

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

South African plastics workers in national strike; Capetown transport workers wildcat

19 October 2018

Africa

South African plastic industry workers strike for equal pay

Members of South Africa's National Union of Metalworkers began a national, indefinite strike in the plastics industry Monday.

The strike involves over 10,000 workers and affects 450 industries, including cell phones, auto and IT industries. There are some 60,000 employed altogether in the South African plastics industry.

The workers are demanding parity with engineers and a 15 percent settlement this year in line with the Metal and Engineering Industries Bargaining Council. Included in their demands is a return to the R40 minimum wage, against the recently imposed reduction to R20.

The employers association has gone to court in an attempt to break the strike. The Labour Court is due to rule Friday.

South African Cape Town transport workers wildcat strike

South African Cape Town MyCiTi bus transport workers began an indefinite strike Monday with a rally of 300 at the city's civic centre.

Bus drivers, cleaners and marshals took wildcat action demanding increased pay and better conditions. The agency staff complain they earn half the amount that directly employed workers earn, have no canteen facilities and must eat their lunch in the toilets.

According to Timeslive, one worker said, "We are fed up of NUMSA [National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa] ... They never take us seriously. Most of the workers are working 14 hours a day but they are not paid for overtime work."

The company claimed they did not know why the strike was taking place, citing a collective bargaining agreement in May with the unions. City officials called the walkout "illegal" and there were reports of police firing stun grenades at protesting drivers.

Cape Town South African fire fighters call dispute for a 40-hour week

Fire fighters in Cape Town South Africa, overworked due to staff shortages, have lodged a labour dispute with the authorities.

The South Africa Municipal Workers Union members rejected an offer of a wage increase of 30 percent and demanded a reduction in working hours. They want a 40-hour week and no more than two hours a day overtime—instead of 24-hour shifts.

They also want overtime pay, with one worker reported as working for 240 hours a month but only being paid for 160.

Public service workers in Polokwane, South Africa demonstrate against outsourcing

Thousands of National Union of Public Services and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) members marched to the Department of Health in Polokwane, South Africa on October 11.

The early childhood development workers, security officers and NGO staff were demanding outsourced home-based care employees be brought in-house (onto the council's books).

Other demands were for the introduction of the standardised wage of R3,500 agreed June 2018, and back pay. NUPSAW is also campaigning for the restoration of lost union bargaining rights.

Unions silent on Nigerian state and federal government offers of unacceptable minimum wage

Nigerian Minister of Labour and Employment Chris Ngige announced a new national minimum wage of N24,000 on October 10. State governments say they will pay N20,000.

Workers began a seven-day general strike September 27 to demand a wage of between N56,000 to N65,000. The unions called this off after two days on the promise of negotiations.

The government refused the reduced offer by the National Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress and the United Labour Congress of N30,000, but increased its own initial offer from N21,000. The unions have yet to respond.

Nigerian academics threaten strike over intimidation

Members of Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics have given the federal government a 21-day strike notice from October 2 to end its intimidation or they will close the country's polytechnic colleges.

Federal government and polytechnic management are trying to impose the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) onto the workforce without paying outstanding wages or putting subscriptions deducted from wages into the relevant accounts.

Grievances, including the unimplemented 2017 collective bargaining agreement, also remain unresolved.

Nigerian aviation workers' solidarity strike forces reinstatement of sacked workers

Aviation workers went on strike last week at Nigeria's Murtala Muhammed Airport Two. The airport is run by Bi-Courtney Aviation Services Limited (BASL). Ignoring a back-to-work court order, the strikers came out in support of 62 fellow workers sacked for wanting to join a union.

Members of the Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, the National Union of Air Transport Employees and the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers barricaded the entrance to the terminal.

BASL was forced to recognise union rights and reinstate the sacked workers.

The company was forced to revert to its previous place of operations at the state operated General Aviation Terminal, as did other flight operators.

Middle East

Strike by Iranian teachers

Teachers in Iran began a two-day nationwide strike on Sunday. The members of the Coordination Council of Teachers' Trade Organisations of Iran turned up at school but refused to take classes. They are protesting low pay and poor working conditions.

Teachers say that inflation has eroded their earnings. Many shopkeepers have closed their stores in support of the protest. The job action comes in the wake of US sanctions that have fuelled a collapse in the value of the Iranian currency.

Europe

Long-running strike of Maltese dentists continues

The strike by Maltese public dentists for a pay rise and improved career progression begun on August 6 continues. They are refusing to honour appointments or carry out routine work, though offering emergency cover.

The dentists claim the Maltese Health Ministry is refusing to address their concerns seriously, and is seeking to circumvent the strike by outsourcing work to private dental practices.

Wildcat go-slow strike by Maltese ferry workers for pay parity

On Monday, ferry workers on the Gozo Channel ferry service to the Maltese mainland held a go-slow action leading to delays and cancellations. The UHM union members work as contractors for the ferry company and took action to demand equal pay with permanent employees.

Strikes and protest marches by Swiss construction workers

On Monday, around 3,000 construction workers in the southern Swiss Canton of Ticino struck. The members of the Unia, Syna and OCST unions are protesting worsening working conditions. In June, 18,000 construction workers marched in Zurich. They were protesting plans by building employers to raise the current retirement age that now stands at 60.

Employers have since withdrawn the threat to raise the retirement age, but are demanding construction workers yield to other demands such as longer working hours.

On Tuesday, 1,800 construction workers in Geneva came out on strike and marched through the city holding up traffic to protest attacks on working conditions.

UK: London tube drivers announce further strike

Drivers on the London Underground railway Piccadilly Line are to hold a 24-hour strike on November 7. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

The strike follows previous action over a breakdown in industrial relations between drivers and management.

The BBC reported, "Some drivers say they were threatened with the sack for taking time off after people had killed themselves on the tracks while they were working. A leaflet produced by the union stated, London Underground are working drivers on the line into the ground."

Rail staff in northern England continue fight over driver only operated trains

Rail staff working for Arriva North, which serves the north of England, are due to strike again on Saturday with further 24-hour strikes planned for the following three weekends.

The members of RMT have taken part in over 30 days of strike action over the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 conductors' jobs at train franchises nationally.

The RMT has limited action against DOO to regional, short-term strikes, to isolate and dissipate struggles, without fundamentally affecting rail operations. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia. The union has agreed a sell-out deal "in principle" with Merseyrail and the Labour Party-led Liverpool City Region Combined Authority whereby "door control and dispatch of the trains will transfer to the driver" on new trains.

Demonstration against rail cuts in northwest England

RMT members held a protest outside Liverpool railway station Monday in support of rail guards and to oppose plans by rail companies to cut staff. They also want an end to the use of casual labour on major rail refurbishments such as that being carried out at Liverpool station.

Staff at UK teaching union strike

Staff working for the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) came out on strike Wednesday.

The GMB union members are opposing the NASUWT's plans to change the terms of their defined benefit scheme. They are also opposing an imposed three-year pay deal. The workers voted by a near 90 percent majority for strike action.

Further one-day strikes are planned for November 5 and 9.

Staff at Irish colleges take industrial action

Support staff supplying library, administrative and clerical services at the Institute of Technology and Mary Immaculate College in Limerick began industrial action Monday.

They are refusing to participate in any communication, refusing to make or take phone calls, send or process emails or take part in video conferences.

The members of the Forsa trade union are demanding colleges undertake a job evaluation exercise as agreed in 2015. They had voted by an 85 percent majority for the action back in July.

Scottish teachers to be balloted over pay offer

Teachers in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) union are to be balloted over a 3 percent pay offer from the Scottish government. They are seeking a 10 percent pay increase.

The ballot will begin October 29 with a recommendation by the EIS that they reject it. The EIS believe a No vote will strengthen their hand in negotiations.

If negotiations fail, the union will ballot for a strike, but hopes to avoid industrial action. According to the EIS, the real value of take-home pay for teachers has been eroded by 24 percent over the last decade.

Strike threat at Bosnian aluminium plant

Workers at the Aluminij aluminium plant in Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina threatened strike action this week at a rally in front of parliament.

The 900 workers are demanding the government cover company debts and avert the threat of the electricity supply being cut off because of unpaid bills. Founded in 1977, the company was later privatized, although

the government holds 44 percent of shares.



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