

Tension high in Zimbabwe as doctors begin national strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 March 2018

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

Zimbabwe doctors in national strike

Zimbabwe's doctors went on a national strike March 1 after a 21-day warning strike notice expired.

The doctors' demands, reproduced in the *Pindula News*, served notice to the Health Minister that, from March 1, "we will be unable to discharge our normal duties until such a time the ministry decides to prioritise our people's health.

"Our locums remain unpaid since October 2017 and we remain severely understaffed. There are no essential drugs and fluids and patients are dying unnecessarily ...

"Working hours remain ill-defined and at the whim of the admin and our allowances have not been graded as per regional standards, a concern we raised in our letter dated February 5."

The hospitals ran out of water in early February and doctors fear the danger of water borne diseases—cholera broke out recently.

In many hospitals, nurses walked out with the doctors, who are members of the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association members.

Military personnel have been drafted into hospitals in an effort to break the strike.

Zimbabwean civil servants threaten strike over poverty wages

Zimbabwean civil servants are preparing strike action to raise wages above the poverty line.

They have not had a pay rise for over four years and incomes have been eroded by inflation. Civil servants on the bottom pay rung get \$300 a month while the poverty line is \$600.

The Apex Council, the umbrella union for civil servants, is calling for wages to be raised to the Poverty Datum Line and some promotions.

Strikes and demonstrations banned by Zimbabwe courts

A demonstration of workers at Zimbabwe's Zesa Holdings has been

banned by the country's high courts, threatening protesters with arrest.

The Energy Sector Workers' Union (ESWUZ) went to court for permission to protest over corruption at Zesa, Zimbabwe's power generating and utility company.

Workers in the National Energy Sector Workers' Union of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Energy Workers' Union joined the protest call, planned for February 28.

The courts ruled against a previous union request for strike action, in December 2017. The state employer has refused to sign collective bargaining agreements since 2012.

Riot police arrest protesters in Chad

Riot police are confronting striking public sector workers, who have broad support among impoverished workers and students, with over 100 students and workers already arrested.

Public service workers have been on strike in Chad since the beginning of the year, first over unpaid wages, then over pay cuts. Teachers, nurses and administrators have joined the strike, incensed by increased petrol cost, wage cuts and other austerity measures.

The Chadian Order of Lawyers have condemned the government's "brutal and unjustified increase in fuel prices, unilateral and suicidal cuts in wages, as well as the systematic ban and repression of peaceful demonstrations."

South African poultry workers demonstrate to demand screening for deadly infection

Poultry farm workers in South Africa are planning a demonstration March 12 following the breakout of the bacterial infection listeriosis.

Listeriosis was recently found in chicken in three processing factories—at a Limpopo Enterprise factory in Polokwane, Enterprise Foods in Germiston and Rainbow Chicken in Free State.

Poultry workers, members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), have been laid off, but not called in for screening for the possible fatal infection. The FAWU is appealing to the company to finance the cost.

The outbreak is the largest ever, with 750 cases and 180 deaths so far.

The health minister is advising removal of ready-made meat products from these suppliers from supermarkets and domestic fridges.

Nigerian bus workers strike over state extortion

Bus drivers came out in Enugu state Nigeria in a lightning strike on Monday over alleged extortion, arrests and impoundment of commercial vehicles by ministry of transport officials.

The strike by members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers was over by noon, but it had a significant impact on commuters who could not afford other forms of transport.

The Transport Minister admitted extortion by some officials.

Nigerian doctors in Edo state to join public sector workers on strike

Doctors in Edo state Nigeria called a five-day warning strike from Wednesday. Edo state has only 200 doctors for a population of 7.2 million and the state institutions are in decay.

Doctors are also striking at Lokoja specialist medical centre in Kogi state, coming out three days in every month with no emergency cover.

The doctors' union, the Nigerian Medical Association, is demanding payment of salary arrears of 40 percent from August to December, payment of wages for January and February this year, and the implementation of a long outstanding wage structure.

Non-academic staff in Nigeria's universities are continuing their strike action, begun December, over an unfair distribution of funds by the government for allowances—89 percent of N23 billion (US\$64 million) in allowance settlements went to the university's academic staff to end their dispute.

All Nigeria's 36 states owe workers unpaid wages despite billions of Naira overpayments being refunded by the Paris Club of lenders (banks and state lenders), according Nigeria's Trade Union Congress.

Kenyan medical staff strike over victimisation

Nurses, consultants and 700 registrars came out on strike Tuesday this week at Kenya's Kenyatta Referral Hospital Nairobi, the largest hospital in the country, and other major hospitals. Registrars also struck at Moi Training Hospital in Eldoret.

The strike was prompted by the suspension of a post-graduate student doctor after brain surgery was carried out on the wrong patient.

Workers are demanding the victimised doctor be reinstated, holding the hospital responsible for having poor training systems.

The government has refused to sign a 2017-21 collective bargaining agreement with the University and Academic Staff Union to improve medical staff training. The standoff threatens the education of 600,000 students.

Construction workers occupy UK nuclear plant in unofficial action

Around 600 construction workers at the Hinkley Point power station construction site in southwestern England occupied the plant on

Wednesday in an unofficial action.

The members of the Unite union, who are contracted by construction firm Kier/Bam and are paid by energy company EDF, remained in the canteen after complaining they had not been paid. The firm told them they would not be paid for the weekend because buses that ferry them to work were cancelled due to bad weather.

Speaking to the Somerset Live web site, one worker said, "Hinkley Point is on a sit-in over wages. This is because we were sent home at the weekend [and] put on standby. But we're now being withheld weekend payment because buses were cancelled on Friday morning until Monday morning. There are 500 men involved and counting."

The occupation ended later Wednesday when workers reached an agreement with EDF.

Greek rail strike against privatization and staff shortages

Following a series of three-hour stoppages on Monday, 600 employees of the Greek rail company Trainose held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday against privatization of the train and carriage maintenance company and staff shortages. The strike affected national routes and the Athens Metro line as well as services to Athens airport.

Protest by taxi drivers in Greek capital

Hundreds of taxi drivers marched through Athens on Tuesday to protest the use of taxi hailing mobile phone apps such as Uber. The drivers said that apps are taking away their customers. The members of the regional SATA union accused the Syriza-led government of not proceeding fast enough with legislation regulating taxi-hailing apps.

Estonian meat processing workers strike enters second month

Around 20 workers on the slaughter line at the Finnish owned HKScan meat factory in the northern Estonian town of Rakvere have now been on strike for over a month. They also struck in October for a 32 percent pay rise and union recognition.

Last November, HKScan ignored a government recommendation to sign a collective agreement with the meat processing union IMTAL. Management say they are reviewing the wage structure of the whole workforce and would not enter into a separate agreement with the slaughter line employees.

Irish meat processing workers strike

Food processing workers at the Kerry Foods plant in Carrickmacross struck on Tuesday, protesting company plans to cut 31 jobs. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union, representing around 300 workers, is calling for voluntary redundancies.

Further strikes are planned for March 13 and 20.

Strike threat by Danish public sector staff

Strike action is threatened in Denmark by 180,000 state employees and 500,000 municipality workers beginning April 4. This follows the breakdown in talks on pay and conditions between the unions and employers.

Services hit would be hospitals, some train services and social benefit payment services, including the issuance of passports. Schools would be hit as the sector includes 10,000 teachers and educators who teach 100,000 schoolchildren.

Slovenian public workers to strike

Slovenian public sector staff have announced strike action on April 11 over a pay claim and against austerity. It includes health workers in the KSS union and care workers in the SPUKC union.

Further strike by London Docklands Light Railway staff

Dockland Light Railway (DLR) workers employed by contractor Keolis are to hold a 48-hour strike on March 21, followed by a four-day strike April 20.

They are employed by ISS, which provides cleaning, security and information services for DLR. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union say the companies fail to keep to agreements.

Cleaners at UK *Daily Mail* strike

Cleaners employed by contractor MITIE at the *Daily Mail* newspaper are on strike for the London Living Wage of £10.20 an hour. They currently earn £7.50 an hour.

The paper sent MITIE a letter threatening to sack all the striking cleaners. They are members of the United Voice of the World union.

Bus drivers in Scottish city of Aberdeen vote to strike

Around 250 Scottish bus drivers working for the Aberdeen First bus company have voted by over 90 percent to strike. The proposed new contract would mean fewer benefits, longer working hours and less leave entitlement.

The members of the Unite union will hold a 24-hour strike on March 16 and overtime ban, followed by 24-hour strikes on March 19, 21 and 23. A seven-day all-out strike is set to begin March 25.

Local union convenor Michael Finn indicated that the union was desperately seeking to avoid a strike. He told the *Aberdeen Evening Express*, “[I]t is not too late to stop this. If First Aberdeen is willing to get round the table with us ... we may be able to find a way forward.”

Strike threat by Maltese ambulance drivers

Ambulance drivers in Malta are threatening strikes over poorly maintained equipment, tasks not covered by their job description and disputes over how overtime is organised.

The General Workers’ Union, which represents ambulance drivers, said practices are changed without consultation.

Iranian steel workers strike

The strike by around 4,000 steel workers employed by the Iran National Steel Industrial Group, over non-payment of two-months’ wage and bonus arrears, has entered its third week. Nine employees arrested on March 1 by security agents are now on bail. Thousands of workers marched through the city of Ahvaz on March 3 to demand their release.

In recent years, hundreds of workers have been arrested across Iran for protesting unpaid wages and violations of their rights.



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