

South Africa: meat processing workers' stoppage in Thaba Nchu, steel strike at Scaw Metals plants; retirees block traffic in Nigerian capital; ongoing protests in Iran

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

31 July 2020

### Police intimidate striking meat processing workers in Thaba Nchu, South Africa

Strikers at Sky Country Butchery in Thaba Nchu, Free State, were harassed and intimidated by South African Police Services while demonstrating for safety measures against the pandemic outside their workplace on July 22. Many were arrested.

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union members are demanding a danger allowance from the meat processing company, which saw increased sales and profits during the country's lockdown. The workers also want safe transport between workplace and home and onsite facilities for quarantining and treatment.

To contain the virus, the African National Congress (ANC) government of President Cyril Ramaphosa reintroduced some lockdown measures, including a night-time curfew, a ban on gatherings and social visits, and school closures for four weeks from July 28.

There have been 471,123 confirmed coronavirus cases in South Africa and 7,497 deaths.

### South African steelworkers strike in defence of wages

Steelworkers at the South African Scaw Metals Group went on strike indefinitely from Monday after the firm unilaterally took away workers' allowances and benefits. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members walked out at plants across the country.

### South African police use rubber bullets against protesting municipal workers in Johannesburg

South African municipal workers in Tshwane, Johannesburg, went on a three-day protest from July 21 after the city reneged on a previous agreement to pay salaries benchmarked against other similar-sized municipalities.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members faced police firing rubber bullets after damaging property in the municipal offices and

surrounding streets in frustration.

On July 24, the municipality agreed to a 6.25 percent salary increase but, in the meantime, sought and were granted a court order forbidding workers from blocking streets, causing damage or interfering in municipal business as part of their protest.

### Nigeria: Protest by retired state workers over unpaid pensions

A demonstration by retired state workers in Imo, Nigeria demanding payment of pension arrears led to four of the demonstrators keeling over and being taken to hospital.

The protestors held placards saying, "We are not ghost retirees." They blocked a roundabout near the state capital, Owerri, causing traffic jams. It was the third such protest by the unpaid retirees, who say they are owed 45 months' worth of pension payments.

### Kenyan doctors in Siaya County protest lack of promotions and personal protective equipment

Doctors in Siaya County, Kenya have protested against the Health Executive going back on an agreement on promotions. They are threatening strike action if the agreement is not honoured.

County Secretary Joseph Ogutu said the executive was hopeful of coming to an agreement with the leaders of the trade unions.

Doctors are also angry about the lack of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE). A Kenyan doctor, Doreen Lugaliki, who died of COVID-19, is believed to have caught the disease from a colleague at a hospital in Nairobi, who in turn caught it from a patient. Lugaliki did not show signs of any underlying health condition.

There are 19,125 confirmed COVID cases in Kenya, with 311 fatalities.

### Liberian ambulance drivers protest non-payment of wages

Liberian drivers of ambulances and other health vehicles are demanding their wages for working at a time of increased risk from COVID-19. They said they were not paid for April, while managers blamed the lack of pay on workers not giving them correct details of their bank accounts.

There are 1,179 total coronavirus cases in Liberia and 72 deaths.

### **Nigeria: Trade Union Congress warns government its attacks may create instability**

Nigeria's Trade Union Congress is embarked on a face-saving operation, after opposing the recent health workers' strike. It warned the government that the recently imposed six percent stamp duty on tenants is in danger of causing instability.

Posing as a critic of government corruption, the body stated, "Sometimes we wonder if there is any milk of kindness left in our leadership," and called for a delay in the implementation of the duty.

The Nigerian Labour Congress has made similar statements claiming to oppose increases in fees without specifying any action to be taken.

### **Ongoing protests by Iranian workers**

Protests by workers in Iran against wage arrears, working conditions and the impact of the COVID-19 are ongoing. On Monday, municipal workers in the southwestern city of Yasuj protested nine months of wage arrears.

On Sunday, workers contracted to the Ministry of Health demonstrated outside the Iranian parliament against low pay and employment insecurity. Also at the weekend, contracted workers at Beheshti hospital in Shiraz held a protest at the hospital demanding a 50 percent pay rise in line with that given to directly employed workers.

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

### **Jordanian teachers' union under government attack**

On Saturday, the Jordanian Judicial authority ordered the closing down of the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate union, representing 100,000 teachers, for the next two years. It raided the union headquarters' office and detained several union leaders.

The government repression came days after the union organised a rally demanding the government implement a wage increase agreed October last year. Wages were due to rise by 35-75 percent depending on experience and seniority. In April, the government announced it was reneging on the agreement citing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The teachers syndicate planned a rally Wednesday to protest the government attack on the union.

### **Protest by art gallery staff against redundancies at Tate Modern, UK**

Workers at the Tate Modern art gallery in London staged a protest

outside the gallery on Monday, the day it reopened after a prolonged closure due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members were protesting plans by gallery management to eliminate around 200 jobs from its commercial arm, Tate Enterprise.

The PCS has called on the gallery to use some of the government's promised £7 million COVID-19 bailout to protect jobs. The union is currently balloting its members at the gallery for strike action.

### **Unite union negotiates sellout deal to end strike by UK refuse workers in south London borough**

A five-day strike by around 150 refuse workers in the south-east London borough of Bexley, due to begin Thursday, was called off by the Unite union.

The workers, employed by the outsourcing company Serco, were demanding a minimum wage of £13 an hour. The current rate is £10.15.

The workers walked out in March over pay, but further action ended following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers also accused Serco of reneging on a promise to pay sick pay to around 30 workers, who had taken leave of absence because of COVID-19 symptoms.

### **Strike threat by Maltese medics over COVID-19 measures**

Maltese doctors are calling on the government to refuse permits for events of 10 or more people from August 3 and have threatened industrial action if the government refuses.

Their call is in response to a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases. They will refuse to perform normal duties and instead only carry out emergencies.

The Maltese Medical Association criticised the prime minister for allegedly encouraging people not to comply with public health recommendations made by the Superintendent of Public Health. They also accuse the tourism authority and tourism minister of promoting mass events.

### **German car manufacturer unions agree pay cuts**

Cuts in hours and hence pay at the German car manufacturer Daimler have been agreed by the unions and will take effect October 1 for an initial period of a year. Thousands of Daimler workers in logistics, administration and non-factory jobs will see a two-hour cut in the working week.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the financial crisis facing manufacture. Daimler, which employs 300,000 worldwide, announced 10,000 job cuts last December. It has now upped this to 20,000 in the wake of COVID-19.

### **Cabin crew union agrees inferior contract with Icelandair**

The Icelandic Cabin Crew Association (FFÍ) has agreed an inferior

contract with Icelandair, after cabin crew previously twice rejected it.

The airline negotiated with FFÍ for several months without achieving resolution. On July 17, Icelandair announced it would fire all cabin crew and begin negotiations with another labour organisation. In the meantime, it expected pilots to cover cabin crew duties.

Following discussions on July 19, the new contract was agreed and will be in place until 2025. The airline will only employ 200 of its cabin crew staff when it recommences flights this autumn. In April, prior to the pandemic, it employed 900.

### **Asylum seekers hunger strike in Ireland**

Around 30 asylum seekers at asylum accommodation at the Skellig Star hotel in Cahersiveen in County Kerry, Ireland announced they will go on hunger strike.

They allege that food and water are being rationed at the accommodation and have tried to raise the issue for the last five months. The allegation is now being investigated by the Department of Justice (DoJ). The protestors are demanding the DoJ move them to self-catering accommodation, where they can cater for themselves.



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