

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

## One-day walkout by Italian doctors

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

### One-day walkout by Italian doctors

Doctors and veterinarians walked out in a 24-hour action on Tuesday. It led to the cancellation of around 40,000 planned operations and appointments. Protests took place at over 50 venues across the country.

They took the action to protest lack of funding for health care in the 2018 government budget currently being debated. They are also calling for a renewal of their collective contract, in place for the last eight years. The unions say the current budget does not provide enough to keep the health system operating under conditions where the population is aging.

Another grievance is the use of temporary contracts to fill posts at many hospitals rather than employing permanent staff. There is an ongoing shortage of specialists, such as anesthetists, which the striking medics insist must be addressed.

### Strike by Macedonian rail staff

Rail workers employed by state owned Macedonian railways walked out on Tuesday as they are still owed October's wages. They vowed to remain on strike until the arrears have been paid. They had previously gone on strike in June over the same issue.

### UK transport staff strike several private firms

Train managers and senior conductors, working for Arriva Cross Country trains, held a 48-hour strike over the weekend of December 8 and 9. The members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) are in dispute over rostering arrangements. Further strikes are planned for December 23 to 24, December 27 and New Year's Eve.

Cabin crew, members of RMT, working for Virgin West Coast, are set to walk out today. They are looking for parity with drivers, who agreed that the company buy out their claim for a one hour reduction in the base working week with no loss of pay in return for an additional £500 pensionable increase on their basic pay. Further walkouts are planned for

December 22 and four dates in January.

Guard members of the RMT working for South Western Railway, Merseyrail and Greater Anglia have announced 24-hour strikes in their ongoing dispute over the extended use of driver only operated trains (DOO). Merseyrail guards will hold a 24-hour strike on December 22, those at Great Anglia will hold a 24-hour strike on December 27 while those working for South Western Railway will strike on December 31.

### UK ferry staff vote to walk out

Ferry staff working for Orkney Ferries in the north of Scotland have voted by an 80 percent majority to strike over a pay dispute. The RMT executive will now consider the next step.

### Bus drivers in northwest England vote to end strikes

Bus drivers and engineers working for Arriva in northwest England have voted to accept an increased pay offer. With their current pay set at £12.0 an hour, their hourly rate will increase to £12.42 next year.

The dispute began in October and several strikes were held over the intervening period. The major union involved is Unite.

### UK capital cinema staff hold further strikes

Staff working for Picturehouse cinemas in London have taken further strike action this week as part of their long running campaign to be paid the "London living wage," currently set at £10.20. Further strikes are planned on Christmas and Boxing Day. They are members of the media union Bectu.

### Strike threat by pilots working for Ryanair in Germany

Ryanair pilots in Germany are threatening to strike in conjunction with Ryanair pilots in Italy, Portugal and Ireland.

The pilots, belonging to the Cockpit union, are demanding pay and working conditions on a par with other airlines. However, the union stressed that no walkouts will happen over the Christmas period, December 23 to 26.

Ryanair has recently experienced problems organizing its annual leave allowance for staff, leading to the cancellation of thousands of flights. The company refuses to acknowledge negotiating rights by trade unions throughout its international operation.

### **Ryanair pilots in Ireland announce strike**

Pilots working for the Dublin-based Ryanair airline in Ireland are to hold a 24-hour strike on December 20. It is part of a growing European wide struggle against the airline, which refuses to negotiate with any trade union body. Instead, the airline negotiates through an Employee Representative Council at each of its 87 bases throughout Europe.

Ryanair pilots are seeking to negotiate through a European wide European Employee Representative Council.

The Dublin-based pilots, who voted by a 94 percent majority for the walkout, are represented by the Irish Airline Pilots' Association, part of the Impact trade union.

Only pilots directly employed by the company will be taking part in the strike. Many Ryanair pilots are either contractors or hired through agencies and will not be part of the strike.

### **Portuguese distribution workers to stop work for two days**

Warehouse distribution staff are set to stop work on December 23 and 24 in a dispute over working conditions, promotion prospects and working hours.

The stoppage has been called by the Portuguese Federation of Trade, Office and Services Unions, which is affiliated to the Stalinist-backed CGTP trade union confederation.

### **Portuguese notary and registry staff to step up action**

Portuguese notary and registry staff, currently carrying out an overtime ban, are threatening an all-out strike during Christmas week.

They are asking for a career review and for an end to unpaid overtime. They held a protest outside the Ministry of Justice on Tuesday.

### **Protest against precarious work in Slovenia**

Workers in precarious employment such as news vendors held a protest outside the Ministry of Labour in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana on Tuesday.

They were protesting the lack of job security, low pay and poor working conditions.

### **Finnish bank staff begin overtime ban**

Bank staff employed by Finland's biggest bank, Nordea, began an overtime ban on December 8 to protest the bank's decision to cut 420 jobs and move 50 posts to its operations in Estonia and Poland.

Nordea operates in northern Europe and plans to cut 6,000 jobs throughout its network, in a series of four rounds of job cuts over the next four years. Nordea staff are represented by the Nousu union.

### **Strike by Paris rail commuter drivers**

Train drivers on two commuter lines in the French capital held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The two commuter lines, RER A and RER B, were hit hard by the strike, with only around 50 percent of services operating. One of the commuter lines serves the airport.

Four unions represent the drivers, who held the strike to protest the dysfunctional organisation of the company.

### **Further strike by staff at Irish pharmaceutical firm**

Twenty-four machine operators working for the US-based multinational pharmaceutical company AbbVie in Cork, Ireland, began a 48-hour strike on Monday. It was the fifth of a series of strikes, which began in November.

The workers are striking over recognition of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which they have joined. SIPTU is urging the company to abide by a Labour Court ruling which the union says calls on the company to recognise the union. The union has said further strikes will take place in the New Year if the company does not abide with the court ruling.

### **Underground protest by Kazakhstan miners**

Coal miners at eight mines in Kazakhstan held an underground sit-in to demand a pay increase, improved working conditions and earlier retirement. A sit-in began at four of the mines on Monday and was joined by the other four on Tuesday as the dispute spread.

The mines are owned by the ArcelorMittal steel company and produce coal for its factory there.

### **Iranian sugar workers continue strike**

Workers at the Haft Tapeh sugar plantation and mill in Shush, in northwest Iran, are continuing their strike over non-payment of wages for the last four months.

On Sunday, alongside family members, they attempted to stop lorries bringing sugar cane to the factory. They succeeded in closing down steam supplies to the factory and stopping all production. The workers and family supporters then marched to the plant's offices.

### **Tanzanian-Zambian Railway staff win salary arrears**

Workers employed by the Tanzanian-Zambian Railways Authority (TAZARA) went on strike December 7. Railway men were striking for the payment of their last two months wages.

The company have since promised payment in full for the salary arrears.

The strike, called by the Crews and Allied Workers of Zambia and declared illegal by the Minister of Labour, was limited to Zambian workers only.

A scabbing operation had been put in place in Zambia whereby management are keeping freight trains running from the copper belt to the coast.

The 1,160-mile rail line is owned and operated on a 50-50 basis by Tanzania and Zambia. It was built by the Chinese in 1974 to transport copper to their home market, bypassing hostile Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

### **South African fashion workers protest against strip searching**

Workers demonstrated last week outside the premises of RS Fashions in Durban, South African, over strip searches. Employer's representatives are strip-searching female staff because they allege they are stealing stock.

The company—which employs 300—claims the searches have happened on only one occasion, after initially denying they happened at all. It has promised to work with COSATU, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions to supervise future actions.

COSATU's provincial secretary said they will meet regularly with the company to help them “deal with workers when they steal.”

Strip-searching is also a practise among the fashion companies that manufacture in Durban's Sidney Road area.

### **South African university unions threaten strike to push for wage claim**

Several unions involved in wage negotiations at the South African Witwatersrand University are taking their case to the CCMA arbitration services.

The dispute is over a wage offer of 6.8 percent where the workers demand 8 percent. They are members of the ASAWU, ALTSA, NUMSA, and NEHAWU.

A spokesman for the university said they would accept a CCMA dispute resolution process, but maintained they could not meet the wage demand and other issues raised by the unions.

### **Two South African media unions prepare to strike at SABC**

Employees at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) have threatened to resume strike action on Thursday this week over an unresolved 10 percent pay claim.

The SABC is offering 4.5 percent.

The media workers returned to work after striking over a month ago, at the recommendation of the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media and Allied Workers Union (BEMAW), pending new negotiations with SABC.

The interim board of directors recently awarded themselves R3.9 million (US \$289,000) even though the company is to all intents and purposes bankrupt—it lost R977 million last year around (US \$72 million).

Another strike was called at the SABC also on Thursday by the Communications Workers Union (CWU) over a 12 percent pay increase.

### **South African breakaway metal union goes out on strike for increased hourly rate**

A breakaway union from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has called a strike in the metal industry. The strike at Agni Steel South Africa got under way on December 8.

The wage claim by LIMUSA, the Liberated Metalworkers of South Africa, was originally for R48 (US \$3.57) an hour, reduced to R40.37 (US \$3.00). The company pays R24 (US\$1.78) per hour.

The company has refused to negotiate with LIMUSA and went to court, which banned the strike, but on appeal the ban was lifted.

A settlement of wage negotiations was completed with the metal employers associations at the end of July with a three-year agreement, with the majority union NUMSA in the industry, and four other unions accepting.

LIMUSA has 200 members out the 270-strong workforce at the Agni Port Elizabeth plant, and NUMSA a proportion of the rest. The company has nevertheless signed off with NUMSA on the wage deal.

### **Nigerian oil union demands government address lawless oil companies**

Nigerian oil employees are threatening to strike December 18 unless the government brings indigenous and marginal field operators under control.

Workers have complained over a period of time about the oil companies arbitrarily sacking employees who consider joining the union, Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSON).

### **Kenyan Airline workers mount picket to bring the company to a standstill**

Workers on strike at Kenyan Airlines set up picket lines from Tuesday to bring the regional operator to a halt.

The aeroplane engineers are demanding the implementation of a collective bargaining agreement signed two years ago. The agreement involves a wage increase, paid leave and life insurance.

The National Union of Air Transportation Employees (NUATE) picket was put in place after a delay of several days, owing, the union says, to the police intervening in a failed attempt to force negotiations.

NUATE had given the company a pair of two-day notices of strikes, with no response from management.

## **Kenyan lecturers' union ends strike**

Kenyan University lecturers' union have again called off their national industrial action after 37 days.

It is the third time the union, the University Academic Staffs Association, has called off strikes connected to the 2013-17 collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

The union has agreed with the university employers to negotiate a new 2017- 21 CBA, even though there are many outstanding issues from the 2010-13 and 2013-17 agreement.

The university vice chancellors agreed to look into the academics' pension shortfalls of \$15 million in 2010-13 and \$20 million in 2013-17 CBA pension agreements, but this does not address around \$50 million dollars of unpaid wages.

University management also agreed not to victimise strikers.

## **Gambian workers sacked for seeking to renew employment contract**

Sixty-seven employees at the Gambian Arezki Construction Company Limited were sacked last week after asking for their contracts to be renewed.

They accuse the company of paying their wages late and neglecting to pay premium pay for weekend work.

The workers also want a wage increase and better conditions.

The construction company often works in other West African countries and workers spend month after month working away from home.

Some workers fighting for reinstatement had been with the company for up to four years and are looking to the government to rein in the company.



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