

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 December 2018

## Strike by Amazon workers in Spain and Germany against dangerous work conditions

Amazon workers at the San Fernando de Henares fulfillment centre in Spain and fulfillment centres in Graben and Leipzig, Germany, came out on strike December 7.

The workers at all three sites were protesting dangerous working conditions and to oppose the company's anti-union stance. Amazon workers in Germany have been in dispute and have taken intermittent strike action since 2013 to demand a collective bargaining agreement.

According to the *Gizmodo* science and technology website, further strikes are planned for December 15 and 30.

## French energy workers strike in support of yellow vest protesters

Energy supply workers at state-utility EDF.PA, and gas and power supplier ENGIE.PA were to begin a 48-hour strike Thursday in support of the yellow vest protesters.

## UK rail guards continue strikes in opposition to driver only operation trains

Rail guards working for the Arriva North franchise servicing the north of England will hold a further 24-hour strike on Saturday. It will be followed up with 24-hour strikes December 22 and 29.

Guards at Arriva North have been taking strike action over many months against plans by the company to introduce driver only operation trains (DOO). DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 conductors' jobs.

Rail guards and train drivers working for South Western Railways are also fighting over the issue of DOO. The RMT announced Thursday that guard members would hold a 24-hour strike on December 22, with two additional 24-hour strikes on December 27 and December 31.

The RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia. The union has agreed to 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. In June, the RMT agreed to a framework deal with West Midlands Trains, agreeing that "On such new or modified rolling stock, train drivers will operate the train doors and undertake train dispatch in normal circumstances..."

## Strike by German rail workers

Rail workers employed by German rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB) held a four-hour strike for a pay increase on Monday. The strike began at 5 a.m., hitting long distance and regional trains affecting rush hour services.

The members of the EVG rail trade union came out after pay negotiation talks broke down. The 160,000 DB employees are demanding a 7.5 percent pay increase. DB claimed it had offered a 5.1 percent pay

rise in two stages and a one-off payment of €500 and that together these made up a 7 percent deal.

## Bus drivers in northeast England to strike

Around 650 bus drivers at Arriva Durham County Ltd in northeast England will begin a week's stoppage on December 16.

The workers voted by over 90 percent to take the action for a £1 an hour pay rise, backdated to March this year. A Unite official said they were the second lowest paid drivers across the Arriva network of bus companies.

Arriva bosses were to meet union representatives on Wednesday for last minute talks aimed at averting the strike.

## Academics at Scottish university to be balloted for strike over staff cuts

Teaching staff at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh are being balloted on industrial action. The ballot will close on January 16.

The members of the University and College Union (UCU) are opposed to proposed job cuts. The university wants to reduce the 400 teaching staff by around 10 percent. The UCU says the cuts can be achieved by other means. The university plays an important role in the training of National Health Service staff.

## Journalists in northwest England to strike over job losses and pay

Journalists at Newsquest will hold a 24-hour strike on December 20. Newsquest publishes four titles across Cumbria—the *Carlisle News and Star*, *Cumberland News*, *Workington Times and Star* and the *Whitehaven News*.

The National Union of Journalists members are protesting 100 job losses, mainly senior experienced reporters, since Newsquest took over publishing. They are also protesting not having a pay rise since 2015 and being expected to work excessive hours.

They voted by over 80 percent in favour of action.

## Waste management workers in Widnes, England to strike over pay

Workers at the Veolia waste management site in Widnes, northwest England are to hold a 24-hour strike on December 21 with further strikes on December 24, January 4 and 7. They will also impose an overtime ban.

The members of Unite are protesting non-payment for working an extra day out of their rostered seven days. Under their contract they are expected to work five shifts in a seven-day period but are not paid an extra day if they work a sixth shift within the seven-day period. The workers voted by a three-quarters majority to take action.

The company is contracted to remove waste from fast food outlet McDonalds and the supermarket Asda among others and the strikes are expected to have a significant impact.

## Union calls off UK housing charity pay strike

Around 400 workers at UK housing charity Shelter were due to begin a three-day strike on Tuesday. Unite called off the strike after Shelter

offered a 2.25 percent consolidated rise plus a 1.75 percent unconsolidated flat rate amounting to around £500 for each worker.

Workers were initially calling for a 3.5 percent pay rise or a flat rate rise of £1,100, with Shelter offering just 1 percent and a 1 percent one-off bonus.

### **Protest by Hungarian workers against overtime and pay**

Around 10,000 workers held a protest in Budapest on Saturday against changes to the labour laws. Under the proposed changes workers could be required to work up to 400 hours overtime a year, up from the current 250 hours.

The changes will allow companies to accrue the overtime payments over three years, rather than the current one year, before having to pay out. The changes would also allow employers to make agreements on overtime directly with workers bypassing any collective bargaining arrangements.

According to the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation, wages in Hungary are among the lowest in Europe. The Hungarian parliament was to discuss the proposals on Wednesday. Another protest was expected that day.

### **Strikes at two Irish supermarket stores over pay and conditions**

Staff at two branches of Tesco in Ireland are to strike. Tesco workers at the Sligo branch, northwest Ireland are to strike today, and on December 20. Workers at the Carrick-on-Shannon branch will strike on December 22.

The members of the Mandate union voted by a majority of more than 80 percent to take action. They accuse the company of refusing to abide by collective agreements. They are also seeking improved canteen facilities, for the union to be able to negotiate on pay, weekly hours worked and rosters.

The 180 staff recruited before 1996 have refused to change their contract to one with less favourable hours and have not had pay rises in line with other workers on contracts brought in from 1996 onwards.

### **Spanish rail strike at Renfe for more staff and pay increase**

Rail guards at the Spanish state-owned rail company, Renfe, are to hold a 24-hour strike today over working conditions.

More widespread strikes have been called for December 21 and January 7, involving all Renfe rail operator staff along with workers at the state rail infrastructure company, Adif. Their demands include a pay increase and for more staff to be employed to counter the losses over recent years.

The CCOO union said that since 2005 the workforce has been cut by around 5,000 to around 26,000.

### **Underground protest by Ukrainian miners over unpaid wages**

This week around 100 miners working at the state owned Lisova mine held an underground protest over wage arrears. According to the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine, the last wages they received was half their wages for the month of October.

### **Strikes by Iranian sugar and steel workers over jobs and pay enter second month**

The strike by workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar plant in southwestern Iran is now in its second month. They began the strike on November 5 to demand the plant be re-nationalised. Since privatization, jobs have been cut and wages are in arrears. They also demand the release of a union representative, journalist/activist and former union rep who were arrested.

Steel workers at the Iran National Steel Industrial Group have also been on strike for a month over wage arrears. They have held daily protests for three weeks outside a government office in Ahvaz, southwestern Iran. More than 40 of the workers have been arrested during the dispute.

### **Israeli social workers resume strike action over pay and conditions**

On December 6, after a month's interlude, social workers in north Israel resumed their programme of strikes. They are fighting for improved pay and safer working conditions. They are refusing to write court reports or meet with clients.

On Monday, social workers in the south of the country took action. Regional welfare authorities are having problems attracting workers, with over 400 vacancies on the books.

### **Workers in South Africa's plastics industry continue their two-month pay parity strike**

Ten thousand plastic engineering workers are continuing their strike for pay parity with their metal engineering worker counterparts.

The members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) began striking two months ago for a 15 percent pay increase and to maintain a minimum hourly rate above R40.

The Plastics Convertors Association of South Africa (PACASA) proffered a deal to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, which the unions are considering. NUMSA has settled at some companies, such as Mpack Plastics Wadeville (MPW), and workers returned to work.

PACASA offered an increase in the hourly rate to R43 per hour but did not mention the 15 percent wage increase. They will implement the deal when NUMSA pays millions of Rand lost through damages during the strike.

PACASA is appealing to the government to end the strike.

### **South African coal miners' stoppage for a pay increase**

Coal miners came out on strike at Mafube coal mine in Wonderfontein, Mpumalanga, South Africa on December 5.

One hundred and fifty members of the National Union of Mineworkers walked out to demand a 10 percent wage increase, revised down to 8, and a 7 percent allowance increase.

The employer is offering a 7-7.5 percent pay rise and 5 percent on allowances, with a R2,500 cash sweetener to those who accept.

### **South African pharmacy strikers banned from picketing**

Workers striking since November 16 at South Africa's chemists Dis-Chem have been banned from picketing and protesting.

The "Interim Relief" ban is an amendment to the Labour Relations Act brought in by African National Congress President Cyril Ramaphosa. The strikers are accused of violent picketing at Dis-Chem pharmacy shops.

The members of the National Union of Public Service & Allied Workers (NUPSAW) are striking for a minimum wage of R12,500 and a 12.5 percent increase for those above that rate, and a guaranteed annual bonus.

Dis-Chem employs 17,500 and refuses to recognise NUPSAW.

### **South African mortuary workers defy court order to end go-slow**

On Monday, the 17 workers on an unofficial go-slow at Fort Napier mortuary in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa were arrested. They will appear in court on Tuesday for contempt of court, which carries a 30-day jail sentence.

The workers are protesting that the ventilation and freezing systems do not work, and for an unpaid pay increase agreed from April.

Workers defied two contempt of court orders to resume normal working. The deadline was December 4, and postponed for two days so the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) could end the go-slow. The mortuary workers however continued their action and blockaded the mortuary entrance the following Thursday.

NEHAWU members from different regions of the province joined the

picket. Durban mortuary workers to the southeast of Pietermaritzburg recently joined the go-slow.

#### **Nigerian academics continue five-week strike over pay and funding**

Academics in Nigeria's universities are continuing their strike over pay and conditions. The strike began November 4 after the government reneged on previous agreements and lack of university funding. A meeting with the government ended Monday with no agreement, and will be resumed December 17.

The government threatened to impose a no-work no-pay rule, but the strike by members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is official.

While members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics threatened to strike on December 12, the College of Academic Educational Staff Union (COEASU) called off their stoppage based on government reassurances, to be reviewed January. Members of COEASU have been on strike for two months over unpaid wages.

#### **Nigerian Assembly employees picket to demand unpaid salary increase**

Hundreds of Nigerian Assembly workers picketed parliament last week over an unimplemented pay rise and lack of promotions.

The members of the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria should have been paid a 28 percent increase from the beginning of this year from extra funds in the budget. Assembly management cited shortage of funds and the lack of promotions because there are no vacant positions.

#### **Libyan oil and port workers strike over pay and conditions**

Libyan oil production and seaport workers went on strike at nine oilfields last week for a wage increase and the implementation of health insurance.

Libya's National Oil Corporation called on the Finance Ministry to implement a pay rise of 67 percent awarded in 2013 for its production and seaport workers. The company lost 300,000 barrels per day from the beginning of the month through the strikes, flooding and rough seas at the ports when tankers cannot dock.

#### **Mozambique building workers strike over pay cut**

Mozambique building workers employed by the Italian CMC-Africa Austral company struck December 3. The 2,000 workers were protesting no breaks over Christmas and New Years.

Though the company capitulated, the strike resumed because wages were docked by 3,000 meticais (US \$49.50), around 80 percent of the monthly minimum wage. Palma district officials visited the site with a large police contingent, but the strikers remained out.

The workers are building a resettlement town for 500 families, displaced to make way for two gas liquefaction plants planned by US-owned company Anadarko.

#### **Namibian airport workers demand implementation of wage deal**

Namibian airport workers demonstrated at the Namibian Airports Company (NAC), demanding a 3 percent plus inflation promised pay increase.

An agreement was reached between NAC and employees in April but not sanctioned by the government. The pay agreement was based on PricewaterhouseCoopers looking into earnings, and reporting pay was well below the market level.

The members of the Namibia Public Workers Union also demand an increase in transport allowance and a fairly contributed medical aid system between workers and management.

#### **Zimbabwe radiographers join doctors on strike**

Radiographers have followed Zimbabwe junior and mid-level doctors out on strike.

Radiographers came out December 6 after the government refused to discuss their grievances. They are demanding payment in US dollars, the restoration of on-call allowances, replacement of obsolete equipment, a review of housing and transport allowances and unfreezing of posts.

Doctors came out on strike on December 1, the second time this year, over pay and conditions. Radiographers and doctors are concerned that public hospitals have no medication and that 20 percent inflation per month is eroding pay.

The health ministry has ruled out payment in dollars and claims the strike is illegal.

To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>