German Amazon workers walk out; Zimbabwe doctors and public sector continue 13-week stoppage

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.

Strikes at German Amazon facilities

Around 2,000 workers employed by Amazon in Germany walked out on November 29, so-called "Black Friday." Six of the company's 13 distribution centres were involved, at Bad Hersfeld, Graben, Koblenz, Leipzig, Rheinberg and Werne.

The strike, which ended Tuesday morning, incorporated "Cyber Monday" which, along with "Black Friday," is a key day in Amazon's discount period in the run-up to Christmas.

The Verdi union members have been involved in a long-running dispute over wages and conditions. Amazon classifies employees at its German fulfilment centres as logistics workers, but the workers argue they should be regarded as retail staff and enjoy pay and conditions in line with other German retail staff.

Amazon has raked in massive profits based on the low wages and super-exploitation of its employees—founder Jeff Bezos is the world's richest man with a net worth of $111 billion.

Protests at UK Amazon sites on "Black Friday"

GMB trade union officials protested outside UK Amazon fulfilment centres at Sheffield, Rugeley and Peterborough on "Black Friday," November 29. No Amazon workers were involved, however. The protests were to highlight low pay and poor working conditions.

UK University staff eight-day strike ends

University teaching and research staff at around 60 UK universities ended their eight-day stoppage this week. The University and College Union (UCU) members are in a long-term dispute over pensions, pay and conditions.

The strike involved around 40,000 lecturers, support staff and administrators, and affected a million students. Following the strike, university staff will take action short of strike action.

More stoppages are expected in the New Year, but no dates have been set. A further 12 universities are being balloted by the UCU, with the ballot opening on December 4 and closing on January 28. Several universities which returned majorities in the recent dispute but fell just below the 50 percent threshold turnout level are being reballoted.

The UCU sold out last year's national pension strike at 64 institutions by 50,000 lecturers and other university staff, accepting promises by management to review pensions. The universities are now insisting employees pay tens of thousands of pounds in extra pension contributions. A typical member of the Universities Superannuation Scheme could lose up to £240,000 during retirement. Staff are also protesting the marketisation of education and demanding an end to temporary contracts.

Irish medical staff begin strike ballot

A strike ballot of around 3,500 Irish doctors, which began this week, is due to end December 17. Both consultant and non-consultants represented by the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) are being balloted.

The doctors are demanding an end to the current two-tier pay regime for consultants, introduced in 2012, and are also calling for the recruitment of additional consultants to resolve staff shortages.

Action, which would not begin until at least mid-January, would involve a work to rule, not attending outpatient clinics and finally the prospect of an all-out strike.

Demonstration by German steelworkers

Around 6,000 Thyssenkrupp steelworkers demonstrated outside the plant in Duisburg, Germany on Sunday. Thyssenkrupp is threatening to cut around 2,000 jobs out of its worldwide operation.

The current work contract, which runs out at the end of the year, has a no-redundancy clause. The company recently appointed Martina Metz as its new boss, following a failed merger with the Indian Tata steel producer.

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Spanish railworkers' strike

Railworkers employed by Spain's state-owned rail company Renfe were to strike Thursday in a dispute over workers' rights.

The CGT members were to walk out over three periods: midnight until 4 a.m., 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. until midnight. Renfe cancelled 155 services ahead of the strike, taking place in the lead-up to the Puente long holiday break.

Under the compulsory minimum service legislation, 90 percent of long-distance AVE trains will run, as will over 60 percent of medium distance train services.

Protest by fired Turkish municipal workers passes 100 days

This week protests by Istanbul municipal workers passed the 100-day mark. The newly elected Republican People's Party administration in Istanbul fired hundreds of municipal workers.

Each day since their dismissal, between 300 and 400 municipal workers have gathered in front of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality building in protest.

Road maintenance staff at Welsh local authority vote to strike

Workers who grit icy roads in the winter period at Carmarthenshire council highways department in Wales voted by more than a three-quarters majority to strike. The 80 GMB union members are protesting pay levels. Unison union members also voted to strike while Unite members will likely support the action.

Lebanese petrol station owners strike

Petrol station owners in Lebanon began an all-out strike on November 28. The union representing the fuel station owners said it was in response to losses they incurred as part of the ongoing economic crisis hitting the country.

The petrol station owners receive payment from customers in Lebanese pounds while having to buy fuel supplies in US dollars. As a result of the ongoing economic crisis the cost of US dollars is increasing, hitting the petrol station owners.

Zimbabwe doctors and public sector workers on strike for 13 weeks

As Zimbabwe's public sector strike continues, 57 striking senior doctors were sacked on November 26 by the government, following the sacking of 448 junior and middle-ranking doctors.

The public sector workers have been on strike for 13 weeks. They cannot even afford to travel to work, with inflation raging at 500 percent, and are demanding to be paid in US dollars. Wages have declined fifteen-fold over the last year.

The lack of basic equipment in hospitals such as drugs, bandages, gloves and syringes has compromised patient safety.

A spokesman for the Senior Hospital Doctors' Association said their members would not provide emergency services until the juniors had been reinstated. The junior doctors are defying a government demand to vacate their lodgings. They also ignored a government amnesty offer, leaving the public hospital system in shutdown, as nurses are also out.

The government is threatening to sack striking nurses and teachers.

President Emerson Mnangagwa accused the doctors of a plot against the government and causing many deaths. The doctors replied by charging the government with genocide against the Zimbabwean people.

The government is considering appealing to China, India and Cuba to provide doctors.

After an eleven-day visit Hilal Elver, United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, said the country was on the brink of starvation. What was once the breadbasket of Africa has become dependent on food aid.

South Africa Cape Flats workers demonstrate over steel closure and unpaid pensions

Demonstrators gathered outside Cape Flats parliament, Saldanha, South Africa last Thursday over a steel mill closure. Arcelor Mittal is closing its steel mill, with a loss to the community of around one thousand jobs.

Around 140 protesters from the South African Social and Economic Development Forum, the Ex Mine Workers, Mining Fighters of Namaqualand alongside Cape Flats community groups members—miners, retired miners and miners' widows—demanded the government keeps the mill open and pay unpaid pensions.

South African medical workers demonstrate to demand new hospital

South African medical staff at the Bushbuckridge hospital, Mpumalanga, staged a demonstration November 28.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members are demanding the completion of their new hospital. Building work began in 2015, but only the foundations have been laid.

NEHAWU claims the construction has cost R300 million so far and is questioning where the money has gone.

The workers at Bushbuckridge say their present hospital is dilapidated and dangerous. They also want an increase in staff and security. Patients have been murdered with guns and knives while in Mpumalanga hospitals.

The latest murder took place in November at Witbank General, causing a strike.

South African chrome miners strike over unpaid wages

Striking South African chrome mine workers faced rubber bullets and arrest for protesting over unpaid wages. Private security guards shot at the miners at Horizon Chrome Mine, North West province. Many suffered injuries and nine were arrested.

In a memo to the National Union of Miners (NUM), the company wrote: "Recent illegal work stoppages, acts of sabotage and poor performance led to insufficient production to cover the Company's costs. The

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Company therefore has to yet again secure external funding."

That was followed by a threat that staying away from work would constitute an illegal stoppage. November's wages would only be paid when the strike ended.

South African ANC president sacks half workforce at his farm

South African National Congress (ANC) President Cyril Ramaphosa is laying off half his farm workforce in the run-up to Christmas.

Ramaphosa owns the Ntabanyoni farm in Badplaas, Mpumalanga. His net wealth is estimated at $450 million. He visited the farm to inform 22 of the 46 staff they had to go. The reasons given were foot-and-mouth disease among his herd and poor market conditions.

A worker lamented, "How can Mr. Ramaphosa fire us before Christmas? I have to buy food and things for my kids for Christmas. I don't know what I'm going to do now."

The Food and Allied Workers Union said that because the President has already sacked the workers they will have go to the arbitration services and labour court.

Kenyan clinical officers continue strike over pay and conditions

Clinical officers including anaesthetists, paediatricians and ophthalmologists are continuing a month-long strike in 47 counties across Kenya over pay and working conditions.

Courts in four counties have banned the stoppage. The courts are demanding that county employers and the Kenya Clinical Officers Association negotiate. The county employers are using victimisations to end the strike.

Malawian government intervenes in truck drivers' strike

Malawian haulage drivers walked out Monday, parking around 500 trucks, when employers refused to pay an increase agreed after a previous dispute. The government intervened to resolve the issue.

In October, 1,000 truckers parked their vehicles causing petrol stations to run out of fuel and power stations running on diesel to shut down. Many areas of the country suffered power outages, causing blackouts.

The stoppage ended when the employers promised to pay an average of K100,000 a month. The government allowed employers to raise haulage fees from US$1,500 per tonne per kilometre to US$2,700 for international haulage.

A minimum wage of K140,000 was set for fuel tanker drivers, and an increase from K30,000 to K60,000 minimum wage was agreed for dry cargo haulage workers. The existing minimum wage for fuel tanker drivers is already set at K140,000, but employers do not pay it.

Malawi LUNAR university lecturers strike

Staff are striking at Malawi's Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUNAR) for equal pay. The lecturers' union say they will continue the stoppage until the 30 percent anomaly between their salaries and other lecturers at other universities is rectified.

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