

Iranian sugar plant strike enters fourth week; Israeli social workers on indefinite strike; indefinite walkout by Nigerian doctors

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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### Iranian sugar workers strike enters fourth week

The strike by Iranian workers at the Haft Tapper sugar plant has entered its fourth week. On Saturday, Haft Tappeh workers protested outside the local governor's office before marching into Shush city centre.

The Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers' Union members are demanding three months' arrears of wages owed to them along with social welfare and medical insurance payments. They are also calling for the sugarcane complex to be brought back into public ownership. The complex built more than 50 years ago was privatised in 2015.

Thousands of workers at the plant have been involved in various forms of industrial action since 2018. During their prolonged fight, there have been attacks by security forces and arrests.

One of the factory owners is currently being investigated for foreign currency violations. He was given bail on condition he paid the wage arrears but is yet to do so.

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

### Israeli social work staff begin indefinite strike

Social workers in Israel began a nationwide indefinite strike on Monday. This followed a breakdown in talks between the Israel Union of Social Workers and the Israeli Finance Ministry on Sunday.

The workers are protesting low pay and heavy workloads along with threats of violence against them. According to the union there are around 1,000 social work post vacancies as employers struggle to fill them because of the low pay and work overload. Last week in the run-up to the strike, social workers protested in several cities, including Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.

### Ongoing protests by redundant workers at Debenhams in Ireland

Former workers of the UK-based retail company Debenhams have picketed its 11 stores in Ireland. The company closed its Irish operation in March, with the loss of 2,000 jobs. Pickets were mounted by former workers demanding a fair redundancy package.

On Monday and Tuesday, pickets at the Cork shop turned away lorries sent to remove stock from the closed store.

Jobs in retail, hospitality, travel and manufacturing have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic.

### Protest by Dutch farmers

Dutch farmers staged protests at the weekend to oppose measures announced by the government to curb nitrogen pollution. Dozens of tractors blockaded the junction of the A32 and A7 motorways near

Heerenveen. Others blockaded access to Eindhoven airport, while some picketed supermarket distribution centres.

The government recently announced measures to decrease the amount of protein in cattle feed to reduce nitrogen emissions. Farmers who exceed the amounts will be subject to a €2,500 fine. The farming industry accepts the need to reduce pollution but is questioning the amounts and method of enforcement.

On Wednesday, farmers blockaded a waste processing plant in Wijster in the north of Holland. Police arrested scores of them for contravening a ban on protesting with agricultural vehicles.

### Strike by health workers in Bosnian capital Sarajevo

Around 3,000 Bosnian health workers in Sarajevo, including nurses, radiologists and lab technicians, walked out indefinitely on Wednesday. The strikers are providing emergency cover. They are demanding a pay supplement for coping with the COVID-19 crisis in line with that paid to medical staff.

Previous industrial action by health staff in Sarajevo over a pay claim, begun in the autumn, was called off by the unions in March as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

### Ballot for strike action by workers at UK power plant

Power workers at Drax power station in northern England began balloting for strike action this week. Drax Group Ltd has switched four of its six generators at the plant to burn biomass. The two remaining generators will become gas fired. The company announced 230 redundancies due to the switch.

Around 600 workers are employed at the plant. In a consultative ballot of Unite members, 84 percent rejected the company's enhanced redundancy terms. A majority of GMB and Prospect unions members voted to accept the offer.

Unite accused Drax of renegeing on a promise of no compulsory redundancies as part of a previous pay settlement. The union had offered a pay and bonus freeze if Drax removed the threat of compulsory redundancies and reduced the workforce through natural wastage and retirement.

### Journalists at UK newspaper group in strike ballot

Journalists at Bullivant Media Limited in the English midlands are being balloted for a possible stoppage. The company publishes several local newspapers, including the *Coventry Observer* and *Worcester Observer*.

The National Union of Journalists members suffered reductions in pay over the three months of the lockdown, March-May. Those not

furloughed had shortfalls in pay which meant they were receiving less than the 80 percent of pay received by furloughed staff.

Other issues include the lack of a pay rise for 10 years, working practices and the possibility of compulsory redundancies in the coming period. The newspaper group is facing financial difficulties, suffering long-term reduction in revenues.

### **UK car workers at Nissan Sunderland plan rally to protest pension attack**

The Japanese car manufacturer Nissan is proposing to close its defined benefits pension scheme at its factory in Sunderland in northeast England. Many of the nearly 2,000 workers in the scheme have been in it for more than 20 years and stand to lose big benefits.

The Unite union, which represents around half the 6,000 workforce, called a protest rally for Saturday. However, rather than condemning outright the closure of the scheme, Unite is calling for compensation for those affected.

A July 8 *business.live* website article quoted Unite national officer Steve Bush saying, "It's not a huge surprise that Nissan is closing the scheme. The problem is the arrogance of Nissan management with regards to closure. I've personally dealt with other manufacturers where there was a compensatory package and that has been between £25,000 and £30,000 per person."

### **Medical doctors on indefinite strike in Cross River State, Nigeria**

Doctors in Cross River State, Nigeria walked out indefinitely to oppose the state government's lack of action on COVID-19.

The Nigeria Medical Association accused the authorities of putting doctors and residents "in a precarious public health and safety situation" by not testing and monitoring the spread of the disease. The daily situation report of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control does not include figures for the state. At the time, there were five patients with COVID-19 being treated in the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital. Nigeria has 29,789 reported cases with 669 deaths.

### **Chemical plant workers in Ogun State, Nigeria protest company lockout**

Workers at the Nycil chemical plant in Sango Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria arrived at work on June 29 to find they were locked out. The aggrieved workers protested outside the gates of the company premises in Lagos with support from other workers in the area.

The company gave no explanation for the lockout, saying the plant is closed until further notice.

The two unions at the plant complained the action was done without their collaboration. "There's an understanding that no employers must embark on retrenchment due to COVID-19 as it is a global phenomenon and no worker should be made a sacrificial lamb. But rather the unions and the management must find a way out through dialogue and negotiation," said Goke Olatunji, president of the National Union of Chemical Footwear, Rubber, Leather and Non-Metallic Products Employees.

Acting president of the Nigeria Employers Consultative Association, Taiwo Adeniyi, said employers agree that instead of job cuts they would negotiate pay cuts with the unions.

### **Doctors and other health workers' stoppage in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

Medical doctors in Ekiti State, Nigeria were joined by other health workers on a three-day warning strike from July 6 to July 8.

Over the last 10 years, the health workers have not received their allowances, including hazard and uniform allowances.

The state government has also been making deductions from salaries but not putting the money into the appropriate funds. Unions said the

three-day strike would be extended unless the demands were met.

### **Oil workers in Imo State, Nigeria blockade state building**

Nigerian oil workers employed at Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission blocked the entrance to the Government House in Owerri to protest over three months of unpaid salaries. The protesters dressed in black and carried placards.

### **South Africa teachers demand closure of unsafe schools**

With the reopening of schools, teachers throughout South Africa are organizing protests and strike actions to demand schools remain closed until the COVID-19 cases are brought under control.

Since the reopening of the economy by the African National Congress government, South Africa has the largest number of cases in the African continent. The country has 151,209 confirmed cases, with 2,657 fatalities.

Protest actions have been carried out throughout the country from Cape Town to Johannesburg.

In Thembelihle, located in the Northern Cape Province, a crisis committee has been established. In a July 6 statement the Thembelihle Crisis Committee (TCC) said, "We believe that the Minister and the National Coronavirus Command Centre are acting carelessly. It is our conviction the Minister and the ruling party do not care about the wellbeing of the poor and working class, the majority of whom rely on public services such as the public education system." The committee issued a series of demands for a safe re-opening of schools including the organization of an independent body of experts that can assess a school's readiness and make sure it is compliance with safety standards.

On June 30, teachers in Port Elizabeth protested at the district's education offices to demand schools close to protect the lives of teachers and students in the COVID-19 pandemic. The following day, South African Democratic Teachers Union members walked out of many schools in mourning for 18 colleagues, who have died from the virus.

### **South African health care workers protest at Durban hospital over COVID-19 risk**

Health care workers at the Albert Luthuli Central Hospital in Durban, South Africa demonstrated outside the hospital July 2, after more than 100 workers tested positive for coronavirus. They have put forward a set of demands to hospital management.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union members are concerned about safety and staff shortages. The hospital has the highest number of health care worker COVID-19 infections in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

### **Municipal workers in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa call for government to honour wage agreement**

Over 100 municipal workers demonstrated July 3 outside the Kwazulu-Natal provincial treasury offices in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa to demand a previously agreed wage increase.

Congress of South African Trade Unions members picketed the offices. They also want a risk allowance for continuing to work in dangerous conditions during the country's COVID-19 lockdown.

### **Dam construction workers' three-month strike in Lesotho sold out by union**

A three-month strike by 189 construction workers at the Polihali dam in Lesotho has been sold out by the Construction, Mining, Quarrying and Allied Workers Union (CMQ) in return for the company recognising the union.

The strikers demanded a salary overhaul to bring them up to international standards. The union took the issue to court, leading to a 6 percent increase but giving the union negotiating rights.

Robert Mokhahlane, the secretary general of the CMQ, praised the “mature and professional manner” in which the company made the deal.

The WBHO-LSP Construction joint venture was awarded a multimillion-dollar project to complete the second phase of the dam designed to provide water to Gauteng in South Africa and generate hydroelectric power for Lesotho.

### **Striking nurses arrested at hospital in Zimbabwe**

Thirteen striking nurses were arrested by police on July 6 at the Sally Mugabe Central Hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The arrests were an attempt to stop protests by the thousands of Zimbabwe Nurses’ Association members on strike for a living wage. Despite the intimidation, other nurses joined the demonstration.

The strikers were accused of not wearing masks and fined between 200 and 500 Zimbabwe dollars under laws banning rallies and demonstrations, as well as other public gatherings. The laws were passed using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext.

Zimbabwe has 739 reported cases and nine fatalities. The country’s economy is in meltdown, with inflation approaching 800 percent.

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