Strike threat by South African coal miners

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.

South African coal mining union threatens national action

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is threatening a national strike in the coal mining industry over pay.

Union negotiators have rejected offers of 5 and 7 percent pay increases from different employers within the industry, for 2018 and 2019, respectively, and gave the employers until Wednesday of this week to respond. The union is calling for 8 and 9 percent.

The NUM said it would settle this year's wage deal with a one-off payment of R1,100 (US$78) per member.

Strike action threatened by the union was postponed after the employers broke up the employer-union negotiating body, the Chamber of Mines.

The NUM says it will only sign the three-year agreement if the Chamber of Mines is retained as the coal mining industry negotiating body.

The National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) also came out on indefinite strike October 25 demanding payment of between five and seven months' unpaid wages and allowances.

After two days of strikes, the Local Government Service Commission intervened to end the strike. The NULGE then called off the action, deferring to the government body to "give them the benefit of the doubt."

South African broadcaster confronted with wage claims

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is confronted with a strike over workers' wage claims.

The SABC, which is effectively bankrupt, held negotiations with the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media & Allied Workers Union and Communications Workers Union on October 23 but failed to reach an agreement.

An SABC spokesman said it had applied to government for assistance, but recognised this would come with strings attached.

Nigerian health unions suspend strike after vague commitment on jobs

The Rivers State medical workers' joint union, the Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU), called off their month-long strike last week. Their return to work was backed by the National Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress.

The suspension of the strike is based on a commitment by the state governor to liaise with the unions and expand employment in the health sector.

Though there is little information on the back-to-work deal, there are reports suggesting medical staff are not rushing to return to work.

The *Tide*, an online publication, reported that although the strike was called off on October 26, few medical workers returned to work the following day at health centres it had monitored.

Union monitoring teams were in position to ensure compliance.

Workers protest and strike for the removal of the unregulated insurance commissioner

Workers represented by the Association of Civil Servants (ASCS) protested at Nigeria's National Insurance Commission in Abuja, demanding the removal of the commissioner, Mohammed Kari. The protest on October 30 was followed by a three-day warning strike. They are also demanding the promotion for staff, equipment to do their job and payment of allowances.

Protesters accuse the commissioner of turning the Commission into his own private estate and not carrying through on agreements with the union and government.

UK postal workers to hold mass gate meetings

Royal Mail staff, members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU), will hold mass gate meetings November 7 as part of their campaign to defend pensions, a wage rise and a shorter working week.

The union called off a planned 48-hour strike last month after Royal Mail won a high court appeal.

Rallies by UK civil servants over pay

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Civil servants, members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), demonstrated outside premises across the country on Tuesday. They were protesting against the government's ongoing 1 percent cap on pay rises. PCS members are currently being balloted over strike action against the cap. The ballot closes on Monday.

Bus drivers in northwest walk out

Bus drivers working for First Manchester and Arriva North West took 24-hour strike action last Monday. First Manchester serves Manchester, and Arriva North West covers part of Manchester and Merseyside, Cheshire and Lancaster. They belong to the Unite and GMB unions and are seeking a pay increase.

Further strikes are planned for this coming Monday and four other days in November.

Train conductors in UK to hold further strikes over driver-only operated trains

Train conductors at five train-operating companies will come out on strike on November 8 as part of an ongoing dispute. They are opposing plans to extend the use of driver-only operated (DOO) trains. The conductors belong to the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. Conductors at Southern, South Western Railways and Greater Anglia will begin a 48-hour strike, while those at Merseyrail and Arriva Rail North will be on strike for 24 hours.

Capita staff fight attack on pensions

Staff working for the outsourcing firm Capita began a nine-day strike last Saturday. They are opposing plans to close the current defined-benefit pension scheme and transfer them to an inferior defined contribution pension scheme. They are represented by the Unite union.

The strike impacted Capita offices in Birmingham, Reading, Bristol, Manchester, Stirling and Belfast.

UK airline staff vote to end dispute

Cabin crew working for British Airways (BA) mixed fleet flying out of Heathrow have voted by around 80 percent to end their dispute and accept a deal offered by BA.

The deal includes an increase in basic pay of between £1,404 and £2,908, as well as the restoration of travel concessions and inclusion in the BA bonus scheme, withdrawn for cabin crew who took industrial action. In return, the Unite union will drop legal action against BA for its use of Qatar Airways planes and staff to bypass strikers' action.

The dispute, which began in December against poverty pay, involved a total of 85 days of strike action. According to some reports, the increase in basic pay will be financed by cuts in pay to incentive payments. Unite said in a statement that it looked forward to working with BA to ensure "the airline goes from strength to strength in these uncertain times."

London cinema staff continue action for living wage

Staff working for the Picturehouse group at five sites across London will strike Monday as part of their ongoing fight to be paid the London Living Wage, along with demands for sick pay and maternity pay. They are members of the media union Bectu.

Rally of Bulgarian workers pushes for higher wages

More than 4,000 workers rallied in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia on October 27 demanding higher pay. The rally included doctors, miners and civil servants. Bulgarian wages are the lowest in the European Union.

The Bulgarian economy is set to grow by nearly 4 percent next year, and the government has said it will set pay increases. These increases, however, only target certain sectors, and although the government has promised to increase the minimum wage, workers are pushing for a higher amount.

Irish rail staff hold one-day strike

Rail staff working for the Irish Rail Company, Iarnrod Eireann, held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. It affected the Dublin Bay rail system, which carries around 70,000 passengers daily. In addition, commuter services with 45,000 passengers and 40,000 using intercity services are also affected.

The National Bus and Railworkers Union and Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union, which represent the striking workers, have put in a claim for a 3.75 percent pay rise. Their members have gone nearly 10 years without an increase in pay. The company has offered a 1.7 percent increase.

Four additional 24-hour strikes are planned for November 7, 14 and 23 and December 8, though union leaders said the strikes could continue into the New Year.

Maltese teachers set to strike

On Wednesday, the Maltese Union of Teachers (MUT) stated it would proceed with its planned one-day strike on November 8. Teachers are seeking a 20 percent pay rise; in response, the government has offered a nearly 5 percent rise over five years. They are also calling on the government to step up teacher recruitment to overcome an ongoing teacher shortage.

The planned one-day strike would hit all state and church schools. In addition, MUT members will hold a one-hour strike at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

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Polish medics wind up hunger strike

On Tuesday, Polish junior doctors in eight Polish cities, who have been undertaking a hunger strike for the last four weeks, announced they would end their action. They had been on a hunger strike to call for higher wages and increased resources for the health service.

They will, however, still continue to protest and have said they will no longer abide by an opt-out clause in their contracts, which waives their right to adhere to the European Union directive on working time allowing them to work longer than the 48-hours-a-week limit.

They will also resign from additional posts, which they undertake on top of their regular resident doctor roles. These additional posts often involve working as emergency or night-cover medics.

Portuguese public sector action

Public sector workers in Portugal, including health care, education, social security, court staff and tax office staff, held a 24-hour strike on October 27. They are seeking a pay rise, a 35-hour working week and automatic career progression.

Moroccan oil workers march to demand oil refinery reopen

Oil workers organised by the SNIPGN-CDT union held a march in Casablanca on Saturday demanding the reopening of the SAMIR oil refinery. The march set off from the head office of the CDT trade union confederation, finishing at the Commercial Court.

The refinery stopped production in August 2015, as it was unable to meet a US$1.3 billion tax bill. Around 1,000 workers at the refinery retained their jobs to maintain the refinery but have had their wages cut by around 50 percent, and their pensions and health coverage contributions are not being paid. Thousands of other workers have lost their jobs in related industries.

The union is appealing to the government to take over the refinery directly, or enter into a joint venture with a private company to restart production there.

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