

Workers protests continue over lack of personal protective equipment; South African unions back premature reopening of the mines

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.

Small business owners in Israel demand more action from government on COVID-19

Small business owners in Israel and the self-employed have been protesting over the last few weeks to demand more support to avoid the growing numbers of bankruptcies. They are also demanding the Israeli government make good on its promises of financial support.

On Wednesday, heads of the Israeli trade union federation, Histadrut and the small business organisation Lahav met to discuss COVID-19.

South African hospital workers in Port Elizabeth walk out to demand personal protective equipment

Workers at the Port Elizabeth Zwide Township Dora Nginza Hospital, South Africa, walked out to protest the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), demanding a compensation allowance to cover the threat from the coronavirus.

The workers marched through the hospital calling everyone out.

The hospital is to be a venue for testing for the infection and an isolation facility. A National Education Health and Allied Workers Union shop steward said the hospital had not budgeted for its new role or prepared to prevent staff getting sick.

Workers also fear taxis will refuse to transport them to work.

Nurses in South African hospital refuse to treat COVID-19 patients without PPE

Nurses at Glen Grey hospital in South Africa's Eastern Cape refused to treat 16 patients infected by COVID-19 because they lack PPE.

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA)

members have been threatened with disciplinary action by the hospital manager.

The infected patients have been moved to a boarding house and are in quarantine for 14 days before returning to the hospital to be checked.

All hospitals are expected to test for the virus and those infected are sent to a regional hospital.

DENOSA is consulting its legal team regarding nurses at Morningside Mediclinic in Sandton, Johannesburg. Twelve staff members tested positive for the infection last week. The union says it is waiting for management to provide evidence to confirm it took all measures possible to protect the staff.

South African retail workers sacked for wanting to negotiate a coronavirus working hours bonus

South African Pick-n-Pay (PnP) retail workers were sacked on April 11 for refusing to sign up to an imposed bonus for working as essential workers during the pandemic.

Considering they are risking their lives, the workers demanded the right to negotiate the amount on offer.

The 70 contract employees at the Cape Town PnP Philippi distribution centre on the night shift were told by the agency a bonus of R500 was agreed with management for the lockdown in April and May.

Workers thought they had the right to negotiate the bonus and refused to sign up. Their agency employers responding by walking out of the meeting. Employers then sacked the workers and said they had gone on strike—illegal for essential workers under the lockdown.

There were 3,635 confirmed coronavirus cases as of this writing in South Africa and 65 fatalities.

South African mining companies push for return to work; unions refuse to mobilise members

Opposing an appeal to its members in a fight for safety measures against the coronavirus and a premature return to work, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union has taken court action against the

African National Congress government.

The government exempted 129 mines from lockdown—extended until the end of April—but the mining companies, such as Implats, are pushing for full production immediately.

This would put miners' lives at risk as they travel down the mine in cages squeezed together or work in teams at the pit face.

Initial sanctions barred production, but allowed for the care and maintenance of the pits. The Minerals and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe says if production does not resume, the mines will degrade.

Despite there being no safe exit strategy when lockdown ends, National Union of Mineworkers general secretary David Sipunzi declared: "We have agreed with Harmony Gold that when the lockdown ends on April 30, workers will be utilising May 1, which is Workers' Day, to travel from their homes to their various workplaces."

The Solidarity union also supports the premature back-to-work drive.

South African public servants' union substitutes court action for class struggle

The KwaZulu-Natal branch of the Public Servants Association of South Africa took legal action against the government because public servants have been working without PPE since lockdown began on March 27.

The union took CEO of the Ekuhlengeni Psychiatric Hospital to court, claiming the CEO has put staff and patients' lives at risk.

Malawian health workers strike and demonstrate to demand PPE

Hospital workers at Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi are out on strike to demand PPE.

In response, Malawi's health minister said the staff are making unrealistic demands. This was countered by a nurses' sit-in with placards saying, "If our demands are unrealistic come and work [at the hospital]."

On April 24, nurses walked out at the Chikwawa district hospital and a contingent of staff the following day marched to the District Commissioners office—one of their slogans saying, "Don't send us to war without weapons."

The infections in Malawi on Monday were 17 and two deaths.

Nigerians killed by police/military actions imposing coronavirus lockdown

Over a hundred complaints were registered over police and military random killings since Nigeria's lockdown, which started March 29 for 14 days and was extended a further two weeks to the end of April.

Four women and a young girl died in a rush to claim a \$13 payout and free clothing in Borno State, Nigeria. The crowd of 5,000 desperate residents stampeded to take advantage of the state governor's handout.

On April 22, coronavirus infections stood at 782 with 25 deaths. By April 16, security operatives had killed 18 civilians during enforcement of a total lockdown in major cities, according to the National Human Rights Commission. By that stage, coronavirus has killed 12 people.

Liberian specialist doctors stay away from work over coronavirus safety concerns

Resident doctors at Liberia's John F. Kennedy Memorial Medical Centre are refusing to go to work.

The 50 doctors say they will not be involved in clinical activities until the practice of exposing them to COVID-19 infected patients ends.

The doctors are at the hospital for specialist training, but one of their colleagues was infected by the virus. Rather than being isolated he was sent home, putting his family and others in danger.

In a letter to the administration, the doctors demanded they have a place to self-isolate and that they are tested with or without symptoms.

There has been no response to date from the hospital.

Rwandan data clerks protest on WhatsApp over unpaid contract

Rwandan Data Entry Clerks (DEC) have formed a WhatsApp group of about 65 complainants to demand the Rwandan Education Board pay them.

About 100 DEC's have not been paid for work collating information on education examinations in 2019, valued at around Rwf410,000.

Trade Union Congress supports Ghanaian president's back to work call

As the pandemic just begins in Africa, the Ghanaian Trade Union Congress (TUC) supports the lifting of the three-week lockdown, covering Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Kasoa.

TUC leader Dr. Yaw Baah pledged support for the government led by President Akufo-Addo to "restore growth to our economy so that businesses will flourish once again."

The rate of infection in Ghana has risen to 934 with 9 fatalities. Renowned pathologist, Prof Agyemang Badu Akorsah opposes the premature lifting of the lockdown.

Kenyan journalists face pay cuts and job losses over coronavirus

Journalists and newspaper workers working from home because of the coronavirus pandemic complain their wages have been cut by around 30 percent although their expenses have increased.

The Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) members have to upgrade their computer speeds, plus an increased cost on electricity use.

The KUJ is taking a court case out against employers that have imposed wage cuts.

The journalists and the media complain they have been designated essential services, but their incomes are not being subsidised or protected by government and many jobs are being lost.

Walkout by postal workers in Eastern England over COVID-19 fears

UK postal workers at the Bury St. Edmunds delivery office in Suffolk held a 90-minute unofficial walkout on April 17. They were protesting management's introduction of an additional workstation to cope with the rising volume of parcels from online shopping. This has made safe social distancing impossible.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) members returned to work after a meeting between CWU officials and management.

Last month saw walkouts in Southwark, London and Bridgewater in the south west. This month, postal workers at several other Royal Mail sites have taken unofficial action over their safety concerns, including Chatham, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Warrington, Didcot, Edinburgh, Alloa and Fife.

In March, the CWU cancelled national industrial action to oppose attacks on jobs and working conditions by their employer, Royal Mail, despite a near 95 percent vote in favour. Within hours of announcing the result, the CWU announced it would not call any of its 110,000 members out. Instead it offered the workforce as an "additional emergency service" during the coronavirus pandemic, despite a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safety measures.



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Protest by hospital security staff at UK London hospital over PPE

UK security staff employed by outsourcing company, Bidvest Noonan, at St. Georges medical school in south London, are protesting lack of COVID-19 PPE. Some United Voices of the World union members walked off site on one occasion.

The workers have been involved in an ongoing dispute over zero-hour contracts and want to be employed on terms and conditions in line with directly employed National Health Service staff—including six months sick pay and 28 days holiday leave.

Protests in Ireland by Debenhams' furloughed store staff

Irish Debenhams workers held protests outside stores in Waterford, Cork and Dublin over a no redundancy package being in place after the UK-based retail store went into administration.

The troubled chain called in receivers after going into lockdown, following falling sales last year, which saw some of its stores close.

The company has 11 branches in the Irish republic, employing around 1,500 directly and 500 in in-store concessions. The staff are currently on a 12-week coronavirus furlough but when that ends the staff will be unemployed.

Irish police broke up the Dublin protest citing COVID-19 social distancing regulations.

Dutch teachers express concern over schools reopening

Primary schools in the Netherlands are to open after the May holidays and secondary schools possibly in June. LIA, the teachers' action group and union, have expressed concern at the decision. Teachers feel the decision is premature and not based on scientific evidence. They say they should decide themselves if it is safe to return to school.