Zimbabwe hospital doctors out for 15 weeks; German Amazon workers strike at three centres

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

**20 December 2019**

**Strike at three German Amazon centres**

Around 1,200 Amazon workers at Bad Hersfeld, Koblenz and Leipzig Amazon sites in Germany walked out on Monday, until Saturday, hitting the busy run-up to Christmas.

The Verdi union members are involved in a long-running campaign to improve pay and conditions in line with other retail staff in Germany. Amazon classifies them as logistics workers with pay and conditions in line with logistics workers. The strikers are also demanding an increased Christmas bonus.

Amazon employs around 20,000 in Germany at 35 sites and takes on thousands of additional temporary workers in the Christmas period.

The conglomerate is notorious for tax avoidance. In 2018, US-based Amazon paid negative income tax to the US treasury. Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, is worth over $113 billion, while Amazon workers survive on poverty level wages.

**Postal workers in Bristol, England, strike vote in defence of colleague**

Postal workers at a Royal Mail delivery office in Bristol, England voted by an 86 percent majority to strike Monday and Tuesday next week over the mistreatment of a colleague.

The worker was dismissed following "inappropriate action" resulting from personal tragedies. The Royal Mail subsequently reinstated him but want to move him to a different delivery office.

In September, postal workers at the Glaisdale delivery office in Nottingham were balloted for possible strike action after a postal worker of 15 years standing was sacked for challenging management.

In early October, around 50 CWU members walked out of the Bootle and Seaforth delivery office on Merseyside after a manager made a racist remark to a worker.

In October, 110,000 CWU members voted by a 97 percent majority on a 76 percent turnout to mobilise against attacks by Royal Mail Group on their job security, terms and conditions.

A High Court ruling banned the strike in November on the grounds that postal workers were being encouraged to vote yes by the CWU. Instead of defying the ban, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward appealed to the Trades Union Congress, which has a decades-long record of isolating workers' struggles.

**Workers at UK hospital strike against privatisation plans**

Hundreds of hospital workers at Frimley Health Trust in southeast England began a three-day stoppage on Wednesday, following previous similar action. The Trust has three hospitals in Berkshire and Surrey.

Porters, cleaners, security staff and caterers are opposed to plans by the trust to transfer around 1,000 posts to a wholly owned subsidiary company. The GMB, Unison and Unite union members fear such a move—a step to privatisation—would lead to a worsening of pay and conditions.

Unison cancelled previous planned strike action after the trust promised talks over the plans.

**UK vehicle examiners strike**

Around 150 workers at the UK's Driving Vehicle and Standards Agency walked out on Monday until Christmas. It is the latest in a series of disputes by staff who conduct driving tests for large goods vehicle drivers.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are disputing changes to their terms and conditions.

**UK: Mental health workers in South Yorkshire take strike vote**

Around 200 UK workers, including nurses, social workers and occupational therapists in South Yorkshire voted by an 83 percent majority to strike. The Unison union members are opposed to plans to reorganise the service, fearing cuts to services.

**Protests by Ukrainian coal miners over wage arrears**

Protests by Ukrainian coal miners in several cities including Kiev were held on Wednesday. The Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine members are protesting mounting wage arrears in both state-owned and

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private mines.

Miners in the state-owned sector will be owed an estimated UAH 1.5 billion ($63 million) by the end of the year. A demonstration outside the parliament in Kiev was also due Wednesday over the issue.

On Thursday, the Cabinet of Ministers agreed to pay a portion of the arrears (UAH 322.6 million) to coal miners.

**Belgian rail workers strike for better pay and retention of 36-hour week**

Belgian rail workers in several unions were to begin a 24-hour strike at 10 p.m. on Wednesday. The state-owned SNCB rail company expected two-thirds of trains not to run.

The workers are protesting a proposed new contract for 2020 to 2022. They want a 1.1 percent pay increase in line with the private sector. They are also demanding retention of the 36-hour workweek.

**Road blockades by Dutch farmers and construction workers**

Dutch farmers and construction workers held go-slow traffic processions on highways and major roads on Wednesday leading to traffic tail-backs of hundreds of kilometres.

They are protesting measures by the Dutch government to cut levels of nitrogen pollution without any provision for the impact of the proposed actions on farmers. The new measures will restrict the use of fertilisers, which affects farming methods and incomes under conditions where supermarkets already pay farmers low prices for their products.

Construction projects are also being forced to cut nitrogen emissions, leading to projects coming to a standstill, threatening construction companies and jobs.

The attempt to deal with environmental issues without an overall rational and scientific plan can only lead to piecemeal measures, leading to the disorganization of the economy, while forcing the burden of such measures on the working population.

**Workers in dispute at Israeli mobile phone importer**

On December 10, the Israeli labour federation Histadrut declared a dispute at Suny-Samsung which imports Samsung mobile phones and equipment.

Around 250 workers at the company, which has 25 branches throughout the country, are challenging the wage structure and attitude of the company's executives.

**Zimbabwe hospital doctors' dispute into week 15**

The Zimbabwe hospital doctors' dispute has entered its 15th week, despite attempts to break the strike.

Public sector workers, including doctors, are demanding to be paid in US dollars because of runaway 500 percent inflation. Wages have fallen 15-fold, while hospitals lack basic equipment such as drugs, bandages, gloves and syringes. Staff cannot even afford to travel to work.

The HigherLife Foundation—supported by businesses and wealthy individuals—is offering a bursary of $5,000 and other inducements to around 2,000 doctors to return to work. About 362 doctors accepted the offer and split from the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association.

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.

Some doctors and nurses are leaving the country to get jobs in Australia and the UK where there are staff shortages.

The government of President Emerson Mnangagwa is proposing a private-public partnership to deal with the health crisis.

**Ghana health workers national strike vote over pay**

Health service workers in Ghana's Eastern Sector have overwhelmingly voted for a national stoppage.

The dispute is over the non-implementation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement signed in 2016, and a new single spine pay system (SSPS). Health workers transferred onto the SSPS have suffered wage decreases even when promoted.

As the Health Services Workers Union members voted to walk out, a teachers' strike ended.

Teachers came out on December 9 over pay and allowance arrears from 2012 to 2016 but returned three days later after the courts ruled the strike illegal and suspended it for 10 days.

**Liberian civil servants strike over outstanding wages**

Civil servants walked out across Liberia on Monday demanding months of unpaid wages. Workers in Liberia say they cannot afford to travel to work.

Following the action, the government agreed to pay two months of the five months' arrears. The Civil Servants Union of Liberia announced further action would be decided December 19 after meeting with the government.

**Union calls off Nigerian power workers' national strike**

A national strike by Nigerian power workers has been called off by the union after one day. The strike blacked out the country for the day.

Workers in the electricity supply and distribution companies were protesting outstanding wages, sackings since privatisation and the refusal of the government to negotiate.

As soon as workers walked out, the National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) was invited into negotiations. The NUEE President said the government had "conclusively addressed" the power workers' issues.

The power companies face bankruptcy and need a N1.2 trillion bailout.

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**Angolan workers march to demand minimum wage increase**

Workers marched on the streets of Luanda and other cities of Angola on December 14 to demand a quadrupling of the minimum wage—from K22,000 to K80,000.

The United Trade Union Federation members are campaigning for increased wages, against corruption and the revision of the General Labour Law.

Inflation rose to 16.3 percent in November.

**Labour courts ban Kenya Meru County health workers strike**

Striking clinical officers in Meru County, Kenya have had their national strike banned by the labour courts. Kenya Union of Clinical Officers members walked out after union/government negotiations broke down over poor management, a shortage of 300 clinical officers and lack of promotions.

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