

Algerian and Palestinian general strikes; Zimbabwe's striking doctors threats

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

13 December 2019

## Strike by guards on UK rail franchise enters second week

The strike by around 900 guards and 40 drivers working for UK's South Western Railway (SWR), which runs services into London, entered its second week on Monday. The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposing the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

The strike will last throughout December and has begun to impact services, with about 40 percent of scheduled trains cancelled.

According to a *Guardian* report December 9, the RMT has put forward proposals to end the strike. The union has drawn up a six-point "road map to a settlement." The company is adamant it will brook no opposition. An SWR spokesperson told the paper, "The best and safest way to operate the new trains we will introduce next year is with the driver closing the doors [part of the guards' safety role] ..."

The strike is part of a long-running dispute against DOO, 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 numerous private train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

A series of strikes over DOO by RMT members working for West Midland Trains was called off. The workers voted for a series of seven strikes each Saturday beginning November 6. The RMT is recommending its members at WMT accept a new offer to resolve the dispute it has agreed with the company—based on a form of DOO, the drivers will open doors and conductors close them if the deal is accepted.

## Strike at London UK tax office

Workers at HM Revenues & Customs (HMRC) office in Ealing, west London were to hold the second of two half-day stoppages on Thursday. They held a half-day strike and rally last week.

The Public and Commercial Services members are opposing plans by HMRC to close the Ealing office. A previous five-day strike earlier in the year earned the workers a stay of execution on the closure, which is now on the agenda again.

## Cleaners strike at London school

Cleaners working for contractor Lakethorne Group at Highgate Wood school in north London walked out on Tuesday. The Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union members are demanding to be paid the London Living Wage, currently £10.75 an hour.

They held a previous strike on November 12. They are also in dispute over leave arrangements, provision of cleaning materials and problems with work rosters.

## Industrial action by nurses in Northern Ireland

Nurses in Northern Ireland are taking industrial action. About 16,000 Royal College of Nursing members are demanding pay parity with nurses in England and protesting staff shortages.

On Tuesday, they refused to cover certain duties for 48 hours. They also held a lunch-hour picket. They plan a 12-hour strike on December 18.

## Palestinian general strike against settlement proposals

Palestinians in Hebron carried out a general strike on Monday. A rally of protesters was tear gassed by Israeli security forces. The strike and rally were in opposition to the decision by the Israeli defence minister, Naftali Bennett, to give the go-ahead for the building of 70 apartments in Hebron for Israeli settlers.

## General strike and rallies in Algeria

A four-day general strike began in Algeria on Sunday. Workers, students and youth were protesting at the list of candidates for the presidential election due Thursday. All candidates have close ties to the previous regime.

In April, sitting president Abdelaziz Bouteflika was forced to stand down after weeks of protests. On Monday, police broke up a rally of university and high school students in Algiers.

In 1962, French occupation forces were expelled from Algeria by a revolutionary struggle of Algeria's workers and oppressed masses.

Formal independence from France solved none of the problems that drove the masses into struggle. The Algerian bourgeois regime led by the FLN continues to plunder the country's wealth in the interests of imperialism, while condemning millions of Algerians to poverty.

The protests, which have been ongoing for nearly a year, are part of a broad radicalisation of the working class and a resurgence of class struggle across the world.

### **Zimbabwe doctors' strike continues despite sackings and strikebreaking**

The majority of Zimbabwe's hospital doctors are continuing their 14-week stoppage, despite sackings and financial inducements to return.

With inflation at 500 percent, public sector workers, including doctors, are demanding that they be paid in US dollars. Wages have fallen 15-fold in the past year. Hospitals lack basic equipment such as drugs, bandages, gloves and syringes. Staff cannot even afford travel costs to work.

The Higher Life Foundation tried to break the strike with an offer of \$5,000 over six months for a return to work, but only 80 doctors accepted.

A total of 448 striking Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association members have been sacked. Fifty-seven senior doctors were sacked for coming out in support of their junior colleagues last week.

The Minister of Health is proposing a Private Public Partnership to deal with the health crisis, which doctors oppose. President Emerson Mnangagwa claims that outside forces such as human rights lawyers are backing the doctors.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum says 2019 was one of the worst years for human rights abuses with the government becoming more ruthless in its approach to citizens' grievances.

### **South African firefighters sacked over safety strike**

In Johannesburg, 202 firefighters have been sacked by the Emergency Management Services (EMS) after a strike in July.

The Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa members at three fire stations walked out after refusing to take on work which was not part of their responsibilities. They defied a labour court ruling to return to work.

The firefighters accused the EMS of not sticking to the National Health Act in their job description and complained of unsafe building accommodation.

The sacked workers have six weeks to appeal. Standby and volunteer staff are taking on their duties.

### **South African mortuary workers locked out, then sacked for going slow**

South African workers at the Magwaza Maphalala, Gale Street Mortuary in Durban were sacked last week, and others given final warnings.

The 37 workers were locked out from December 3 for a go-slow protest against unpaid overtime and poor working conditions. Fourteen workers were later dismissed.

The 14 sacked workers continued to turn up for work after the Gale

Street mortuary was closed and work relocated to the Phoenix area of Durban.

Management and the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union met last Friday.

### **Kenyan nurses march to demand their pay and jobs back**

Sacked Kenyan nurses in Vihiga County marched to the county referral hospital to demand their reinstatement and their salaries.

On December 3, 528 health sector workers who had worked for seven months without pay were notified in the press they were sacked.

The Vihiga county secretary opposing the sackings in court was himself sacked by the county governor.

The federal government has threatened to withhold funding from six counties in the region, including Vihiga and Kisumu, for not clearing their outstanding debts.

### **Kenyan medics' stoppage over reneged contract**

Kisumu County doctors walked out Friday as a two-week warning notice expired.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) members are protesting the non-implementation of a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) including promotions. Doctors have not been promoted over the last two years.

The KMPDU is going to court to legally force the county governor to implement the CBA.

### **Nigerian power workers threaten walkout**

Nigerian power production and distribution workers are poised for strike action over outstanding wages, the payment of dues, and sackings.

The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) members gave the power generating and distribution companies 21 days to settle the dispute, which ended Tuesday. NUEE said they had used up every avenue to appeal to the government.

The power generators and distribution companies are bankrupt and need a N1.2 trillion bailout.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**