

Strike vote by Dutch steelworkers, Nigerian doctors prepare for indefinite walkout; South African airline workers protest

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 June 2020

### Steelworkers at Tata steel in Netherlands have voted to strike

Last week, around 2,000 Dutch steelworkers employed by Tata Steel at their plant in IJmuiden voted unanimously to strike. The FNV union members are opposed to plans by Tata to cut 1,000 jobs at the plant. Tata said the proposed job cuts are due to start in October next year.

On May 26, around 100 steelworkers at the plant held an unofficial walkout and picket over the planned job cuts. The union's plea to the company is for no compulsory redundancies.

In November Tata confirmed plans to cut around 3,000 jobs across Europe, of which 1,600 would be in Holland. In the UK, where it owns the Port Talbot steel plant in South Wales, 1,000 jobs were slated for destruction. In March the company announced it would revise its UK planned redundancies down to 500, based on natural wastage, to reduce the numbers. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means Tata, along with many industries internationally, is considering plans for further cuts.

### Strike vote by Icelandic nurses

More than 2,000 nurses in Iceland have voted by a more than 80 percent majority to strike.

The Icelandic Nursing Association members are seeking a new bargaining agreement, as their current one expired 15 months ago. They have rejected the proposed agreement put forward by the government. They are seeking an increased starting salary for new nurses among other issues. The nationwide strike is scheduled to begin on June 22.

### Strike and protest by food delivery workers in Russian capital

Russian food delivery workers employed by the company Delivery Club in Moscow held a strike June 5. They were protesting the increase in the length of delivery journeys and fines imposed by the company.

Workers who deliver on foot had their maximum journey lengths increased from three to five kilometres. Those who deliver orders late are fined up to half their wages of around €40. With the increase in journey lengths fines are more frequent.

Delivery drivers are aggrieved that fuel allowances do not cover the actual amount of fuel used. Drivers make around €50 for a 15-hour workweek.

Around 40 strikers protested for two hours in the rain outside the company. Demands for management to come and speak to them were ignored.

### Underground protest by Ukrainian miners

Miners at the Komsomolskaya pit in the separatist Ukrainian province of Lugansk held an underground sit-in on Sunday. They were demanding that wage arrears for March and April be paid in full. They held a similar underground protest in April over arrears.

Police blockaded the pit to prevent miners' supporters from bringing in food and drink.

### Wildcat strike by cleaners at London school

Migrant workers employed as cleaners at the UK Ark Global academy school in south London stage a wildcat strike June 4.

The United Voices of the World (UVW) union members work for outsourcing company Ridge Crest. They walked out over wage arrears going back in some instances to January 2019. They are also demanding to be paid statutory sick pay, pay of £12 an hour, and face masks for COVID-19 protection. The UVW is currently balloting them for official strike action.

### Strike threat by Spanish government employment service workers

Workers at the Spanish state public employment service SEPE are threatening strike action. SEPE workers are charged with making payments under the Spanish government's ERTE system. Under ERTE, furloughed workers are paid up to 70 percent of their wages from SEPE funds.

The CSIF union members are protesting the amount of work they

perform to process the large number of claims. Almost three million Spanish workers have applied. The workers have had to work seven days a week to try to cope with the applications, which amount to a normal year's workload processed within two months.

### **Swedish construction workers in conflict with employers over new collective bargaining agreement**

Construction workers in Sweden are poised for a stoppage unless an agreement can be reached over pay and conditions.

Talks between the Swedish construction workers union Byggnads and the employers' federation Byggföretagen are at loggerheads. The employers propose continuing the existing collective bargaining agreement (CBA) until November. The union's position is to renew it in October with negotiations to begin immediately. If no agreement is reached by next week a dispute could follow with strike action.

### **Expatriate workers in Malta on hunger strike**

Turkish construction workers employed by TACA Construction in Malta are on hunger strike over non-payment of wages. They work on the redevelopment of the Fortina Hotel in Sliema on the Maltese east coast.

### **Ultimatum by Scandinavian Airlines**

Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) is seeking to make 350 of its employees redundant at its Norwegian section. The cuts are in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This week, the airline announced that employees had the choice of giving up their jobs immediately in return for travel concessions and the possibility of being rehired later or leaving the airline when their redundancy notices run out.

The cabin crew union NKF held negotiations with the airline on Monday. NKF leader Nina Pedersen described the negotiations as a "bloody day."

### **Tunisian natural gas workers' strike**

Workers at Tunisia's Nawara natural gas field began a three-day strike on June 3. The General Federation of Petroleum and Chemicals Union members were protesting the sacking of 23 colleagues.

The gas field, which came online in February, is the country's largest gas field, run as a joint venture between the Tunisian National Oil Company and the Austrian company OMV AG.

### **Strike by Israeli airport workers**

Israeli airport workers at Ben Gurion airport serving the Israeli capital Tel Aviv walked out for several hours on June 5. They were demanding a compensation package for 2,500 airport workers laid off in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The laid-off workers were put on unpaid leave, claiming unemployment benefit, which has stopped. The stoppage led to the cancellation of all plane take-offs and landings. Most flights in and out of the country were halted because of the pandemic. The Israeli Airports Authority workers union was due to meet with government ministers this week to discuss a compensation package for the laid-off staff.

### **Airline workers protest outside the offices of South African President**

Employees of the troubled state-owned domestic airline South African Express demonstrated outside the Union Buildings, the seat of government in Pretoria. Pilots, engineers, administrators and others have not been paid for March, April and May and are demanding an intervention from President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The firm is in "provisional" liquidation, to take effect this week.

One worker, Papa Mollo, said the airline's struggles were the result of theft rather than the coronavirus pandemic: "The company has been making deductions from our incomes for services like medical aid and unemployment insurance, but has not given that money to those relevant companies."

Workers' homemade placards read, "Your looting has cost us our livelihood," "Current ANC is far worse than apartheid," and "State Looters free!!! Workers Pay!!!"

### **South African metalworkers picket factory to protest missing payments**

Workers demonstrated outside Formex Industries June 4 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa to protest the non-payment of monies the company received through the government's Unemployment Insurance Fund's Temporary Employee Relief Scheme (TERS).

One employee said that while the workers were unable to work due to the lockdown, the firm used their annual leave in lieu of payment, against a government directive.

On May 28, metalworkers at Macsteel, one of Africa's leading steel suppliers, walked out after company management cut salaries by 20 percent without applying for TERS.

South Africa has 52,991 coronavirus cases, with 1,162 fatalities.

### **South African workers demand shutdown of cosmetics factory until clear of COVID-19 risk**

South African workers demonstrated at French cosmetics company L'Oréal in Johannesburg on May 28, calling for its closure after a series of coronavirus infections put employees and their families at risk.

The protesters said the company's response was inadequate and consequently they are still at risk. One said, "They want us to work... The company does not care about our lives. What they care most about is the production... So now we are still working because we fear for our jobs."

## **Public sector workers in South Africa take their fight for agreed wage increases to court**

South African public sector workers in five unions are taking their demands for the government to honour its salary rise promises to the Labour Court in Johannesburg.

The government's Department of Public Service and Administration reneged on a three-year deal agreed in 2018 to cut the public sector wage bill. The 1.2 million workers, including doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers, say the contract is binding on the government. They rejected attempts earlier in the year to reduce the agreed increases.

## **South African footballers threaten not to play if they remain unpaid**

Several players in one of South Africa's National First Division teams have warned they will not return to the club in Durban when lockdown ends if they are not paid outstanding wages.

Other teams had their salaries reduced, some by as much as 60 percent, and players are accusing club bosses of taking advantage of the pandemic.

## **Nigerian doctors preparing indefinite strike against cuts in jobs and pay**

Doctors in Nigeria are preparing for an indefinite strike from June 15 over government failures to fulfil promises on pay arrears, working conditions and other matters.

There is also anger over the termination of 26 resident doctors from the Jos University Teaching Hospital. A further demand is the ending of salary deductions in Kaduna state and other regions and the repayment of previous deductions.

Health workers in Kaduna held a 7-day "warning strike" at the end of last month against a 25 percent pay deduction.

## **Kenyan health workers plan strike**

Health workers in Kisumu County, Kenya are preparing a stoppage over allowances, promotions and other outstanding issues. The county authorities sent promotion letters to 260 of the workers but they received no pay increase. Another 616 did not receive letters of promotion despite a labour court order to the authorities.

A previous health workers' strike caused suspension of all health services for two months.

Kisumu County announced its fifth case of COVID-19 last week.

## **Zimbabwean miners reject below-inflation pay offer**

Mine workers in Zimbabwe rejected a below-inflation pay offer agreed between the Zimbabwe Chamber of Mines and the Associated Mines Workers Union of Zimbabwe. The offer would bring the miners' monthly minimum pay to US\$100 when the poverty level is set at US\$567 for a family of six. Inflation in Zimbabwe is over 900 percent.

The secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Worker's Union—one of the other official unions—described the offer as a joke.

Miners in South Africa and Botswana get around US\$850 per month as a minimum.



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