

Workers in Germany and France protest Airbus redundancies; Iranian sugar workers strike enters second month; national strike by Israeli social workers continues

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 July 2020

Coordinated protests by French and German plane makers

Airbus workers in France and Germany held coordinated protests on July 8 against the plans of the plane maker to cut 15,000 jobs.

Around 8,000 French Airbus workers staged a 90-minute strike and lined a runway at Toulouse airport to protest the planned job cuts. They held up banners calling for no compulsory redundancies.

German Airbus workers in Hamburg set out 2,000 empty chairs symbolising the 2,000 proposed job cuts. Their colleagues in the Bavarian city of Augsburg released balloons bearing slogans.

The proposed job cuts would be the first compulsory redundancies by Airbus, which has seen no strike action called by the trade unions since 2008.

Irish airline workers reject union-backed company redundancy plan

Irish ground crew working for Aer Lingus airline have rejected redundancy plans to cut 500 posts out of its 4,500 workforce. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members voted by 55 percent to 45 percent to reject the union-backed company plans.

Around 270 of the job losses would be among the ground crew, support and maintenance staff. The company said they would restore pay cuts imposed during the COVID-19 crisis if the redundancies went through. SIPTU officials had negotiated the deal with the company after the workforce rejected proposals involving workers taking on extra duties and changes to conditions.

The company told the *Irish Times* newspaper, “The restoration of hours and pay and return to work will not now take place. In the context of the unprecedented and deepening crisis being faced by the aviation industry in Ireland, Aer Lingus will now consider its next steps.”

Aer Lingus is a subsidiary of the International Airlines Group (IAG), which owns British Airways.

Further strike by local government staff in London borough

Around 1,500 local government staff at the east London borough of Tower Hamlets began a three-day stoppage Wednesday. Council staff took three days strike action earlier this month. Strikers included social workers, housing staff, teaching assistants and refuse collectors.

The Unison union members are opposed to the Labour-controlled council’s imposition of a new contract known as “Tower Rewards.” Under the contract, newly employed council staff would be on lower pay rates, receive lower night-working payments and incremental payments. Also, severance pay for redundancies would be 80 percent lower than currently.

Unison and National Education Union (NEU) members at Tower Hamlets voted by around 90 percent earlier in the year to take strike action in opposition to the council’s plans, but action was postponed because of the pandemic.

This week’s action and the earlier action were taken by Unison members. The NEU has not called out its members. Council staff belonging to the GMB and Unite unions were not called out either.

The Tower Hamlets council imposed the new contract on July 6, sacking two-thirds of its workforce of around 4,000 and reemploying them on the inferior “Tower Rewards” contract. The action taken by Tower Hamlets will set a benchmark for other Labour-controlled councils, as all local authorities face a financial cut in funding following the pandemic.

Two-day strike by Portuguese prison staff

Prison guards in Portugal began a two-day strike on Wednesday. The National Union of Prison Guard Corps members are protesting work conditions and the refusal of the Justice department to address them.

Protests by Ukrainian coal miners in Kiev end

Protests by Ukrainian miners and their families in Kiev, begun June 30, ended after 11 days. The miners were from publicly owned and private mines across the country. The Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine members were demanding payment of wage arrears and for coal mining operations to restart.

The protests ended after the coal mine companies and state-owned Centrenergy electric power company reached an agreement. Centrenergy buys coal to power its electric power stations. Two state banks granted credit facilities to Centrenergy so the mine companies could be paid. The agreement included provision to clear the miners' wage arrears.

Iranian sugar workers strike to enter second month this week

The strike by workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar production factory at Shush in southwestern Iran will enter its second month this week.

The workers, owed wage arrears for the last two to three months, walked out June 14. They held protest marches attracting hundreds. They are also demanding reinstatement of former workers sacked for previous protests, and for the company to be taken back into public ownership. The complex, built more than 50 years ago, was privatised in 2015.

Thousands of workers at the plant have been involved in various forms of industrial action since 2018. During their fight, they have been attacked by security forces and arrested.

One of the factory owners, Omid Assadbeigi, is under investigation for foreign currency violations. He was given bail on condition he paid the wage arrears but has yet to do so.

US sanctions reimposed 18 months ago have slashed exports of Iran's crude oil by 80 percent, leading to price increases in basic necessities and medicines.

Nationwide strike by Israeli social workers enters second week

The strike by Israeli social workers has entered its second week. Strikers held demonstrations at road junctions across the country, holding up signs reading, "Dying Welfare, Crushed Society," and "Children at Risk." Last week, strikers protested outside the home of the Finance Minister, Yisrael Katz.

The strike began after talks between the Israel Union of Social Workers and the Israeli Finance Ministry broke down on July 5. The workers are protesting low pay and heavy workloads along with threats of violence against them.

According to the union, there are around 1,000 social work post vacancies as employers struggle to fill them because of poor conditions and pay. The heads of 140 Israeli local authorities have called on the Finance Minister to resolve the crisis.

Strike threat by Israeli nurses

Israeli nurses across the country are preparing to strike against staff shortages and low pay, which are exacerbating the pressure of dealing with increasing workload due to the pandemic. There are around 1,500 new cases each day.

There is a shortage of nurses, with around 1,500 vacancies and some 800 nurses in quarantine because of exposure to COVID-19 patients. While the Israel Nurses' Association (INA) members are ready to strike, the INA chairperson is anxious to engage with the Finance ministry to head off action.

Zimbabwe nurses remain on strike despite repression

Thousands of nurses in Zimbabwe are continuing their strike for a living wage despite facing police baton rounds, arrest, and being kept in dirty, overcrowded police cells like criminals.

While two of the 13 nurses arrested last week were released after paying a fine, 11 others spent a night in police cells before appearing at Mbare Magistrate's Court, after which they were released on bail for a sum of Z\$500 each.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions secretary general, Japhet Moyo said that the nurses had not broken the law but failed to call for any wider action.

The government is treating the strike as a state security issue without addressing the reasons for the nurses' anger. The strikers face fines between Z\$200 and Z\$500 under laws banning rallies and demonstrations, as well as other public gatherings. The laws were passed using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext.

Workers cannot afford even basic necessities, with runaway inflation nearing 800 percent.

South African workers fight job cuts at profitable car dealership

Workers at South Africa's nationwide car dealership, Bidvest McCarthy, intend to strike over planned job cuts, it was reported on Sunday. The company gave employees notice it will restructure with the possible loss of 1,200 jobs, blaming a decline in sales on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workers, however, say the company had recorded a profit and released reserves to keep the firm buoyant and save jobs. They argue that if money was the issue then why are highly-paid top managers not part of the redundancy plans. One employee claimed, "This is a plot to get rid of certain individuals who are vocal about workers' rights."

Teachers strike over intolerable COVID-19 conditions in South African school

Thirty-five teachers walked out July 8 over conditions at their school in Cape Town, South Africa. They are struggling to keep pupils and themselves safe after returning from lockdown, only to find the school still unprepared for the COVID-19 threat.

According to the strikers, classes are too large as vacant posts have been left unfilled. They also say they need more teaching assistants to cope with social distancing, proper sanitisation, and the screening of learners. There is also a shortage of essential equipment caused by a lack of security at the school.

At another school, near Johannesburg, management threatened teachers with job losses if they insisted the school was closed after staff tested positive.

South Africa has 298,292 confirmed cases and 4,346 deaths.

South African health workers at Western Cape clinic strike over COVID-19 safety threat

Health workers at a clinic in Western Cape province, South Africa, went on strike Monday, protesting against unsafe working conditions.

The National Education and Allied Workers Union members were joined by concerned local residents as they demonstrated over the lack of running water, personal protective equipment (PPE) and ineffective social distancing at the clinic.

In neighbouring province Kwazulu-Natal, health workers are raising concerns over rising infections amongst workers, the shortage of PPE and the failure to decontaminate workspaces. Last week, staff at a hospital in Pietermaritzburg went on strike over poor working conditions after the recent deaths of two nurses from the virus.

Malawian health workers at isolation centre in Blantyre strike over non-payment

Health workers at the Kameza isolation centre in Blantyre, Malawi began strike action July 13 to demand payment of an allowance and accrued arrears. The allowance has not been paid since before April.

A march by the workers on July 9 over the same issue caused the city council to pay the allowance for one day.

Nigerian workers strike against human rights body over below-minimum wage

Workers at the National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria walked out indefinitely from July 16 in opposition to their pay being below the legally enforced minimum wage.

The minimum wage was set at a very low level (30,000 NGN per month) by the Nigerian federal government in April 2019.

Also, the workers have not been paid protection allowances to which they are entitled. Available press reports ignored the fact that a body supposedly concerned with human rights is paying staff less than the minimum wage.

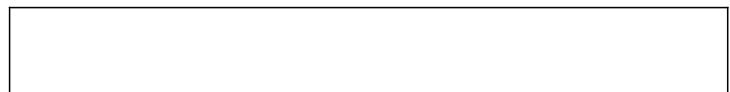
Nigeria: Lagos doctors reject government intimidation and plan strike

Medical doctors in Lagos are planning a three-day “warning” strike on grievances over unpaid salaries, insufficient PPE and safety measures.

Doctors in Lagos intensive care units are at risk caring for patients with COVID-19 without suitable PPE. Doctors suffer due to staff shortages, lack of hazard allowances, high taxation and nowhere to stay to avoid the risk of spreading coronavirus to their families. They are also owed two months’ pay and face losing their jobs with minimal notice.

Their union delayed for five weeks while it engaged in fruitless talks. On the eve of the strike, the union offered to cancel if the state government gave them some justification. Instead, the state accused the doctors of “insensitivity” and of lacking “empathy.”

The state is the epicentre of the pandemic in Nigeria, having 12,583 confirmed cases of the 33,153 cases nationally.





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