

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

Zimbabwe nurses join doctors' stoppage; One-day nationwide strike by Dutch teachers

8 November 2019

Europe

One-day nationwide strike by Dutch teachers in rebellion against trade union

Around 4,000 primary, secondary and special schoolteachers held a one-day strike on Wednesday, despite a union attempt to stop it. The strike affected 80 percent of Dutch schools.

The AOb teaching union members are demanding a pay increase and improved working conditions. The strike date coincides with the beginning of a two-day education budget debate in the Dutch parliament. The teachers are demanding education be fully funded rather than being given one-off payments to plug budget gaps.

Around 40 percent of schools have no replacement teachers to fill in for those on sick leave and 20 percent of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools have unfilled vacancies. As the new term began pupils at some primary schools and nearly a third of special schools had to be sent home as there were no teachers to teach them.

On November 1, AOb chairperson Liesbeth Verheggen signed an agreement with education minister Arie Slob on the promise of a one-off €460 million payment. Teachers, however, demanded the strike go ahead. Verheggen stated she had acted too hastily in agreeing to the one-off payment and has now resigned as AOb chairperson.

"Yellow vests" announce support for planned French rail strike in December

At the weekend, around 600 "yellow vests" organisers representing 200 groups across France met in Montpellier in the south of France. They voted to support a planned indefinite strike by rail workers.

Rail workers employed by the state-owned national rail network SNCF and the state-owned RATP rapid transport network serving Paris are to begin their strike on December 5. The rail workers are protesting the Macron government's attacks on pensions.

Thousands of UK academic staff to strike

Separate ballots of lecturers and academic staff at UK universities over pensions and pay returned majorities in favour of strike action of 79 percent and 74 percent respectively. The ballot results were announced on October 31.

The University and College Union (UCU) announced it will hold an eight-day strike beginning November 25, followed by other industrial action short of strike action, such as working to rule, not covering for absent colleagues and not repeating lectures scheduled to have been given in the strike period.

The UCU leadership has made clear it wants to avoid industrial action. UCU general secretary Jo Grady told the *Independent* newspaper, "The first wave of strikes will hit universities later this month unless the employers start talking to us seriously about how they are going to deal with rising pension costs and declining pay and conditions."

Over 60 university institutions will be hit by the dispute if it goes ahead, affecting around a million students. Last year lecturers held nine days of strikes to oppose attacks on their pensions. The UCU bureaucracy tried to impose a settlement, leading to a rebellion by lecturers, but was able to eventually end the dispute to the detriment of its members.

Guards at South Western Railway franchise in UK to hold month-long strike

UK guards working for the South Western Railway (SWR) voted to hold a month-long strike throughout December. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members will strike each day apart from December 1 and 12. There are no scheduled services on Christmas Day or Boxing Day.

The strike is part of a long-running dispute over the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains, which threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. Action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at several private train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on a number of franchises.

Library and museum staff in Bradford, UK hold further strike

UK library and museum staff working for Labour-controlled Bradford council began a three-day strike on Tuesday. The Unite union members work at 14 library and museum sites across the Bradford metropolitan area. A further four-day strike is planned from November 18 and a five-day strike beginning December 2.

The workers held a two-day strike beginning October 21. They also held a demonstration in the city centre, carrying a coffin effigy bearing the slogan “No cuts to culture.”

The Unite regional organiser said he was realistic about job losses and would accept voluntary redundancies.

Bradford council workers face a 65 percent budget cut over two years to 2020 amounting to £760,000, threatening the existence of prestigious sites such as Bradford Industrial Museum, Cartwright Hall Gallery and the Bolling Hall Museum. The ancient Bolling Hall building is registered in the Domesday Book.

While the Labour Party-run council is slashing spending on culture, it is spending £1.4 million on its application to be considered the City of Culture.

UK sixth-form college workers strike

Teachers at 25 UK sixth-form colleges held a strike on Tuesday. They held a previous strike on October 17 and a rally in London.

The National Education Union members are protesting cuts in funding that have led to low pay and poor conditions. Between 2010–11 and 2016–17 funding fell by 22 percent in real terms. Over the same period, the number of teachers fell by 15 percent while student numbers rose 6 percent.

The teachers voted by an 84 percent majority to take action. The 50 percent threshold needed under Tory anti-trade union law was met by the 25 colleges spread across the country.

Strike by Italian metalworkers

Metalworkers across Italy held a two-hour strike on October 31 to take part in workplace assemblies. They were protesting low wages, job insecurity and the increasing frequency of fatal and serious accidents. They also sought to highlight the economic instability of around 160 companies in danger of going out of business. The protest strikes were organised by the FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL and the UILM-UL unions.

Strike by bus drivers in Belgian province of Brabant

Bus drivers at six depots in the Flemish province of Brabant walked out on an unannounced stoppage on Tuesday. They work for the Flemish government-owned De Lijn bus company. Their concerns include reorganisation plans, cost-cutting measures and staff shortages. The strike was due to be continued Wednesday. The union and De Lijn representatives were to meet Wednesday to attempt to resolve the dispute.

Strike hits petrol stations across Italy

A 48-hour strike hitting all petrol filling stations across Italy began at 6 a.m. on Wednesday. The stoppage is in opposition to plans by the Italian government to introduce electronic invoicing. Petrol station managers and owners say the planned measures will increase bureaucracy without any apparent benefits.

Latvian health workers protest

Latvian doctors and nurses were to hold a protest outside the Latvian parliament on Thursday. They are demanding adequate health care funding in the 2020 budget. Health care staff from Latvia’s leading medical institutions were expected to attend. Routine appointments at medical facilities have been cancelled. Health care staff will be on hand to provide emergency care.

Middle East

General strike call in Iraq protest

Answering a general strike call, protesters shut down streets, schools and government offices on Sunday as part of a month-long protests by Iraqis. Sit-ins also took place in schools.

Africa

Algerian judiciary end their strike

Algerian judiciary ended their 12-day strike on Wednesday. Judges and prosecutors began their strike on October 27. They were protesting a reshuffle of posts, which would have affected half of the 6,000 judiciary personnel.

The country is in the midst of anti-government protests leading up to the planned elections in December to replace the highly discredited longstanding president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Bouteflika was forced to stand down in April after he planned to run for a fifth term.

The strike is impacting court hearings as 96 percent of the judiciary have supported the action. Magistrates play an important role in overseeing elections. The judiciary see the planned reshuffle as an encroachment on their rights.

The Algerian government has agreed to look at the judicial staff’s concerns and promised not to prosecute the strikers.

Zimbabwe nurses join doctors on national strike

Zimbabwe nurses and hospital staff in the capital Harare stopped turning in for work from November 4 claiming incapacitation. The Zimbabwe Urban and Rural Council Nurses Workers Union members are demanding to be paid in US dollars.

Zimbabwe’s doctors have been on national strike for nine weeks for the same demand. Some 230,000 doctors, nurses and public sector workers are staying away from work as they cannot afford travel costs on their wages. Runaway inflation at 500 percent has pauperised them. The price

of basic foodstuffs is increasing weekly.

Striking doctors have boycotted government-organised disciplinary hearings. The hearings are planned from November 1 through November 15 with judgments estimated to be carried out on around half of the county's 1,600 doctors in absentia. So far 77 doctors have been sacked.

Striking civil servants are officially being backed by the Apex council (public sector union federation).

The finance ministry says paying wages in US dollars would bankrupt the government. The exchange rate is 15 Zimbabwe dollars to one US dollar, meaning instead of a salary equivalent to US\$67, doctors would be paid US\$475 a month.

South African coal miners strike for improved working and living conditions

South African coal miners went on a one-day warning strike Friday last week at the Glencore coal mining company. The dispute is over working and living conditions and how the coal miners are treated by Glencore.

The National Union of Miners (NUM) has given the company seven days to respond to a submitted memorandum of demands, on pain of taking further strike action, although no date has been given.

South African miner shot dead at Sibanye/Lonmin in Marikana

As the South African platinum mining unions move closer to a wage settlement at two of the three main mining companies, miner Kaizer Lungisa Madiba was shot dead near the Marikana Rowland shaft last Friday.

The NUM is accusing the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU)—the majority union at the mines—in the death.

Earlier this year Lonmin was taken over by Sibanye Stillwater Platinum, making it the biggest platinum mining company worldwide. A rationalisation programme is in place meaning the loss of thousands of jobs, and a relatively poor pay offer regarding its rivals.

NUM and the smaller trade-based union Solidarity have reached an agreement at the two companies while the rival union, AMCU, is as yet holding out.

A better pay offer by Sibanye's international rivals at Anglo American Platinum and Amplats mining company was agreed due to sky-high prices for platinum and palladium to avoid disruption of production.

The AMCU sold out a five-month gold miners' strike at Sibanye Stillwater Gold earlier this year only a month before platinum miners' negotiations started. It capitulated to a wage agreement, already signed off by the NUM and Solidarity, which it called a "slave labour deal."

In 2012, the ANC government ordered a brutal crackdown on striking Lonmin miners seeking a living wage, resulting in the state murder of 34 miners at Marikana. The current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, was the founder of the NUM in 1982 and a Lonmin director who orchestrated the killing at Marikana. The seven-year commemoration of the Lonmin massacre will take place on November 17 in Marikana.

South African wood product workers strike for pay increase

Workers employed at the South African UCL Company demonstrated outside its premises demanding a wage increase.

Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU) members have been on strike for two weeks to demand a 10 percent wage claim. Workers say they have not had a pay increase since the minimum wage was introduced. Prior to the minimum wage they got an annual increase of 7 percent.

The company deals in tree lumber products and sugar production. Workers accuse UCL of hiring workers during the dispute, threatening to sack the strikers and move to contract labour.

The union has reduced the workers' demand for 10 percent to a 6 percent pay rise this year. The company is offering 6 percent next year.

Union agrees South African student support workers penalised for striking

Striking South African student enrolment workers on strike for a week returned to work last Friday after the union sealed an agreement whereby workers' pay would be docked.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union members employed at the student support body the National Student Financial Aid Scheme returned to work after R2million was agreed towards an outstanding bonus scheme. The union agreed with management that a no-work/no-pay rule would operate.

Workers walk out at BMW South Africa over premium payment reduction

South African car workers walked last week at BMW's Rosslyn plant, Pretoria, over shift changes.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) say BMW has arbitrarily changed the terms of night-shift workers, reducing night-shift payment on a fixed term contract from 28 percent to 23 percent.

The strike was isolated to the affected workers while the rest of the workforce continued to work. BMW, however, locked out the other sections and successfully appealed to the labour court for an injunction against the strike.

The dispute goes back to March when a strike over the same issue was banned by the court. NUMSA has appealed against the latest banning order and says it will continue the strike until its demands are met.

South African solar workers strike threatened over picket line regulations

South African workers employed at the Spanish company Abengoa Solar are striking to demand an end-of-year bonus and a housing allowance.

The Northern Cape company has gone to court to get the strike banned. Abengoa accuses the strikers of violence on the picket line against those going into work, which NUMSA disputes.

Workers struck last year to get the international company to pay benefits such as medical aid and a provident fund.

Strike threat by Nigerian doctors in Alhambra state over poor wages

Nigerian doctors at the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Teaching Hospital in Alhambra state threatened a stoppage this week if their pay is not brought into alignment with pay across other states.

The Medical and Dental Consultants' Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) called off a previous strike in July on a promise their demands would be met, insisting they are not asking for pay rise.

Consultants complain their pay level is the same as House officers in Federal Medical Centres, who are trainee doctors under supervision in their first year on the wards. House officers get N165,000 a month in their first year, while consultants would expect up to N800,000 a month.

Kenya clinicians strike over six months' unpaid wages

Kenyan clinical officers walked out on November 1 in response to the collapse of collective bargaining negotiations and payments for diploma interns.

The 10,000 strikers have a range of highly skilled responsibilities in the counties' outpatient departments, such as anaesthetics.

The Kenya Union of Clinical Officers members have not been paid for six months and say they will not return to work until money owed is in their accounts.



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