

Birmingham refuse workers' strike suspended; Kenyan state governors begin filling the jobs of striking nurses

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### **UK: Long-running strike by Birmingham refuse workers suspended following court order blocking layoffs**

The High Court has granted an interim injunction against Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council's intention to push through redundancies among the city's refuse collection workers. A trial will take place to determine whether the council had acted unlawfully. The council has accepted the court ruling.

The trial is expected to last five days and is scheduled to take place at the end of November. The judge, Mr Justice Fraser, said he hoped the union and council would come to an agreement to avoid the "expense" of a trial.

The refuse collectors have been involved in a long-running strike against the council's plans to make around 120 redundancies. Those slated for redundancy were staff responsible for the safe operation of the refuse collection lorries.

Their working conditions are under attack, including the ending of the four-day working week and the imposition of a five-day working week. For many of the refuse workers on minimum wage, overtime working on their nominal day off would help boost their incomes.

The strike action began on June 30, and eventually the council agreed to drop the threatened redundancies. At that time, the Unite union suspended the strike, only for the council to renege on the deal, resulting in the refuse collectors resuming their action.

Council leader John Clancy, who was responsible for reneging on the deal, subsequently resigned after coming under intense pressure for his handling of the dispute.

The Unite union hailed the court ruling as a victory and immediately suspended strike action. Unite Assistant General Secretary Howard Beckett said, "As part of the ruling Unite will suspend its industrial action until the matter is put before a full court hearing at a later date."

### **UK Royal Mail staff balloted for strike action**

A ballot of UK Royal Mail staff for strike action is currently under way,

carried out by the Communication Workers' Union (CWU). The ballot is in response to Royal Mail's plans to end the defined benefit pension, replacing it with a reduced payment, defined contribution pension scheme.

On September 11, CWU members held rallies outside more than a thousand workplaces in support of a yes vote in the ballot. The ballot closes on October 3.

### **London Underground drivers set to strike**

London Underground train drivers have voted by a 90 percent margin for strike action. The first strike is due to take place on October 5. The strike by the members of the rail drivers' union Aslef is over working conditions and the London Underground's failure to implement a 2015 agreement on work-life balance issues.

### **London cinema staff set to walk out over fight for London living wage**

Cinema staff at the Ritzy Picturehouse cinema in Brixton, south London, are set to walk out Saturday as part of their long-running campaign to be paid the so-called London living wage. The staff, members of the media union Bectu, began their campaign a year ago.

In a ballot to renew their demands carried out by Bectu last month, 92 percent of its members at the Brixton Ritzy cinema voted in favour of further strike action.

### **Big vote for strike action by ScotRail CCTV staff**

CCTV monitoring staff working for ScotRail at customer information centres in Paisley and Dunfermline have voted to strike over plans to cut 22 staff. They are represented by the RMT and the TSSA, with RMT members voting by a more than 90 percent majority to strike. Talks between the unions and ScotRail are ongoing.

## **Rail staff to strike over driver-only-operated trains**

Rail staff at four UK rail firms are set to strike next month over the expanded use of driver-only-operated (DOO) trains. The guards, working for Southern, Greater Anglia, Northern and Merseyrail, are set to hold 24-hour strikes on Tuesday, October 3, and Thursday, October 5.

The members of the RMT union at the four franchises voted by big majorities to hold the strike, with those at Greater Anglia voting by a 90 percent margin to take action.

## **French lorry drivers' protests block motorways**

Lorry drivers in France organised by the FGTE-CFDT union blockaded motorways on Monday. It was part of protests against President Emmanuel Macron's assault on the labour code, which attacks working conditions and increases job insecurity. The action led to big traffic jams on the A1, A4 and A7 motorways.

Under a national agreement, lorry drivers are entitled to an end-of-year bonus equivalent to one month's salary. Under Macron's "reforms," individual companies would be able to set the bonus figure.

## **German foreign base workers strike**

Around 70 German workers employed on US and other foreign military bases in Germany held a strike on Tuesday to demand a 5 percent wage increase. The bases are at Ansbach, Katterbach and Illesheim, and employ a total of 300 workers. The staff are represented by the Verdi public sector union. A protest was held outside the Katterbach military base.

The US base employer representatives have offered only a 1 percent pay rise, which had been rejected by the union representatives in talks. Further talks are scheduled for the beginning of next week.

## **Greek public sector staff demonstrate**

Public sector workers demonstrated in Klafthmonos Square in Athens Tuesday against government plans to push through performance evaluation of civil servants. The members of the civil servant union ADEDY boycotted an attempt to carry out performance evaluation earlier in the year.

## **Dutch airline cabin crew in strike action**

Cabin crew working for Dutch airline KLM based at Schiphol airport took strike action on September 15. The VNC union members held a one-hour strike prior to each planned flight beginning at 5 a.m. and ending at 11 p.m. Cabin crew were opposing proposals by KLM to increase productivity.

## **Maltese air cabin crew strike threat**

Talks were due Wednesday to discuss the future of the Maltese national air carrier, Air Malta. Faced with financial losses, the government is threatening to break up the company and create a new one with new work contracts.

Cabin crew members of UCC union are demanding a 10 percent pay rise, while the pilots' union, the Airline Pilots Association (ALPA), is seeking a 30 percent increase. UCC representatives met on September 16 to discuss possible strike action.

The Maltese government is prepared to break up the airline carrier in an attempt to reduce costs. Tourism minister Konrad Mizzi told *Malta Today*: "Unless all employees and their representatives understand the need to cooperate with the company as it strives to make the airline profitable, the government will have no option but to close down Air Malta completely and re-open with new staff."

## **Protest by waiters at Tel Aviv café**

Last week, waiters at the Café Noir in Tel Aviv held a protest about the distribution of tips given by customers. The tips are pooled in a common pot called the Café Noir Union, a company managed by the café owners, and distributed according to the hours worked and used to compose part of the café staff's hourly wage.

The young waiters were protesting the fact that social benefits are only paid on the proportion of their wage paid directly by the café owners, and not on the proportion gleaned from the common pot of tips.

The waiters have taken their case to the labour court.

## **Kuwaiti cleaning staff protest late payment of wages**

On Monday, staff that clean municipal buildings in Kuwait City protested outside the main Kuwaiti Municipality building against the late payment of wages. They dispersed after a company representative promised the outstanding wages would soon be paid. The company recently won the contract, but has not paid any staff since winning the contract.

## **Libyan airport staff postpone planned strike**

Airport ground staff at Misrata airport in Libya had planned to strike Sunday, but following the intervention of Misrata civil society organisations (CSOs), they postponed it. They agreed to hold off the strike for two weeks while the CSOs interceded with the Libyan government. The airport ground staff claim they have not been paid for nearly one whole year.

## **Kenyan governors advertise striking nurses' jobs**

Some Kenyan county governors have put adverts in the local press for applications to be made for striking nurses' jobs.

Nurses are continuing their strike, which began at the start of May, over the non-implementation of a collective bargaining agreement. The governors have stipulated that any strikebreaking nurses taken on will be on short-term contracts dependent on their competency.

The nurses refused to return to work although their strike has been made illegal because, according to the union, they do not trust the county governors.

### **Kenyan online taxi drivers strike**

Uber and other online taxi drivers began an indefinite strike on September 11 and carried out a protest in Nairobi. They are demanding a greater share of the fares taken by reducing the companies' percentage from 25 down to 15 percent. Further, drivers demand they be informed of discount offers given to customers.

The taxi drivers of Uber, Little, Taxify and Mondo are organised in the Digital Taxi Association of Kenya, and their action is in the form of an indefinite go-slow.

Uber has threatened its drivers with deactivation of their accounts if they are reported for "violent action" in the dispute. As a consequence, the drivers covered over their number plates when protesting.

### **Nigerian health care unions call all-out strike**

All health care workers across Nigeria, members of the Joint Health Sector Unions, the Assembly of Health Care Professionals, and the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, decided to strike from Wednesday.

Issues involved in the strike are demands for investment in the dilapidated health system, payment of arrears with promotions respected, and improved working conditions.

The strike follows on the heels of the suspended National Association of Resident Doctors' strike called off last week.

### **Nigerian Labour Congress ends national strike**

The Nigerian United Labour Congress (ULC), from which the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) split last year, ended a national strike it had called starting last Friday.

Although the ULC has existed since 1978, it is not recognised by the government. The TUC and NLC also reject its authority.

The ULC strike incorporates unions such as the National Union of Electricity Employees in power production and distributing companies and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas in the oil industry.

The ULC is demanding government recognition, along with other issues.

The strike affected power and oil production and distribution, banking and finance, mining and many other essential industries.

Workers proceeded to strike at some private electricity companies in Lagos with pickets stopping workers and customers entering their premises.

Oil workers refused to load tankers for Mobil, Total and Orlando at Lagos ports, with NUPENG saying it was complying with ULC's directives. Workers organised in the Nigerian railway union are carrying out a sit-in.

The banking and finance union come under the ULC umbrella but declared they were not coming out, while the airline pilots' union said they had not been included in ULC's strike.

### **Nigerian state sector workers threatened with sack for striking**

Civil servants in Nigeria's Kogi state are defying Kogi's state governor's threats to sack them if they strike today. Their unions, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, have stated the strike will go ahead.

Claiming to speak on behalf of the workers, a union spokesman said: "As we all know, whoever is down does not fear a fall. This government has brought workers down to the lowest level and as such we fear neither fall or sack nor non-payment of salary."

### **South African diamond miners strike**

South African diamond miners at Ekapa Mines Kimberley have gone on strike and occupied two mineshafts. They are demanding a pay rise to bring their wages into line with other workers across the operation.

In response to the pay claim, management have threatened to take away bonuses, generally paid for carrying out their job.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) says differences in wages across the company's operations can be up to R3800 (US\$285).

The two shafts, Wesselton shaft and Joint Shaft, have been occupied by 75 miners and 80 miners, respectively, for five days until Tuesday of this week.

On Monday, surface workers joined the strike, concerned that fellow protesters had run out of food and possibly water, too.

### **South African power company calls for end of coal strike**

Eskom, the South African power producing company is calling on National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members to end their strike. They are striking at Exxaro, the coal mining company that provides fuel for two of Eskom's power stations.

Two thousand NUM members went out on strike September 14 for a 10 percent pay rise, but the other smaller union at the mine, Solidarity, is continuing to work.

### **South African Airlines strike threat over fraud and victimisation**

South African Airlines (SAA) is to face a strike beginning September 27 involving 10 unions. A Confederation of Trade Unions (COSATU) spokesman said there was a possibility that their pension fund would be used by the government to bail out bankrupt SAA.

COSATU claims SAA is corrupt and is subject to state capture (private interests significantly influencing a state's decision-making processes to their own advantage).

The National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa is also raising corruption by SAA management as a reason to strike because its members who exposed this are being victimised.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**