

Zimbabwe four-month-long hospital strike continues; French rail workers to strike over Christmas defying unions

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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French rail workers pledge to continue strikes over Christmas in defiance of unions

French rail workers on strike against attacks on pensions have vowed to continue their action over the holiday period.

Last Saturday, French rail company SNCF reported only half its high-speed TGV trains leaving the capital as a result of the action. The number of metro and suburban trains running in the capital Paris was also restricted with half the 16 metro lines closed.

Following the yellow vest protests, demonstrations of workers across all sectors against President Macron's pension reforms have been attacked by riot police using rubber bullets and tear gas, with many protesters suffering serious injury.

The strikes are now at a crossroads, as the unions are attempting to climb down in the face of the government's determination to impose the reforms.

Rail workers in the CFDT and UNSA unions are rebelling against their unions' call for a truce over Christmas.

Strike by light rail system staff in Tyne and Wear, England

Drivers on the Metro light rails system that covers Tyne and Wear in northeast England held a 48-hour strike beginning last Friday. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members are in dispute with Nexus that runs the metro network.

The drivers are opposed to changes in working conditions that Nexus has linked to an increased pay deal. Nexus plans to increase the maximum driving time from three and a half to four and a half hours before a break. The drivers also want shift times to be a maximum of nine hours for shifts finishing after 10 p.m.

The strike, which was supported by all drivers, shut down the entire metro network and all its 60 stations.

Ferry workers in Woolwich, England plan stoppage

Ferry workers in Woolwich, southeast London, were to strike on Thursday. The Unite union members are demanding the London living

wage of £10.75 an hour. Workers are also protesting that their employer refused to investigate racism reported by two employees.

Firefighters in Surrey, England begin industrial action Christmas Eve

On Christmas Eve, firefighters in Surrey, England were to begin six months industrial action short of striking. The Fire Brigades Union members were to ban overtime and refuse cover for staff shortages of senior officers. They will refuse to use their own cars for Fire Brigade duties.

The firefighters voted by 94 percent majority on a 72 percent turnout to take the action. The Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is underfunded and has cut seven fire engines on the night shift and 70 jobs.

Week-long strike by UK driving examiners

Large Goods Vehicle driving examiners walked out Monday for a week in Bredbury, Greater Manchester in northwest England. Talks to resolve the long-running dispute at the conciliation service Acas had broken down.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) union members at the Driving, Vehicle and Standards Agency (DVSA) are protesting longer working days, staff shortages and increasing workloads.

In August, IT workers at the DVSA went on strike for a month.

Strike at UK tax office

Tax office workers in Ealing, London walked out on a second half-day strike in a month last Thursday.

The PCS union members are opposing plans to shut their office and relocate it to the other side of the city—too far for workers to travel so they would be faced with redundancy.

UK education workers at two London schools strike against academisation

UK staff at St Angela's and St Michael's Catholic schools in Newham, East London, walked out December 11 in opposition to becoming academies.

Academies are schools that are publicly funded but privately run, established as part of the drive to privatisation.

UK engineers at Felixstowe strike vote against outsourcing

Engineering workers at UK's Felixstowe docks in Suffolk have voted overwhelmingly for strikes.

The 110 Unite union members at the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company voted by 98 percent to walk out and 100 percent for action short of striking to oppose outsourcing their jobs to a subcontractor.

UK striking library workers win support

UK library workers in Bromley, southeast London, are continuing an indefinite strike they began in the summer. Subcontractor GLL plans to slash frontline jobs.

Unite union members have raised over £20,000 in less than a week to support the strikers.

Refuse workers in English Midlands voting on strike action

UK refuse workers employed by outsourcing company, Serco, at the West Midlands borough of Sandwell began a strike vote on December 20. The GMB union members are protesting the instruction by their employer to contravene health and safety measures to accommodate extra workload.

According to the GMB the extra workload resulted from a new housing estate and to incorporating rounds normally done by other Serco staff. The vote closes on January 6.

Office cleaners in northwest England to walk out

Cleaning staff at the HM Revenues and Customs (tax) offices on Merseyside in northwest England are to walk out on Friday. Friday's strike will be the fifth round of strike actions this year.

The workers are employed by outsourcing company ISS. The Public and Commercial Services union members are seeking a pay increase and want holiday and sick pay entitlement in line with directly employed civil service staff.

Strike vote at Welsh power plants

Workers at First Hydro power stations in north Wales voted by 97 percent to strike and 99 percent for action short of strikes.

The Unite union members at the Dinorwig and Ffestiniog plants are opposing a pay offer. The union says it will announce strike dates soon unless the pay offer is improved.

Welsh road gritters two-day walkout

Road gritters employed by the Plaid Cymru-led Carmarthenshire County, Wales struck for two days. The Unite members were demanding winter gritting work be made contractual and to be paid their hourly rate.

Strike threat at Northern Ireland social benefits office

Around 50 workers at Jobs and Benefits MOU (Mail Opening Units) offices in Coleraine and Limavady in Northern Ireland were to strike on Monday, for two weeks. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance members, responsible for opening mail and inputting data, are in an unresolved pay dispute.

German Lufthansa airline cabin crew to call further strikes

The UFO union has announced it could call further strikes after the Christmas holiday period. The union ongoing talks with Lufthansa management had failed.

Lufthansa cabin crew held a well-supported 48-hour strike in early November that led to the airline cancelling 1,300 flights. WSWS wrote at the time, "The broad support for the strike is due to the working conditions for Lufthansa flight attendants, which have worsened dramatically in recent years. The job of a steward at Lufthansa, considered well-paid and secure 20 years ago, has degenerated over many years into a low-paid, insecure and highly demanding profession."

Nokia engineer sacked following strike in Finland

On December 19, Nokia sacked a shop steward at its factory in the city of Espoo in Finland. The sacked engineer, who had worked for the company for 25 years, took part in an official three-day strike earlier in the week.

The company claims the engineer turned off power to switches. The worker says he turned off the power because the strike meant no one would be available to monitor the switches. Nokia says the switches were linked to remote devices outside the country.

The sacked shop steward's union condemned the action, and said it is considering options including industrial action in his defence.

Finland has seen tens of thousands on strike recently. The issues driving the strike wave—austerity, rising inequality, attacks on wages, and growing opposition to the entire political establishment—are the same as those radicalising working people around the world.

The strike by technology workers was against a wage offer of 0.5

percent for 2020. The two-week strike by postal workers in November was against the transfer of 700 parcel delivery workers to an outsourced subsidiary of Posti (the Finnish national post service), resulting in wage cuts of up to 30 percent. In response, thousands of transport workers launched a solidarity strike, resulting in the cancellation of some 300 flights by national airline Finnair.

Four-months-long hospital strike continues in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe hospital doctors are continuing their four-month long strike despite sackings and attempts to bribe staff back to work.

Alongside the public sector workers, doctors are demanding to be paid in US dollars because of inflation—out of control at 500 percent—making travel to work impossible. Real wages have fallen 15-fold, while hospitals lack basic equipment such as drugs, bandages, gloves and syringes.

A total of 448 striking Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association members have been sacked, including fifty-seven senior doctors coming out in support of their junior colleagues.

The Senior Hospital Doctors Association members accuse the government of abandoning the hospitals and are appealing to industry to fund equipment, and to patients and relatives to buy drugs to provide six-weeks emergency service cover over the festive season.

The senior doctors are threatening to resign en masse and accept job offers they are receiving daily from around the world.

Nigerian aides to senators demonstrate over unpaid wages

Federal senate aides demonstrated in front of the Nigerian parliament in Abuja Thursday last week over wages. The state representatives' assistants have not been paid for up to six months.

Aides to the Bayelsa representative have been refused pay by the National Assembly management for six months. Those who have been paid had their income cut.

Training sessions since June have also been cut, though a training session has been scheduled for the two days before Xmas when the staff would be travelling home for the break.

The demonstration was ignored by the Assembly officials with no one present to respond to the protest.

Nigerian oil workers' stoppage over Chevron's refusal to honour annual payments

Workers at US-based Chevron, an oil and gas producer in Nigeria, have blocked the company's head offices in Lagos over annual entitlements.

Chevron oil workers are on a limited strike in defence of an annual payment for December and January, which management are refusing to pay this year.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria members refused to allow office staff into the building to carry out normal working but let senior management through the picket to sort out their demands. Two workers instead of the usual 10 are working at each plant.

Chevron, involved in many oilfields in Nigeria, threatened to shut down operations, which produce 350,000 barrels a day.

The Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) union threatened to call a strike in August when Chevron stated it was reducing operations in the country and laying off 70 percent of the workforce.

When the company illegally sacked 500 workers in its gas production sector, the government intervened and although the issues were not resolved NUPENG did not call action.

Other major oil companies such as Shell and Exxon have also been reducing their operations in Nigeria claiming political uncertainty.

Nigerian postal staff demonstrate over threat to jobs

Postal workers demonstrated at the Nigerian Ministry of Finance over threatened job losses, closing it for an hour. The government intends to transfer stamp duty collections to the Federal Inland Revenue Service.

The Senior Staff Association of Statutory Corporations and Government Owned Companies demanded a government official address the reason for the transfer.

Nigerian power workers threaten to resume strike

Nigeria's power generating and distribution workers on national strike last week are threatening a further walkout.

The National Union of Electricity Employees union called off the stoppage after one day when the government promised to address the issues. The workers were demanding outstanding wages, the payment of dues, and protesting sackings since the company was privatised and the refusal of the government to negotiate.

Nigerian Labour Minister Chris Ngige has now designated the stoppage an inter-union dispute between the NUEE and the Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies (SSAEAC), which opposed the strike. He said the strike cost the country billions of Naira and is threatening an investigation backed by SSAEAC and legal action against NUEE.

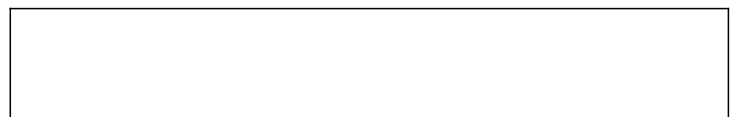
South African hospital workers threaten stoppage over pay parity

Cleaners, orderlies and messengers on a go-slow at the Edendale hospital Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa are threatening to strike over pay.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) at the 900-bed hospital are demanding to be placed in the correct pay category. The workers are in category two pay banding, whereas in other hospitals workers doing the same job are category three with higher wages.

The staff further complain they have not received a uniform allowance since 2010 and are expected to provide their own on a salary of less than R10,000.

NEHAWU called off a strike over the same issue in August.





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