, is subcontracted to the National Health Service (NHS) to provide courier services for samples.

The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members accuse the company of victimising the 10 because they raised safety concerns over the transport of COVID-19 samples. They are also demanding the provision of proper personal protective equipment and for the regular testing of couriers for the virus.

UK: Strike threat by London hospital workers

Porters, domestic staff, cleaners, caterers and security staff working at Homerton University hospital in Hackney, London are threatening to walk out. The GMB and Unison unions' members employed by contractor ISS

want parity of conditions with staff employed directly by the NHS. The contract is up for renewal in October, which the hospital is discussing with ISS.

Middle East

Strike by migrant workers in United Arab Emirates

Around 500 Nepalese migrant workers at an oil and gas company in Ruwais in the capital of United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, went on strike on May 26 over non-payment of wages for the last two months.

Africa

Metalworkers in South Africa walk out against 20 percent pay cut

South African metalworkers at Macsteel, one of Africa's leading steel suppliers, took strike action starting May 28 after company management cut salaries by 20 percent, blaming the effects of the pandemic.

Workers allege the company has not applied for the government-funded Temporary Employment Relief Scheme, designed to help struggling firms pay workers in the health emergency, and which management say would offset the reduction in wages.

Macsteel produces steel and aluminium products to be used in the automotive, construction, agriculture, gas and petrochemicals industries.

The action by National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa will hit Macsteel Coil Processing, Exports, Fluid Control, Roofing, Special Steels, Trading, Tube and Pipe and Macsteel VRN. The company is seeking a court interdict against the stoppage.

Municipal workers plan stoppage due to increased COVID-19 risk

South African municipal workers in Gauteng province plan strike action because municipalities are ill prepared for the easing of the country's lockdown on Monday.

The transition to Level 3 will involve the reopening of all but the most high-risk sectors of the economy. The South African Municipal Workers' Union members are worried about the threat to their health and safety.

Two workers have already died and over 200 have been infected. Municipalities have failed to provide enough personal protective equipment (PPE) and, in some cases, have asked workers to provide their own.

There are 35,812 coronavirus cases in South Africa and 755 have died.

South African pharmacists protest lack of safety measures

Pharmacists at the Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa spoke out in a news report Thursday saying their demands for safety measures in the workplace have fallen on deaf ears. Nine pharmacists in the major public hospital have contracted COVID-19.

Management at the hospital said that the pharmacists were not frontline

workers and therefore not in as much need as doctors and nurses. Only after staff members became infected were they provided with some PPE.

The workers have also asked for assurance that they be quarantined for 14 days after contact with infected staff, and to be placed on shifts for social distancing purposes.

“Stop compromising our health,” say South African nurses demonstrating for safer working conditions

South African nurses picketed outside the Tygerberg Hospital, Cape Town May 26 to demand hospital management provide health workers with PPE and testing after they have been in contact with a positive case.

Nurses say they are living in fear after almost 140 workers were infected with the virus and two died.

Nigerian doctors strike in Ogun State

Doctors at the Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital in Ogun State Nigeria mounted a three-day strike late in May over the state government's lack of action to ease their suffering due to the pandemic. Their demands include implementation of a new minimum wage, hazard allowance, a solution to low pay and a life insurance policy.

The state governor denounced the strike as “politically motivated.” The state government expected doctors to “put patients first”—sacrifice their lives and livelihoods.

Nigeria has 11,166 COVID-19 cases.

Nigerian university union moves to sabotage planned strike

Non-academic staff in universities, polytechnics and colleges in Nigeria are facing sabotage of their upcoming strike by the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), which is calling for “last minute” government intervention to reach a compromise at the expense of their members' interests.

Some staff have not received salaries and agreed allowances. The problems stem from the introduction of a new payment system, the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System. The issue of underpayment goes back to an agreement made in 2009.

NASU want to prevent unified action with academics, also on strike over pay agreements.

The federal government has issued an ultimatum against the academic staff stoppage that if the Academic Staff Union of Universities does not do a deal to end the strike, the government will bring in an “arbitration body” to impose a settlement.

Agricultural workers in Malawi strike against poor conditions

State-employed agricultural workers started a nationwide strike on May 27 to demand better housing conditions, allowances and promotions. Other civil servants are paid a hardship allowance, but not Ministry of

Agriculture employees. Another grievance voiced by workers is the number of years it takes to get any promotion.

Some workers delivered petitions with their grievances.

COVID-19 frontline workers in Sierra Leone on strike over non-payment of allowances

Tracking and enforcement staff dealing with the pandemic were on strike in Sierra Leone Monday over non-payment of their risk allowances. They refused to attend a morning progress meeting, to collate a picture of the virus spread.

The strikers are employed by the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (Nacoverc)—a temporary agency set up with backing from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

There have been 896 confirmed cases and 46 deaths in Sierra Leone.

Diamond miners in Zimbabwe angry over unpaid wages

Diamond miners working for Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamonds Company (ZCDC) were last paid wages in February. ZCDC used COVID-19 as a pretext to order employees to stay within company premises, which have no health and safety measures, to prevent the spread of the virus.

Workers complain of “a shift system whereby the incoming shift ... share[s] the same beds which were used by the outgoing shift” and “poor eating conditions as the company’s canteens ... usually run out of food.”

“The local currency has lost a lot of its value and we are still entitled to Zimbabwe dollar salaries which are outstanding,” one worker explained. Zimbabwe’s economy, in free fall before the pandemic, had an inflation rate of 765.6 percent in April.

Zimbabwe has 206 reported coronavirus cases with four fatalities.



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