

Tata steel workers' stoppage in the Netherlands over job losses; Greek health workers walk out; more strikes by Iranian sugar workers

## **Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa**

**19 June 2020**

### **Further strikes by Dutch workers at Tata steel**

Tata steel workers at the IJmuiden plant in the Netherlands struck again on Wednesday to protest the company's plans to cut 1,000 jobs. Office workers were to join 2,000 production workers.

This follows days of strikes at the plant begun on June 10. On May 26, around 100 steelworkers held an unofficial walkout and picket over the planned job cuts. The union's plea to the company is only 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. Tata is utilising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with many firms internationally, to impose further restructuring.

### **Protest by health workers in Greek capital**

Greek health care workers held a march in Athens on Tuesday to the Ministry of Health to meet with officials. Members of the Federation of Greek Doctors' Union and National Union of Public Hospital Workers (POEDIN) were protesting the underfunding of the health system and called for the recruitment of additional doctors and other staff.

They also called for temporary staff taken on to deal with the COVID-19 crisis to be made permanent.

The march coincided with a 24-hour doctors' strike, while POEDIN members are striking each day this week between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.

### **Protest over deaths at UK hospital**

A protest was held Monday outside the UK's St Georges Hospital Tooting, London. The action, organised by GMB union members, took place on International Justice Day for Cleaners. It commemorated the death from COVID-19 of two cleaners at the hospital.

### **Council staff in London borough to strike**

Workers at Labour-controlled Tower Hamlets council in London are planning a one-day strike July 3, a two-day strike July 6 and a three-day strike beginning July 14. The Unison union members oppose the council's Tower Reward programme—an attack on pay and conditions which will cut redundancy and severance pay.

### **Council workers in England and Wales to vote on pay**

Around 100,000 council workers across England and Wales are to be balloted on pay and conditions. The Local Government Employer body has offered the Unite union members a 2.75 percent pay rise for 2020-21. The ballot will run from July 3 to August 14.

### **Iranian sugar workers renew strike**

On Monday, workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Company in Iran walked out. The workers held a protest outside the sugar cane factory, where they were joined by supporters. Their demands included the payment of wage arrears, the reinstatement of sacked workers and for the company to be renationalised.

The Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' union members in their thousands have undertaken a series of walkouts and mass protests over the last three and a half years over job losses, pay and conditions as well as to demand the company 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 18 months ago. The price of food, housing and necessities has soared, while there is a shortage of medicines.

### **Shopworkers in Soweto, South Africa, refuse to work over COVID-19**

## **danger**

Three Shoprite stores in Soweto, Johannesburg were closed on June 10 when staff refused to work, fearing the risk of infection after several workers tested positive for COVID-19.

Workers were especially concerned after seven managers had not turned up for work and the stores refused an explanation.

South Africa has 76,334 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 1,625 fatalities.

### **South African hospital workers demand to be paid for overtime**

Ancillary workers at Livingstone Hospital in Eastern Cape, South Africa, have threatened further strike action if they are not paid for working overtime.

General Assistants, including cleaners, porters, cooks and laundry workers, say the hospital is understaffed. They have also demanded more personal protective equipment (PPE) and regular sanitising of wards with COVID-19 patients.

The workers only returned to their posts on Saturday when they received promises via the National Union for Health and Allied Workers that management would meet their demands.

### **Outsourced South African workers protest over unequal pay and conditions**

Outsourced municipal workers in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, South Africa, protested on June 10 demanding permanent employment. They get paid less than workers directly employed by the municipality.

The Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa members marched through the streets to City Hall, picketed the building and demanded to speak to the mayor. They included security guards, meter readers, seasonal workers and plumbers.

### **South African warehouse workers picket to demand safety in the workplace**

Workers picketed on Monday at the Johannesburg warehouse of South African pharmacy retailer Dis-Chem, demanding the firm test all employees for COVID-19 and that they can self-isolate at home on full pay if tested positive.

The company has not carried out an adequate screening and tracing process after 10 workers tested positive for coronavirus at the warehouse. The National Union of Public Services and Allied Workers union members are also insisting the building should be cleaned and disinfected and they should not have to pay for their own tests.

### **Nigerian doctors' stoppage over PPE and lack of benefits**

Resident doctors in Nigeria began strike action on June 14. The main issues are the lack of PPE and other benefits they expect, such as life insurance. They are vital in Nigerian health care due to their central role in hospital accident wards.

The doctors are seeking a COVID-19 supplement, more funds for training, the ending of salary deductions in Kaduna state and other regions, and the repayment of previous deductions.

Doctors treating COVID-19 patients are not currently part of the strike but expect to walk out if their demands are not met.

Nigeria has 17,148 cases of coronavirus with 455 deaths.

### **Nigerian college workers protest unpaid salaries and pensions**

Teaching staff at Edo State College of Education in Ekiadolor, Nigeria, protested against 11 months of working without pay or pensions being funded. The protest addressed the Benin state Head of Service (HoS), Anthony Okungbowa.

Staff described the "untold hardship" that their families are suffering, made worse by the pandemic. The response of the HoS was to state they would receive one month's pay—rejected by the protesters since it would not cover their bills.

### **Sacked Ugandan hotel workers oppose company blackmail**

Hotel staff at Sanyu FM in Uganda, sacked after refusing to accept a 25 percent pay cut, are standing firm against the company's bullying.

The staff were sacked after unanimously rejecting the cut in salary. They are looking at legal action for unfair dismissal. They used the company's Twitter account to ask for support, explaining that "Sanyu FM management ... chose not to treat us fairly in accordance with the law and fired us." They asked for lawyers to come forward to take up their case.

### **Liberian waste collectors protest non-payment of wages**

Almost 4,000 waste collectors employed by the Reclaiming Liberia Beaches and Waterways Program are preparing to stage a protest over non-payment of wages for 21 months.

They issued a statement saying, "We, the underprivileged slum dwellers in tears, frustration and hardship ... are left with no alternative but to protest in demand of our twenty-one months wages since the Government of Liberia ... continue to show no interest."

The government admits owing the money to the workers but is fobbing them off with empty promises.



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