

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

21 August 2020

## Strikes and protests continue in Iran

The strike by oil, gas and petrochemical workers in Iran in pursuit of wage arrears is now in its third week. The strike encompasses 54 facilities with protests taking place in 23 cities throughout 12 Iranian provinces.

Workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane complex have been on strike for more than nine weeks. They are seeking wage arrears and demanding the renationalisation of the company.

On Saturday, retired workers held protests outside social security offices in 12 provincial capitals to protest poverty pension levels.

Workers at the Heavy Equipment Production Company are continuing their regular protests in the city of Arak. They are protesting arrears of wages and for production at the company to restart after it was handed over to private owners.

Railway workers in five major cities including Tehran began a strike and protests on August 14 and have held protests.

Iran is suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with 352,558 cases and around 20,264 deaths. Its economy has been ravaged by US sanctions, reimposed 18 months ago, slashing exports of crude oil by 80 percent, leading to price increases in basic necessities and medicines.

## Algerian journalist jailed for reporting workers' protests

Last week, Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni was sentenced to three years' jail for reporting the wide-scale protests that shook the country in 2019. The correspondent for the French TV channel *TV5MONDE* and the *Casbah Tribune* news website was arrested on March 7.

He was convicted of "inciting an unarmed gathering" and "endangering national unity." Two protest organisers were also sentenced to two years.

The protests rocked the regime of the corrupt president Abdelaziz Bouteflika and led to his downfall. Major protests have continued, and November 2019 saw big strikes and protests by oil and gas workers as well as lawyers.

## Zimbabwean nurses continue strike over PPE and pay

The two-month strike by Zimbabwe's nurses is continuing, despite them being removed from the payroll for July.

The Zimbabwe Nurses Association members are demanding the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect them from the coronavirus and payment in US dollars. Runaway inflation of around 800

percent has eroded the value of the Zimbabwean dollar, so workers cannot afford necessities.

The labour umbrella body, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, has confined its actions to verbal complaints.

Zimbabwe has recorded 5,643 coronavirus cases, with 150 fatalities.

## South Africa health workers to walk out over staff shortages, lack of PPE, and safety conditions

Around 108,000 health care workers in South Africa are to strike Friday in protest over staff shortages, a lack of PPE and non-compliance with health and safety regulations.

The National, Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members, including nurses, doctors, pharmacists, cleaners, community health workers, ambulance workers, community care workers and laboratory technicians, have been particularly vulnerable in the COVID-19 pandemic, with 27,360 infections and 240 deaths.

Other NEHAWU members at the country's National Health Laboratory Service are also set to strike over unpaid salary increases. The laboratory workers are responsible for critical COVID-19 testing in the country, which has confirmed 596,060 cases and 12,423 deaths.

## South African community health care workers demonstrate for improved pay and conditions

On Monday, community health care workers in Eastern Cape province, South Africa, stopped work and protested outside the health department offices in Port Elizabeth and the provincial capital of Bhisho.

More than 80 Young Nurses Indaba Trade Union members demonstrated to demand better wages and conditions, permanent jobs and more supplies of PPE.

The workers insist they should be integrated into the Department of Health rather than having contracts with the local municipalities. Workers in the neighbouring province of Gauteng with permanent contracts with the health department receive much better pay for the same jobs.

## Sacked Volkswagen workers reinstated in South Africa after fighting for safe conditions

Fourteen suspended employees at the VW car plant in Uitenhage, South

Africa, sacked for fighting for safety at work were reinstated on August 11. The company bowed to threatened legal action by fellow workers acting in solidarity.

The suspensions were retribution after workers went to the Department of Employment and Labour to enforce their rights, and the international company was found to have violated health and safety regulations.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members went on strike after returning to work at the end of lockdown and finding themselves exposed to unsafe conditions. When the firm threatened the entire workforce with dismissal, they fought back using the health and safety laws.

### **Nigerian striking judicial workers in Ebonyi state threatened with sack**

Judicial workers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, faced an ultimatum to return to work on August 14 or lose their jobs.

The workers walked out on August 13 to protest the lack of implementation of the Consolidated Judiciary Salary Structure by the state government.

The state government has called the strike “an act of sabotage.” The workers refused to be cowed, and most of the offices and courts remained empty.

### **Nigerian oil workers’ stoppage over non-payment**

Nigerian government oil workers went on warning strike August 12-14 in protest at non-payment due to the introduction of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) is limiting the current action to a three-day “warning strike.”

Both PENGASSAN and the Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers have threatened to widen the dispute.

### **Redundant Liberian miners protest their plight**

Dozens of former employees of ArcelorMittal Liberia have seized control of the railroad in Sanniquellie, preventing movement of trains to protest their treatment by their former employer.

The workers were made redundant at the time of the Ebola outbreak in 2014.

### **Kenyan doctors prepare stoppage against poor working conditions**

Doctors in Nakuru County, Kenya, are preparing to strike against poor conditions.

Davji Atallah, secretary-general of the South Rift branch of the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union told reporters that for the last two years “the county has only employed 24 doctors and to date, at least

15 have left the service due to frustrations by the county.” The union has given a 30-day notice period.

The doctors are on the front line of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic but have no PPE, risking the lives of themselves and their families.

Doctors in Nairobi are also set to strike on August 21 for safety measures, having issued a seven-day notice. Senior Pulmonologist Ndambuki Mboloi was among the latest victims of COVID-19, succumbing on August 14.

Doctors hired in Nairobi on short-term contracts have not been paid for more than six months.

Kenya has confirmed 31,015 coronavirus cases and 506 deaths.

### **Strike by Tate art gallery staff in London**

Around 100 UK workers employed across four sites in London by Tate Enterprises, the commercial arm of Tate Galleries, went on strike Tuesday against redundancies.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are employed in retail, catering and publishing services across Tate Enterprises. Further strikes took place on Wednesday and Friday with a planned strike for Saturday. Indefinite strike action is due to begin Monday. A rally is also planned outside Tate Modern on Saturday.

In June, the museum announced plans to cut 313 jobs from its commercial arm. The workers voted by a near 90 percent majority on a large turnout to strike. On August 12, the Tate confirmed the job cuts.

The strikers’ demands include the Tate using 10 percent of a government £7 million grant to defend jobs, that no redundancies take place while senior staff are in receipt of six-figure salaries, and that the gallery join the union in demanding a bigger bailout from the government.

The management of the Southbank arts centre in London is planning to cut 400 jobs. PCS members at the art centre have been balloted for strike action against the cuts. The result has yet to be announced.

### **UK protest against job cuts at London University’s SOAS**

The University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) plans to make 150 of its staff redundant. Unison and University and College Union (UCU) members at SOAS are being balloted for strike action. UCU members held a protest outside the institution on August 13.

### **Bus drivers in Manchester, UK, to ballot for industrial action**

Around 500 UK bus drivers at Go North West Limited in Manchester will undergo a consultative ballot to be “held by the end of the month” on possible industrial action.

The ballot was called after a senior Unite union representative was suspended after workers learned they face a £2,000-a-year pay cut.

The company attempted to change terms and conditions during lockdown, when 80 percent of drivers were furloughed, and is demanding productivity improvements in exchange for a one-off payment of £5,000.

The firm only began running bus services in the north west region last year.

The *Oldham Chronicle* reported earlier this month that “Go North West” managing director, Nigel Featham says many of the working practices inherited at Queens Road [bus depot in Oldham] when they took over the depot last year have been in use since the 1980s.” Commenting prior to the strike vote on existing working practises, Featham said, “There are some real throwbacks in there and while individually these may seem harmless, together they add up to a huge waste of resource each year.” He added, “For us it’s a simple choice between continuing to sustain annual losses or improving our performance to a point where we eventually return the business back into profit.”

Unite has a long record of suppressing struggles after workers vote in favour of strikes. Regional officer Steve Davies said: “We believe that [Go North West managing director] Nigel Featham’s reckless ‘bull in a china shop’ actions are now the biggest threat to the business and its profitability.” Unite has appealed to the top executives of the Go Ahead group nationally to resolve the dispute.

### **Maltese airline pilots refuse pay cut deal**

Fifty pilots at Air Malta have turned down a company offer to reinstate 69 pilots laid off due to the pandemic but with pay cuts.

The pay cuts would be 20 percent for current employees and 50 percent for laid-off staff. The latter would also forgo their pension scheme payment of €800,000 when retiring at the age of 55.

According to the company, pay levels would be reinstated to 90 percent by April 2022 and full basic pay by April 2023.

### **Irish pharmacy workers begin industrial action against redundancies**

Workers at Leo Pharma in Dublin, Ireland, began industrial action on Monday, after the company tried to lay off five workers. The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members are holding rolling two-hour strikes and an overtime ban, and are not cooperating with changes in work practice.

The workers accuse the company of breaking an agreement offering permanent employment to any temporary employee with more than two years’ continuous service. The current bout of action is to take place until August 31.

SIPTU represents around 50 percent of the 400 staff at Leo Pharma in Dublin. The Denmark-based company employs 6,000 worldwide, including 650 in Ireland in its Dublin and Cork facilities.

### **Irish airport workers to be balloted on changes to work practices**

Irish employees at Cork and Dublin airports will be balloted on changes to work practices by the Mandate, SIPTU and Forsa unions. DAA, which runs both airports, is seeking to reduce costs. It is currently losing around €1 million a day.

According to DAA, the above unions are recommending the proposed changes. Workers are currently in receipt of 80 percent of their pay, which DAA says will continue after August 29 if they agree to the changes.

Workers in Unite and Connect and security staff represented by SIPTU have yet to be balloted. The two airports are processing less than 15

percent of their normal passenger flows.

The DAA is offering voluntary redundancy.

### **Strike by workers at Irish magnesium production site**

Workers at the Premier Periclase magnesium production site in Drogheda on the Irish east coast walked out on Monday. The Unite and SIPTU members are opposing company plans to temporarily close the site.

The company is seeking to lay off some staff or reduce their hours and bring in contract labour. A previous planned strike in July was called off by the unions for talks with the company under the auspices of the government’s Workplace Relations Committee. The talks failed to reach a resolution.

The company produces magnesium from seawater.

### **Strike by food delivery workers in northern England**

Home food delivery drivers working for Deliveroo in Sheffield, northern England, held a two-hour strike on Wednesday. The Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain (IWGB) members walked out between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m., a particularly busy time for home food orders.

Among their demands are guaranteed living wages after expenses, more clarity over how their pay rates are determined, a ban on unfair sackings and enhanced sick pay.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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