

UK rail workers strikes, Tunisian protests and strikes, strikes spread in Zimbabwe

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 January 2019

### Arriva North rail workers in northern England to hold further strikes

Rail guards working for Arriva North in northern England are to strike on Saturday—their 44th day of action. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are opposing the introduction of driver-only operated (DOO) trains.

DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

Twenty-four-hour strikes are planned for each Saturday throughout January.

The RMT has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed DOO deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia.

The union has also 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.

Last Saturday, far-right activists attempted to disrupt the RMT picket at Manchester's Victoria station.

### Arriva Bus drivers pay strike in northeast England

Bus drivers at Arriva Durham County Ltd in northeast England began a week-long strike Sunday. Forty-thousand passengers are affected by the strike.

The 650 Unite union members are demanding a pay rise. According to the union, the drivers are the second lowest paid at Arriva, which operates in the Durham, Tees Valley, Cleveland and parts of North Yorkshire.

The company is running a free service using scabs in an attempt to break the strike.

### Birmingham refuse employees work to rule

Refuse workers employed by Birmingham City Council are carrying out a work-to-rule and overtime ban. The 300-plus Unite members voted by over 90 percent for action. They are demanding payment in line with that made to GMB union members. The Labour Party-run council paid the smaller group of GMB members a lump sum of reportedly up to £4,000 each.

In 2017, Unite members struck for a month against redundancy threats. Unite argues the payment is an award for not striking and are demanding a parity payment.

### GMB suspends strike by security staff at London Royal palaces

The GMB union suspended the strike by security staff at London's Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) due to take place Tuesday. HRP offered

further talks over the dispute. The GMB members voted by an overwhelming majority to strike in opposition to HRP plans to end their final salary pension scheme, replacing it with an inferior one.

Among the staff are the Beefeater ceremonial guards at the Tower of London and workers at Kensington Palace and Hampton Court.

The Public and Commercial Services union also suspended strike action at the Palaces—proposed for three hours each day on December 28 and January 2—pending negotiations.

### Chocolate manufacture employees in Holme, England, set to strike

Workers at a chocolate confectionery in Holme, England, are due to begin a four-day strike at 6 p.m. on Saturday. They work for Meadow Foods, and half of the 70 workers at the site are members of the Unite union. They have rejected a 2 percent pay offer from the company.

### Further strike by workers at print works in Suffolk, England

UK print workers employed by CPI William Clowes in Suffolk are due to strike for 24 hours on January 17. It will be their third strike, with a fourth planned for February 13.

The 75 Unite members are striking against an imposed pay freeze. Their last pay rise was 1 percent in 2017 and their previous one a decade earlier.

### Spanish Ryanair strike suspended

Cabin crew working for the Spanish wing of Ryanair were due to strike on January 8. The strike was suspended after talks between unions and Ryanair.

The USO and SITCPLA union members were calling on Ryanair to issue Spanish staff local contracts rather than the current Irish ones. Two further strike set for January 10 and 13 were scheduled to go ahead.

### Walkout by security staff at Berlin airports

Around 400 security staff at Tegel and *Schönefeld* airports in Berlin, Germany, walked out for four hours on Monday. The strike by Verdi union members led to flight delays.

The 23,000 airport security staff throughout the country are seeking a €3-an-hour pay increase. The employers' current offer is less than half that figure.

Verdi had called on security staff at Duesseldorf, Koeln-Bonn and Stuttgart airports to strike on Thursday over the pay claim.

### Finnish air traffic control strike

Finnish air traffic control staff held a two-hour strike January 4. They are demanding a new work contract. The previous one expired in November 2017, and negotiations for a new one have failed.

The SLJY union members were to hold a two-hour walkout yesterday, with plans to repeat it weekly.

### **Strike at French power plant extended into new year**

The strike by workers at the Cordemais coal-powered power station at Nantes in western France has continued into the New Year. It began early December in opposition to plans by operator EDF to close the plant in 2022.

A previous strike by the CGT union members took place in November over the same issue.

### **Irish nurses set strike dates**

Irish nurses are set to strike for 24 hours on January 30, and February 5,7,12, 13 and 14. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation members are seeking a 12 percent pay rise to bring them in line with physiotherapists.

Psychiatric Nurses Association members also voted to strike over the pay claim, with dates to be announced Thursday.

### **Portuguese dockers announce series of strikes**

Portuguese dockers have announced a series of strikes at ports throughout the country, starting January 16 until July 1. The SEAL union members are opposed to the anti-union practices of the employers.

Dockers at the port of Setubal went on strike in November protesting lack of job security for casual and part-time workers.

### **Road protest blocks Belgian highway**

Belgian lorry drivers created a traffic jam on the E17 highway between France and Belgium on Monday. The 90-minute protest was to highlight proposed European Union (EU) law changes, which could reduce rest times for lorry and bus drivers.

The protest was called by the Belgian transport union, which is part of the European Transport Workers' Federation. According to an AFP report, the deputy head of the Belgian transport union, John Reynaert, "said the police caused the jam by rejecting the union's proposal to route trucks through a parking area to distribute leaflets to drivers."

The changes were to be discussed yesterday in the European Parliament.

### **Four on hunger strike against wage arrears at Ukrainian coal mine**

Three women working for the state-owned coal-mining company at the Kurakhivska mine in the Ukraine are continuing their hunger strike. It began January 2 to protest wage arrears.

A fourth woman, who works at the attached coal chemistry laboratory, joined the hunger strike on Tuesday.

### **Tunisian teachers, public sector workers hold protests and strikes**

Tunisian teachers resumed their protests on January 2, for increased pay, improved working conditions and an improved education system. As part of their campaign, they have been boycotting exams since December 3 and demonstrating.

The Tunisian General Labour Union members will strike on January 17. They are demanding the government provide increased finance to fund a pay raise for public sector workers.

### **Lebanese general strike**

Sections of Lebanese workers from the private and public sector came out on strike January 4. The protest was against the declining economic situation and the failure to form a new government.

The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers stoppage closed the port in Beirut and flights were held up for an hour at Beirut airport.

### **Israeli pharmaceutical workers give strike notice at Teva plant**

Israeli pharmaceutical workers at the Teva Company's plant in Kfar Sava declared a dispute on Sunday. The nearly 1,400 union members are demanding a pay increase. The company argues it cannot afford to pay more because of increasing competition from generic versions of its drugs.

The strike is set to take place two weeks after the dispute was declared.

### **Algerian trade unionists arrested at rally**

More than 15 trade union leaders and members were arrested at a rally in central Algiers on December 27. They were held for several hours before being released, after signing a document denouncing themselves.

The protest was called to demand the reinstatement of leaders of the SNATEG electricity and gas workers union. They had been sacked from their jobs at Sonelgaz, the state-run gas and electric company more than two year ago. Some of them were unable to find other employment.

### **Nigerian workers in one-day protest over national minimum wage**

Nigeria workers took part in a one-day protest January 8 over a long-running struggle for a national minimum wage. The federal government missed the deadline on December 31 for introducing a N30,000 minimum wage bill in the national assembly.

Nigeria's Labour Congress (NLC) is promising a "major" strike at some unspecified time in the future if the bill is not introduced. The NLC previously called off a general strike planned for November 5, on the promise of an early government bill on a minimum wage agreement.

Private businesses, federal and state government and the labour congresses agreed to the minimum wage last November. Workers demanded a minimum wage of N56,000 to N65,000, but the NLC settled for half that amount.

In many of Nigeria's 36 states, public sector workers have either not been paid for months or at a reduced rate.

President Muhammadu Buhari's budget to parliament prior to Christmas, based on optimistic oil production and prices projections, committed less than 6 percent for education and 4 percent for health—which would not cover the minimum wage.

Recommended spending on education by UNESCO is 26 percent of GDP, and the African Union advocates 15 percent of GDP for health.

### **College workers' pay strike threat in Nigeria's Oyo state**

Education staff in Oyo state in Nigeria have given employers until January 14 to pay all outstanding wages. Workers are demanding from 3 to 18 months of unpaid wages or they will strike at six colleges and polytechnics in the state.

Previous strikes were suspended by the six unions in the Joint Action Committee, in response to Oyo state government's empty promises. Financing for back payment of wages was not included in the state's last budget.

National strikes at the polytechnics have been ongoing since December 12 over the renegeing of federal college funding and the national government's refusal to meet with the unions.

### **South African gold mine strikers hold out against "slave wage" settlement**

Fifteen-thousand miners at South Africa's gold mining company Sibanye Stillwater are continuing their strike begun November 22. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members are demanding a R1,000-a-year increase for the next three years.

Three other unions with members at the mine agreed on a pay deal, which AMCU members describe as slave wages. The company is claiming the AMCU now represents less than 50 percent of the miners, which under employment law would mean the settlement applies to all workers at Sibanye's three South African gold mining operations.

The labour court gave the task of counting union members in the four unions to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. The court has not begun, however, as AMCU and the company cannot agree on the method of calculation.

### **Mounting opposition in Zimbabwe to starvation wages**

Zimbabwe civil servants under the umbrella Apex Council are boycotting work because they cannot afford travel expenses.

President Emerson Mnangagwa's government is committed to reducing civil servants' pay from 90 percent of Zimbabwe's budget to 70.

Members of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Union and the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union Association of Zimbabwe are demanding substantial pay increases and the reduction of overcrowding in classrooms. The present ratio is one teacher per 70 pupils.

Senior specialist doctors and nurses have joined the junior doctors' stoppage. They have been on strike for two months to demand a pay increase, improved work conditions, provision of medicines and medical equipment.

The 550 doctors were suspended as their action began. They recently rejected a proposed deal to end the dispute put by their union.

Teachers and doctors are demanding payment in US dollars, because of soaring inflation and the collapsing Zimbabwe currency.

Miners are also demanding payment in dollars and wages above the poverty datum line (PDL). In 2012, 72 percent of Zimbabwean workers were paid under the PDL, set around 550 Zimbabwean dollars for a family of five, which still stands today.

A Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers Union representative said that although miners are the main currency earners for the country, they are among the lowest paid workers.

### **Court of appeal rules Kenyan tea plantation workers should remain sacked**

Workers previously employed on Kenya's tea plantations have had their sackings confirmed by a court of appeal.

Kenya Plantations and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU) members planned to strike in 2017, to force the large plantation owners to negotiate an outstanding Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

The strike was postponed by a court ruling that the employers and union negotiate a new CBA, "without victimisation."

International tea producers including James Finlay, Unilever and Kipkebe continued to refuse to negotiate with the unions so the workers came out on strike. The plantation employers then sacked 336 employees, claiming the union had broken the court ruling.

The KPAWU returned to court and was awarded a judgment for reinstatement, which was overturned on appeal.

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