

Nurses strike in Northern Ireland for pay parity; Zimbabwe municipal workers refuse pay offer as hospital strike continues and teachers plan walkout

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 January 2020

### Northern Ireland nurses strike over pay parity and staff shortages

Northern Ireland health workers' unions have called off action that saw thousands of health care staff on strike for five days from January 10. Strikers included 9,000 Royal College of Nurses (RCN) members, on strike for the first time in their 103-year history.

Further walkouts were planned for next week. The action was called to protest the pay disparity with nurses on the UK mainland, as well as severe staff shortages resulting from the poor pay.

Health minister, Robin Swann, in the newly installed Stormont assembly, agreed to meet with union leaders to discuss closing the pay gap. Unison, Unite and the RCN, calling the talks "positive," called off the action Thursday. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance has expressed concern at the amount of money pledged in the pay deal and has not called off its industrial action.

### Strike threat by French ski resort staff

French ski resort staff in the Stalinist CGT union have given notice to strike beginning February 15. The action would coincide with the beginning of the French school holiday break, which sees a surge in ski resort bookings.

Seasonal workers such as ski resort staff are entitled to payments from the Pôle emploi to cover off-season periods when no work is available. The Macron government wants to change the way off-season payments are calculated. Seasonal workers say the changes will leave them worse off.

The ski workers will join the tens of thousands of French workers and yellow vest protesters demanding an end to President Macron's attacks on pensions.

### Strike by UK hospital security staff at London hospital

Security staff working for outsourced company Noonan at St George's University Hospital Trust in southwest London began 15 days of strikes

on Monday.

The United Voices of the World union members are seeking parity of working conditions with directly employed National Health Service staff, including being paid sick pay from day one rather than after three days. They also want 25-30 days leave rather than the current 20.

The hospital trust called the police to the picket line who arrested a UVW legal representative, but later let him go, having no legal basis to hold him.

### Postal workers set to strike in Bootle, England

UK postal workers at the Bootle and Seaforth delivery depots on Merseyside are to strike on Saturday and the following Monday. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) members are taking action over the sacking of two colleagues for alleged gross misconduct stemming from a protest action last year.

The staff were sacked following unofficial action at the Bootle depot in October last after a manager allegedly made racist remarks towards a Muslim worker. Other staff are facing disciplinary action over the incident.

In October, 110,000 CWU members voted by a 97 percent majority on a 76 percent turnout to mobilise against attacks by the Royal Mail Group on their job security, terms and conditions. The CWU capitulated when the High Court ruled the strike illegal, in an attack on democratic rights.

### Strike threat by Finnish technology workers

Technology workers in Finnish firms such as Nokia, are threatening a two-week stoppage from January 27. The PRO trade union members are demanding a pay rise. The PRO represents around 120,000 white collar/managerial staff.

Talks between PRO and employer representatives broke down when the employers insisted workers carry out unpaid overtime when necessary. Ahead of the strike threat, workers are operating an overtime ban and refusing to swap shifts.

The PRO leadership said it is willing to resume talks to avert strike

action.

### **Italy: Alitalia air traffic control and airline staff walk out**

Tuesday air traffic control and staff at the Italian airline Alitalia held a four-hour strike beginning at 1pm January 14. Originally planned as a 24-hour strike, it was reduced to four hours after the intervention of the Italian government. Alitalia cancelled around 140 flights.

The Federation of Transport Workers members walked out because of disputes between the publicly owned air traffic control provider, ENAV, and private airline carriers Air Italy, EasyJet and Alitalia. The dispute has led to the companies failing to keep to nationally agreed bargaining contracts.

Union spokesman, Fabrizio Cuscito, reported on the Chinese news website *Xinhuanet*: “We need a reform of the rules for competition between companies and we need specific regulations against failure to apply the national collective bargaining contract.”

### **Road hauliers in Slovakia walk out**

Road hauliers in Slovakia began strike action January 7, parking up their trucks on major roads in towns and cities throughout the country.

Members of the Union of Slovakia’s Road Hauliers’ are demanding a halving of the amount they pay in road tax and for the current toll system to be suspended, pending its takeover by a different company.

On Monday, the hauliers targeted freight traffic leaving and entering the country at border crossing points. Later that day they suspended their action after the Slovak prime minister, Peter Pellegrini, promised meaningful talks if the action ended.

### **Strike threat by nurses in Algarve region of Portugal**

Nurses in the Algarve region of Portugal have threatened a stoppage on January 24, with further possible strikes in February. The Portuguese Nurses Union (SEP) members are demanding their employer, the Regional Health Administration (ARS) commit to promises made over career advancement and related pay increases.

In September, the ARS promised to address the question of promotion, but the nurses say career progression is frozen. An SEP spokesperson stated that currently there are nurses in employment who have worked 18 years with no progression.

The strike will hit the three hospitals and numerous health centres in the Algarve.

In January last year, nurses across Portugal took part in four-day rolling strikes for increased pay and enhanced conditions. It was part of a drive by Portuguese workers for improved pay and conditions.

### **Week of protests in Lebanon**

Workers across Lebanon came out on the streets Tuesday declaring a

“week of anger.” They were protesting government corruption, the ongoing economic crises and political paralysis.

The action included the blocking of roads and pickets outside banks and government departments.

The protests come three months after similar protests last October.

### **Zimbabwe workers refuse derisory pay offer as hospital strike continues and teachers plan walkout**

Zimbabwe public sector workers have rejected a 100 percent pay rise offered by the government, as annual inflation stands at 600 percent. The Apex council, a federation of several public service unions, has failed to get its members to accept the government’s pay offers.

The civil service unions entered further negotiations with the National Joint Negotiating Council last Friday seeking a wage equivalent to US\$ 475 based on the prevailing inter-bank rate.

Following last week’s meeting, the government rejected a demand by workers in 15 civil service unions for a US dollar linked wage. The government proposes cushioning allowances (sporadic payments in response to inflation) already rejected by workers.

The Senior Hospitals Doctors Association (SHDA) members continue to strike although a no work/no pay rule has been imposed and, the government claim, junior doctors are returning to work. The SHDA say they will not return until their demands for a properly resourced health service are met.

Junior doctors cannot carry out their duties without the supervision of senior doctors. SHDA says adequate care cannot be given to patients because of the lack of basics such as surgical gloves and broken critical equipment.

SHDA members came out in support of the junior doctors’ nearly five-month-old strike. The junior doctors’ demands include payment in US dollars, equipment to carry out their jobs, and an end to the flexihours system for nurses and other hospital staff.

Teachers have rejected the government offer and will boycott a return to school Tuesday this week, as they cannot afford travel expenses, declaring “incapacitation” rather than calling it a strike.

### **Tourists support striking Robben Island museum workers in South Africa**

Around 250 workers at South Africa Robben Island museum are continuing their strike for a nine percent pay increase, originally a 15 percent demand.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) dropped demands for full employment for casual workers and a long service bonus after management claimed they could not afford to pay. Management have refused to budge from a 6.5 percent offer along with imposing a no work/no pay decree.

They called the police to intimidate strikers and contracted private ferry operators to take tourists to the island.

Tour visits have been cancelled and disappointed tourists reimbursed. Many tourists showed sympathy for the strike, including American students, set for a visit to the island, who joined the picket lines.

The *Dispatch Live* reported one student saying, “Despite having tickets, we chose not to tour because we felt it was not ethical to tour a site that commemorates the struggle while the island’s workers continue to

struggle.”

The prison island turned World Heritage-listed museum is where anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for almost 27 years.

### **South African transport workers stop bus company over unpaid wages**

South African bus drivers at the Nelson Bay Integrated Public Transport System (IPTS) are continuing their four-week strike over unpaid wages. Of the 400 workers employed by the company, 300 drivers, conductors and office cleaners, who launched the strike, are not union members.

Spectrum Alert which runs the IPTS last week claimed workers were returning to work and threatened to fire those still on strike. However, on Monday the remaining workers joined the strike and paralysed the company.

Spectrum hired new drivers to scab on the strike in violation of a contract agreement. Pickets stopped them going into work with roadblocks and burning tyres. Police attacked the strikers with stun grenades and teargas canisters.

Spectrum has been paying workers sporadically over several months, claiming the Port Elizabeth authorities have not released funds to the company for the payment of wages.

### **South African municipal union protest over unpaid wage agreement after calling off strike**

On Monday, around 100 shop stewards protested outside Tshwane House, headquarters of the Tshwane city municipality in North Gauteng, Pretoria. The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members were protesting the non-payment of a pay increase agreed from December. They appealed to the municipality to make the payment to avoid further protests.

A strike by municipal workers took place last August over a pay increase for managers and group leaders based on an upgrading of the City’s status from a category 9 to category 10 city. This meant staff in upper managerial posts were given a mandatory 18 percent pay rise, but the general workforce received no increase.

SAMWU and the Independent Municipal Allied Trade Union (IMATU) called off the strike after the government agreed on a joint commission with the unions into the status increase for the general workers. Strikers were promised a lump sum varying from R7,000 to R15,000, a week after the strike.

The incoming Democratic Alliance opposed the payment and pushed it back to December. An assessment of the pay differences of category 9 and 10 cities around the country showed that Pretoria’s workers were underpaid.

### **Nigerian Trade Union Congress agree to postpone minimum wage deadline**

After most Nigerian states ignored the deadline to implement the minimum wage (MW), the unions conceded a new deadline of January 31. Only six out of 36 states have implemented the new rate of N30,000

agreed to begin in the New Year.

Nigeria’s Trade Union Congress are threatening industrial action in the states that renege on the new date. The “new” MW was supposed to begin November 2018, when unions calculated N66,000 was needed. Inflation was 12 percent last year.

Nigeria last updated its MW figure in 2011 to N18,000, which workers never received, if they were paid at all.

### **Nigerian Ondo resident doctors strike at university hospital over unpaid wages**

Resident doctors at the University of Medical Sciences Teaching Hospital in Ondo state went on strike on January 10 to demand six months unpaid wages. The hospital management contests the arrears, saying it is at most over three months.

Although there is no agreement over the amount due, managers say they are willing to pay doctors their “owed” wages at the end of next week.

### **Kenyan university staff plan national strike over unpaid wage agreement**

Kenya university staff are set to strike on January 20. The University Academic Staff Union (UASU) members are demanding part payment of Sh8.8 billion agreed for 2017-21 that should have been paid to November last year.

Initially UASU claimed Sh13.8 billion, but they later accepted a Salaries and Remunerations Committee’s revised offer.



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