

Croatian teachers' strikes; healthcare workers' stoppage in Northern Ireland; Zimbabwe unrest over runaway inflation continues

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

Mass rally of striking Croatian teachers

Around 20,000 striking primary and secondary school teachers rallied in the Croatian capital of Zagreb on Monday. They are demanding a 6.11 percent pay rise and seeking parity with other public sector employees. The teachers began a series of rolling regional strikes in early October with a national walkout from November 19.

Following talks with teaching unions the government has announced a gradual pay increase, rising to 10.4 percent, beginning next year. If the offer is accepted teachers could resume working today.

Strike action by healthcare workers in Northern Ireland

Around 25,000 healthcare workers in Northern Ireland began industrial action November 25 until December 18 over pay and staff shortages. Those involved include nurses, social care and support services staff across the five health and social care trusts.

The Unison union members will hold partial staggered strikes at the different sites. They will also ban overtime and unpaid goodwill working, and restrict the amount of paperwork they do. A further round of action is due in the new year.

In a separate dispute, nurses in Northern Ireland have voted by a more than 90 percent majority to strike. The action will begin December 3. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members are protesting staff vacancies of around 2,500. An across-border nursing conference to take place at the Titanic Centre in Belfast on December 3 has been cancelled.

Finnish postal workers' strike ends after company/union talks

The Finnish postal workers' strike ended Wednesday, following talks between the employer and postal union PAU mediated by the Finnish national labour conciliator. Ten thousand postal workers were in dispute over a new agreement on terms and conditions. They work for the state-owned postal service, Posti.

The new agreement runs until January 2022. Press reports did not give details of the new agreement. Posti agreed for now to reverse the transfer of 700 parcel sorting workers, which took place in August resulting in

lower pay, increased hours and amended rota hours.

Other Finnish workers carried out sympathy strikes in support of the Posti staff. Finnair, the Finnish national airline had to cancel 300 flights on Monday as a result of action by staff. Finnish seafarers also walked out leaving cargo and passenger ships in port. Other transport workers were to come out if the strike continued.

German farmers demonstrate in Berlin

Around 10,000 German farmers brought in over 5,000 tractors to stage a rally in Berlin on Tuesday. The tractors snarled up the traffic in central Berlin bringing it to a halt. The farmers are protesting anti-pollution measures on the use of fertilisers. The farmers fear the measures will severely impact their livelihoods and drive them out of business.

Greek power workers' union calls off strike

The Greek power workers' union GENOP called off a planned 24-hour stoppage Tuesday, citing bad weather. The Greek state-controlled Public Power Corporation intends to close all lignite burning power plants. Planned rallies in the towns of Megalopolis and Ptolemaida against the proposed closures went ahead on Monday.

Carpet manufacturing workers in England on indefinite strike

Staff at Westex Carpets at two sites, Dewsbury and Cleckheaton, in England began an indefinite strike on November 20. The Unite union members rejected a 2.2 percent pay offer. In response the company removed the pay offer. The company states it cannot afford to raise pay despite making annual pre-tax profits of over £5 million in the last two years.

Staff at Brighton school, England, strike against academy plans

Teaching and ancillary staff at Moulsecoomb Primary School in Brighton on the English south coast held a one-day strike on November 21. The National Education Union and GMB members are opposed to plans to make the school an academy, no longer under local authority control.

Unison union members will strike at a later date. Parents have joined with school staff in a campaign to oppose the move to academy status.

Iranian sugar production workers continue protest

Iranian workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane plant in Shush have continued their present protest for over three weeks. It has included marches and rallies outside the office of the Governor of Shush province. They are demanding payment of wages arrears and the renationalisation of the plant. They are also protesting the arrest of around 20 workers on November 18. All but four were subsequently released.

The Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' union members have walked out in their thousands over the last three years in mass protests over job losses, pay and conditions as well as a demand for the company to be taken back into state ownership. It is the oldest sugar factory in Iran, and since privatisation in 2015 wages and conditions have deteriorated.

US sanctions reintroduced last year have reduced Iran's exports of crude oil by 80 percent. The prices of food, housing and necessities have soared, and medicines are in short supply.

Protest by unpaid Iranian hospital workers

Some 200 workers at the Imam Khomeini hospital in Karaj in northern Iran held a march outside the hospital last week over three consecutive days. They were protesting the non-payment of wages over the last year. They are also raising concern over the financial state of the 250-bed hospital, which is hugely in debt with its future in doubt.

Zimbabwe trade union federation prepares national demonstration but no general strike call

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions is preparing a national demonstration over the deteriorating economic situation. No date has been set. Workers cannot even afford to travel to work, with inflation raging at 500 percent. Doctors along with other public sector workers have been on strike for the last 12 weeks.

The striking doctors' union leadership hopes Vice President Constantino Chiwenga will settle their wage demands on his return from China. He has been in China for the last four months receiving medical treatment. Last year Chiwenga sacked striking nurses demanding to be paid in US dollars as a hedge against inflation. The striking doctors are also demanding their wages be paid in US dollars. They have been facing disciplinary hearings for their action.

The hearings came to an end Wednesday. At the 480 trials, 435 doctors were sacked, while 45 who broke the strike retained their jobs. The demonstration call follows the dropping of charges of subversion against President Mnangagwa by union leaders. They issued the charges after 17 workers were killed and others injured by state forces in a protest January

this year. The army has threatened to use force to quell any planned demonstrations.

Zimbabwe air traffic controllers hold work stayaway

Authorities denied a strike had taken place at the Robert Gabriel Mugabe airport on Wednesday. Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ) air traffic controllers turned in late for work on Tuesday. This came after a letter of complaint from the Air Traffic Controllers' Association of Zimbabwe to CAAZ.

The air traffic controllers complained over low wages and that they cannot afford to travel to work. Inflation of 500 percent is destroying their wages. Major international investment is going into developing and refurbishing airport infrastructures. The Robert Gabriel Mugabe Airport is currently undergoing refurbishment.

South African airline unions capitulate to airport authorities over pay claim

An eight-day strike by South African Airline (SAA) workers ended when the unions accepted the company's original 5.9 percent pay offer. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and the South African Cabin Crew Association members walked out on November 1. They were demanding an eight percent pay rise and a three-year protection of employment.

The unions dressed up the 5.9 percent offer as costing SAA eight percent. The offer will be implemented from February 2020 with back pay from the contract renewal date of April 2019, to be paid in stages. SAA management says the pay agreement is dependent on its ability to pay, and that the November wages of its more than 5,000 employees will be delayed.

The state-owned airline is bankrupt, and the International Monetary Fund and rating agencies are demanding South Africa puts its financial house in order. SAA has been bailed out over the last three years to the tune of R20.5 billion, with a further R5.5 billion set aside for 2019-20 debt. More job losses are expected on top of a proposed 944 mooted in a rationalisation/privatisation plan.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions, (COSATU), the government-affiliated trade union federation, supports selective denationalisations. The skilled trades Solidarity union is pressuring the government to put SAA into a business rescue plan.

South African municipal workers sacked for demanding back overtime pay

South African Newcastle municipal employees have been sacked after they demanded overtime pay due. 223 workers have been sacked but more workers could go. The authority says it cannot afford to pay.

Tensions are running high as the sacked workers held a march through Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal province in protest. The South Africa Municipal Workers Union will take the authority to court to oppose the sackings.

South African municipal workers demand equality of pay increase with city leaders

Two hundred council workers employed by South African Mogale City Local Municipality in West Rand demonstrated outside the town hall on November 21. They are demanding a pay rise in line with management's recent increase.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members demanded a meeting with the city mayor, who was unavailable. Their complaint will be heard at a Local Government Bargaining Council meeting in January.

contracted former employees, along with other ex-employees, had money deposited in the bank where it has been frozen, leaving them destitute. Senior staff from Unicredit, acting as contract consultants to PWC, complain they have not had their fees paid for three months.



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Workers oppose South African steel plant closure

Fifty workers at the Arcelor Mittal South Africa (AMSA) steel mill in Saldanha demonstrated November 21 against the planned closure of the plant with the loss of 1,000 jobs. AMSA blames market conditions. The South African Social and Economic Development Forum union complained that they learned of the closure via social media.

South African workers protest in platinum belt

Protests in the South Africa's Eastern Mpumalanga platinum belt are increasing despite three unions signing agreements with major platinum producers. There have been 400 protests over the last three years. According to the *Daily Maverick* these included 225 roadblocks, 107 illegal marches and 40 wildcat strikes.

The profits from platinum and palladium have soared and these mines are among the richest sites on earth for these minerals. Meanwhile, the mining companies are planning to use police to confront protests.

Kenyan health workers strike threat in Kisumu County

Health workers are threatening to strike in Kenya's Kisumu County over an outstanding collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The CBA was signed in 2016 but had not been implemented.

Workers walked out earlier in June but returned to work after the state governor promised to implement the agreement. The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union said it will declare a strike in two weeks if the CBA is not implemented in full, but remains ready to negotiate.

Ghana bank contract employees go unpaid

Employees of Unicredit Ghana, recently made redundant after the bank's licence was revoked, are protesting the methods of the appointed receiver Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC). PWC is employing the staff temporarily to wind up the bank.

While some bank employees contracted by PWC have been paid a fraction of the agreed terms, others have been paid nothing. Many of the