

Ugandan doctors and medical workers continue “illegal” action

# 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.

## Ugandan doctors and medical workers continue “illegal” action

Ugandan doctors and medical staff went on strike on Monday last week in the face of government claims that their strike is illegal.

The Ugandan Medical Association (UMA) called the strike to demand the government honour an agreement to improve wages and conditions.

The action was called by UMA, which is not a trade union body and has no negotiating rights. It has earned the ire of the medical sector trade unions that oppose its strike call. As UMA has no negotiating rights, the strike is technically illegal.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni intervened, ordering resident district commissioners to immediately monitor hospitals and health centres and take note of workers not returning to their posts.

Interns who joined the strike have been told they may have to reapply for their training course.

The Uganda Medical Workers Union, the National Organisation of Trade Unions and the Uganda Nurses and Midwives are planning to take UMA to court for calling the strike, which they claim is out of their jurisdiction.

## Broadcasting workers continue their strike at South Africa’s state media

South African Broadcasting Corporation employees are continuing their strike for a 10 percent pay increase.

Their union, the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media and Allied Workers Union (BEMAWU), is waiting on government arbitration services to open discussions with the state media company.

Workers have been incensed by the CEO’s annual wage remuneration of R3.37 million (US\$234,000), incorporating a R887,000 (US\$61,600) bonus, while the company made a net loss, and income declined by half a billion rand (US\$350 million).

## Miners at Harmony Gold, South Africa, repeat unofficial action

Miners went out on wildcat strike action at Harmony Gold’s South African Kusaalethu mine last Friday. The strike had been provoked by the sacking of Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) branch officials.

The strike has not been sanctioned by the AMCU national leadership, in spite of an onslaught on jobs.

Wildcat action has become a feature of the workforce’s response at the mine since the beginning of the year, always countered by a Labour Court interdict sending miners back to work.

The AMCU has agreed with the Harmony management to send the workers back to work on Monday.

The Kusaalethu mine is the company’s second largest gold producer, and it increased its output over the year 2016-2017 by over 10 percent while sacking almost a quarter of the workforce.

## South African power generating company stocks coal in preparation for strike

Eskom, the South African electricity-generating company, is stockpiling coal in preparation for a potential strike in the coal industry. The power supplier is 83 percent dependent on coal in generating electricity for South Africa.

Coal workers in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) are threatening to strike on November 19 unless they get a three-year wage deal from the coal owners’ syndicate, the Chamber of Mines.

The Chamber of Mines, which represents around 40 percent of coal producers in South Africa and employs around 14,000 workers, is not budging on its offer.

The various companies are offering between 5 and 7.5 percent increase, whereas the miners want 8 percent a year over a three-year deal.

Eskom has run up debts of R471 billion (US\$3.26 billion), is essentially bankrupt, and depends on government finance to the tune of R8 billion (US\$554.5 million) a month. Corruption is rife.

## Nigeria’s teachers, hospital workers and research staff protest jointly

Workers in Nigeria’s educational union, the National Academic Staff Union (NASU), went on national strike Tuesday, alongside hospital staff organised in the Senior Staff Association of Teaching Hospitals and the Academic Staff Union of Research.

The unions came out after a 15-day warning notice had elapsed and in the face of frustration over continued renegeing on agreements by the government over the last five years.

NASU's academic workers are also demanding 12 months of unpaid wages and allowances and the implementation of retirement at age 65.

The unions called off an 11-day strike in late September.

### **Ethiopian winery workers strike for wage increase**

Twelve-hundred employees at the Ethiopian Castle Winery went on strike at the end of last month, demanding a wage increase alongside 33 other demands—including enhancements in benefits and safety provision, labour rights, promotions and contracts.

The workers say they have been raising these issues for three years, with no response, until they locked management out.

Labourers at the winery are paid around 40 Birr (US\$1.5) a day, cleaners are paid 1,150 Birr (US\$40) a month and security guards get at most 3,200 Birr (US\$115) a month.

The company exports to the US, China and Europe.

The workers returned to work with a promise of a pay rise of between 15 to 70 percent, though many of the other demands have yet to be settled.

### **Bus workers strike in northwest England**

On Monday, bus drivers and engineers working for Arriva North West, which covers the greater Manchester area, along with staff at First Manchester based at the Rusholme depot, held a further one-day strike.

They are members of the Unite and GMB unions. Staff in both disputes are seeking a pay rise to eliminate a pay differential that leaves them earning less than colleagues in neighbouring depots operated by the two companies.

The 2,000 drivers and engineers working for Arriva North West voted to hold weekly Monday strikes until the end of this month. They have now agreed to hold a further nine days of strikes in December, which will include two three-day blocks of strikes.

### **London school staff fight to defend pay and conditions**

Staff at the Charlton Park Academy in southeast London held two one-day strikes, Tuesday and Thursday last week. The members of the GMB and the National Education Union are protesting the changes made to contracts for new staff at the school who receive a reduced sick pay rate as compared to existing staff. The school was made an academy in 2012.

Staff have been taking intermittent strike action since July. A further strike had been planned for Thursday of this week but was called off by the union as they began talks with the trust Monday.

### **UK driving examiners vote for industrial action**

Around 2,000 driving examiners in England, Scotland and Wales,

members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, are to hold a 48-hour strike on December 4. They are also due to begin a work-to-rule on November 23.

The date of the strike coincides with the introduction of a new style of examination by the Driving and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). The examiners are protesting plans by the DVSA to increase the number of tests examiners are expected to carry out each day from six to seven, alongside the introduction of the new test.

### **UK university lecturers to ballot over attack on pensions**

UK university lecturers belonging to the University and College Union (UCU) are to be balloted on the defence of their pension scheme. Currently, their pension, the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), is a defined benefit plan and is in surplus, but employers are seeking to replace it with a lower-paying defined contribution scheme.

In a ballot carried out by the UCU, over 85 percent of university staff indicated they would be willing to take industrial action to defend their pension scheme. At a special conference held last week, delegates voted to ballot on strike action and a work to rule.

### **Greek metro staff continue protests**

Staff working on the Athens metro system, the STASY, continued their programme of partial strikes this week to oppose the Syriza-led government's plans to privatise it. On Thursday, they carried out a 24-hour strike, which also impacted the Kifissia-Piraeus electric railway (ISAP). Intercity rail services were disrupted last Monday when Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) workers held a three-hour strike between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. demanding improved working conditions and safety procedures.

### **Czech financial workers' strike threat**

Czech bank and insurance staff represented by the OSPPP union have threatened to strike in selected bank and insurance offices, as part of a push for increased pay. They issued the strike threat in response to employers' reluctance to negotiate. OSPPP represents around 8,000 staff.

### **Cypriot power workers' union calls off action**

Following talks on Tuesday between the Cypriot president, Nicos Anastasiades, and the power unions representing staff at the state-owned EAC electric power company, the unions called off proposed strike action against privatisation.

The Cypriot government wants the Transmission System Operator (TSO) to become an autonomous body, responsible for the provision of electrical power to end-users. The unions called off the threatened strikes after the Cypriot government agreed EAC assets, such as the transmission grid infrastructure, would not be transferred to the TSO.

### **Portuguese teachers on two-day walk-out**

Teachers in Portugal, represented by the FENPROF union, began a two-week action on Monday. They undertook a partial strike by refusing to teach the first hour of the school day. This was reinforced on Wednesday by an all-out 24-hour strike. They are protesting educational reforms to be outlined in an upcoming budget statement and also in favour of improved career prospects.

### **Romanian workers protest tax changes**

On Sunday, thousands of Romanian workers took part in protests in cities throughout the country. They were protesting tax changes that would see workers pay a bigger contribution towards social insurance while employers would pay less.

### **Yemeni teachers continue strike**

Yemeni teachers organised in the Yemen Teachers Syndicate are continuing a strike to protest the non-payment of their salaries since October of last year. Teachers in the rebel Houthi-controlled areas are affected, and in some of the areas 90 percent of the teachers are supporting the action. The authorities have responded by drafting unpaid volunteers to carry out the teachers' duties.



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