

# Striking Kenyan lecturers defy labor court injunction, Nigeria lecturers strike

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Thousands of university lecturers and academic staff in Kenya have defied a back to work order by the Employment and Labour Relations Court which ruled Friday that their ongoing strike is illegal and unprotected.

Since the strike began on March 1, some 27,000 university staff together with 9,000 lecturers have participated in the walkout, resulting in a complete stoppage of academic activity at nearly all 33 public universities in the country, affecting 600,000 students.

In his ruling, Justice Onesmus Makau stated, “In my view of my findings herein that the strike is not in compliance with the mandatory procedure provided by the Labour Relations Act.” Makau then directed the government to draft a counter proposal for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement and present it to the court within 30 days.

The strike was launched by the Universities’ Academic Staff Union (UASU) and Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU). At the heart of the dispute are low salaries and remuneration for academic staff, and the lecturers’ demand for funding to upgrade the numerous substandard and outdated facilities that comprise the deteriorating public university system in Kenya. The government has refused to offer a counter-proposal for a new collective bargaining agreement, which expired in 2017.

After the court’s ruling, UASU head Constantine Wasonga declared that the union would appeal the ruling and announced that lecturers and university staff would continue the strike. “We are not happy with the ruling and that is why we are going to challenge it on Monday.”

In stating that the strike would continue, Wasonga said, “The strike continues unabated. We respect the

law and we want to challenge the ruling as per the established law. So whatever we are going to do, we are going to do it as per the confines of the law. We are going to apply for stay of orders for our case to be heard at the Court of Appeal.”

After declaring that they would continue the strike in defiance of the court, the lecturers came under immediate attack from the government and universities. The Inter-Public Universities Councils’ Consultative Forum (IPUCCF), the government body which represents public-run universities under the Ministry of Education, warned university staff they would not be paid salaries for days not worked if they continue to strike.

In a display of utmost contempt for the lecturers, IPUCCF chairman Paul Kanyari said, “They have boycotted work yet they still want to be paid.” Kanyari further stated that the lecturers’ actions were an unfair attempt at intimidation to force negotiations.

## Lecturers at Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida University in Nigeria walkout over low salaries

Lecturers employed at the public-run Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) university in Niger state, located in central Nigeria, launched an indefinite strike on March 17 over more than \$1.4 million in salary arrears owed to academic staff by the Niger state government. The lecturers, represented by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), launched the walkout after issuing a 7-day strike warning to the university.

In an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria,

ASUU chairman Dr. Salahu Lawal stated that the union organized the strike after discussions with the government broke down over the back pay owed to staff.

“Niger state government begged us that it will pay N350 million [\$930,000] while we forfeit N150 million [\$418,000]; we cannot afford such a loss, it is huge. This is the money we worked for and it has to be paid us in full; actually, they wanted to pay us but they insisted in paying N350 million; that is a breach and we are not going to take it. This money we are asking for is accrued money from our allowances, this money we earned it, we are not begging for it.”

Jide Orintunsin, a spokesman for Governor Abubakar Bello of Niger state, attempted to lay blame for the salary arrears on the previous administration, claimed there is no money available to meet the lecturer’s demands

Lawal said that staff had died waiting for back pay owed to them, and family members of those deceased are in desperately expecting the money to pay off debts.

“I am sure if they had paid this money, some of them would have used it for their medical care and may not have died.”

Illustrating clearly the obscene level of social inequality present in Nigeria is the fact that Governor Bello is a scion of wealth. Bello’s father, the millionaire Sani Bello, was a colonel in the Nigerian Army, and became governor of Kano state during the first military dictatorship after the overthrow of Prime Minister Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa by a military coup in 1966.

Sani Bello made his fortune in the finance, energy, and telecommunications sectors, becoming chairman of several companies including Broadbank Nigeria, Rock Insurance Company, and MTN Communications, the telecommunications giant based in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 1993, Bello founded Amni International Petroleum Development Company, one of the largest oil and gas exploration companies in Nigeria. His personal fortune is estimated at around \$500 million.

According to Forbes, there are 12 people in Nigeria who hold fortunes totaling \$68 billion. At the other end of the economic pole, the Nigerian masses live in acute poverty. According to the World Bank, 61 per cent of the population, or over 100 million out of 185 million,

live in severe poverty with incomes of less than one dollar per day.

The strikes by university lecturers in Kenya and Nigeria are part of growing labor unrest in Africa and internationally. The struggles of workers in Africa must be linked with the struggles of workers around the world, including lecturers in the UK and teachers across the United States.

However, the nationalist union bureaucracies are unwilling and incapable of mounting the necessary struggle—which is the fight for socialism. Lecturers and university staff must be warned that these organizations operate as labor enforcement mechanisms to suppress the class struggle and to bind workers to the capitalist system.



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