

Nigerian unions call off general strike over minimum wage

# 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.

## Strike by rail guards on UK Arriva North franchise

Rail guards working for Arriva North franchise will hold a 24-hour strike on Saturday, the 12th consecutive Saturday stoppage. The ongoing dispute is in opposition to the extension of driver only operated trains (DOO) that threaten passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs.

The RMT has limited action to regional, short-term strikes, to isolate and dissipate struggles. It has already sealed deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia. The union has agreed a sell-out deal "in principle" with Merseyrail and the Labour Party-led Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, whereby "door control and dispatch of the trains will transfer to the driver" on new trains.

## Steel fabrication workers in Darlington, England set to strike over pay

Steel fabrication workers employed by Cleveland Bridge in Darlington were planning to strike Thursday this week and again on Monday November 12. Around 90 GMB union members voted for the action in a dispute over an imposed 2.3 percent pay deal.

Company and union talks were planned on Wednesday at the government mediation service Acas.

## Protest march against home closures in UK city of Southampton

Around 200 people marched through Southampton on Saturday to protest plans by the city's Labour council to close its last two care homes. The march was organised by the Unite union. The closure could lead to the loss of 80 care jobs. The council said it will relocate staff and find alternative accommodation for the residents.

## Nurses in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland to be balloted for

### possible strike

From next Monday nurses in Northern Ireland will receive ballot papers for an indicative ballot over strike action because they have received no pay offer for 2018/19.

Like the Royal College of Nursing, Unison, representing a third of the 65,000 NHS nursing staff in Northern Ireland, is also planning a similar indicative ballot.

Nurses in the Irish republic are to be balloted over a 24-hour all-out strike. They are demanding a better pay offer to resolve recruitment problems and staff shortages, after rejecting a pay proposal by employer, the Health Services Executive (HSE). Two further 24-hour strikes would follow in December if the HSE fails to improve its offer.

The nurses are members of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation. Members of the Psychiatric Nurses Association have similarly rejected the pay offer and may also ballot for strike action. The Services, Industrial and Professional union, representing some nurses, has accepted the pay proposals.

### Irish teachers may strike over pay

Irish teachers have rejected a pay proposal put forward by the Irish government's Education Department. The proposal was to address the lower pay rates imposed on teachers employed since 2011 compared to earlier employees. The government cut pay after bailing out the Irish banks and financial system following the 2008 crash.

The new proposals would still leave some teachers disadvantaged. The Irish National Teachers Organisation, representing primary school teachers, rejected the proposal and was to meet Wednesday to consider balloting its members for strike action.

The Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland is currently balloting its members for strike action over the same issue. Its result will be announced at the end of November.

### Porters at Irish hospital threaten protest

Porters at University Hospital in Limerick threatened to hold a 50-strong picket line on Thursday. They held a similar two-hour picket on October 9. The SIPTU members are seeking improved break times and better

canteen facilities. Hospital management was to meet SIPTU on Wednesday in an attempt to head off any protest.

### **Irish ambulance drivers begin overtime ban**

Around 500 ambulance drivers employed by the Irish Ambulance Service began an overtime ban Wednesday. Members of the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, affiliated to the Psychiatric Nurses Association, are demanding union recognition and negotiating rights. Most of the other 1,800 ambulance workers belong to SIPTU.

### **Further strikes by Swiss construction workers**

Around 4,000 striking Swiss construction workers marched through Lausanne on Monday protesting against plans by employers to increase their retirement age, impose longer working hours and eliminate the minimum wage.

A protest outside the building employers' association building in Zurich was planned for Tuesday. Previous strikes and protests have taken place in Bern, Geneva and other areas over the same issue.

### **Slovenian judiciary workers in go-slow action/subhead]**

A planned go-slow action by Slovenian judiciary workers went ahead on Monday. The members of the Trades Unions of Judiciary Workers are demanding improved wages and working conditions.

### **Protest by bus drivers in Cypriot city of Larnaca over wage arrears**

Bus drivers working for the Zenon bus company in Larnaca threatened to take legal and industrial action on Tuesday if wage arrears were not paid by Wednesday. It marked the sixth consecutive month that their wages have not been paid on time.

### **Doctors at Cypriot hospital suspend partial strike**

Doctors at the A&E department of the hospital in the Cypriot city of Paphos have suspended their strike begun November 1. They had been taking two-hour strike action each day for five days to highlight staff shortages at the hospital and demanding two additional doctors.

The Health Ministry agreed to appoint an additional doctor immediately. The suspension will last 15 days, during which time doctors expect a second doctor to be appointed. If not, the partial strike will recommence.

### **General strike in Israel over construction safety is called off**

A general strike due to begin Wednesday to highlight safety concerns on construction sites was called off by the Israeli Histadrut labour federation.

Histadrut representatives met with housing, finance and welfare ministers on Tuesday. The government agreed to introduce European standards for scaffolding, crane and other construction equipment. So far this year 37 construction workers have died in work-related incidents.

### **Nigerian unions call off general strike, agree minimum wage**

Nigeria's three labour congresses called off a general strike proposed for November 6 over a new minimum wage level.

The Nigeria Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress of Nigeria and United Labour Congress of Nigeria agreed on a national minimum wage with the government and industry, but have yet to divulge the figure. They say it will be announced after being reported to President Muhammadu Buhari.

Workers were initially demanding a minimum wage of between N56,000 to N65,000. The present minimum wage of N18,000 has never been fully implemented and a state governor's forum said that they would not increase their offer of N22,500.

According to the *Guardian*, airport workers had begun stopping international flights.

Meanwhile, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities began indefinite strike action on Monday to protest underfunding.

### **Nigerian power supply workers protest working conditions**

Electrical power workers in Nigeria's Edo State capitol Benin blocked the entrance of the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC) headquarters last week to protest working conditions.

The workers have not had a pay increase since the company was privatised in 2013.

### **South African plastic workers strike continues as employers mount legal action**

Ten thousand plastic workers are continuing their strike begun on October 15 for a 15 percent pay rise in line with engineers in the metal industry, and a return to a R40 basic hourly rate.

South Africa's Plastics Converters Association are claiming damages of R1million from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and R100,000 from general secretary Irvin Jim.

### **South Africa's Gold Fields miners strike over jobs losses**

South African mineworkers in Gold Fields' South Deep mine have blockaded the company since November 2 in a strike over 1,560 proposed

redundancies. The Johannesburg-based company employs 3,614 full-time workers and 1,940 contractors.

Although Gold Fields got a court order to restrict a 200 strong miners' picket stopping scabs from working, the strike by 3,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers has halted production.

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### **Eastern Cape, South Africa emergency service workers unofficial strike over unpaid overtime and lack of equipment**

Workers employed by South Africa's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in Eastern Cape began unofficial strike action on Monday.

The previous Friday they demonstrated over unpaid overtime, not enough ambulances and poor treatment by management.

Management are using private ambulances to break the strike.

The strike is not backed by the Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa, the National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union, the Public Service Association or the South African Emergency Personnel's Union. They deemed it illegal as EMS is an essential service. A spokesperson said workers had lost confidence in the negotiating capacity of the unions.

### **Kenyan medical staff strike over unpaid wages and dues**

Kenyan public hospital workers went on strike throughout Homa Bay County from Monday.

They are striking over 10 months of unpaid wages, non-remittance of payments to the National Hospital Insurance Fund, National Social Security Fund, Higher Education Loans Board and payment of their union dues.

The members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union, the Kenya National Union of Nurses, the Kenya Union of Clinical Officers and the Kenya Union of Medical Laboratory Officers are also protesting lack of medical equipment, and harassment by management.

### **Zimbabwean teachers strike over pay**

Teachers in Zimbabwe are striking this week to demand their wages be paid in US dollars, as promised in 2012. They are opposed to the Zimbabwean transaction Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), or a National Electronic Fund Transfer.

The RTGS is consistently losing value, so salaries cannot cover the price of workers' monthly expenditures. Retail outlets such as pharmacies demand payment in dollars and will not accept RTGSs for medicines.

The members of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe intend to strike on Thursday and are planning a demonstration in Harare on Friday with members of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe.



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