

National public sector strike in South Africa; health workers' stoppage spreads in Kenya; union ends long-running dispute at London's Tate Gallery

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.

Africa

Public sector workers hold nationwide strike in South Africa

Thousands of South African workers held a nationwide strike Wednesday, demonstrating in the streets of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and other major cities.

South Africa's four main labour federation members demonstrating included teachers, health workers, transport workers and other public servants. Many of their demands were in response to the ANC government's failure to provide for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also protested at the lack of health and safety in the workplace, the freezing of public sector wages, redundancies, poor public transport, corruption in government and inequality.

South Africa records 685,155 coronavirus cases with 17,248 fatalities.

South African train workers halt rail service in salary dispute

South African rail workers went on indefinite strike Monday at Gautrain, the 80-km-long rapid transit rail system that links its international airport in Johannesburg with Pretoria.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members are demanding an 8 percent wage increase after management offered 4 percent and refused to negotiate. Workers demonstrated outside the offices of the operating company, Bombela.

South African mineworkers to strike for living wage

Mineworkers at three South African mining companies, De Beers, Petra and Exarro, are to strike for pay increases to cope with rising food, rent and fuel prices.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members at De Beers are demanding an 8 percent wage rise. The company has offered 1.5 percent. De Beers recorded a 176 percent increase in diamond sales in the last year.

At Exarro, the biggest coal supplier to state-run utility company Eskom, the NUM members are demanding a 7.5 percent wage increase, but the company offered 5 percent. At Petra Diamonds, workers were offered a 4 percent rise.

South African miners stand firm in fight over pay and conditions

South African mineworkers refused to sign a wage agreement with employer Kumba Iron Ore, the largest iron ore producer in Africa, after the company tried to reduce their three-year-cycle sick leave entitlement from 120 days to 30.

The NUM members say they will not give away their sickness benefits.

Health strikes spread across Kenya

Health workers in more than 10 counties across Kenya are taking strike action.

A doctors' strike in Mombasa began on October 1. Doctors are attending to emergencies only.

Nurses and doctors in western Kenya are preparing a stoppage to demand improvements in their pay, allowances and working conditions.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists' Union issued strike notices in Nandi, Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo-Marakwet and Turkana counties.

In Baringo county, the local government made an agreement with two unions—the Kenya Union of Clinical Officers and the Kenya National Union of Nurses—and workers returned to work a week ago.

There are no reports of coordination between strikes in different counties.

There are 39,907 recorded COVID-19 cases and 748 deaths in Kenya.

Current and former staff protest maltreatment by Tuskys in Kenya

Current and former members of staff employed by Tuskys, the biggest retail store in Kenya, staged protests in Kisii on September 30, against non-payment of salaries.

More than 1,800 employees were made redundant at branches across the country. Staff had already agreed to accept a pay cut.

Citing financial problems, Tuskys has not paid thousands of its direct and contract employees for July and August. Salary arrears are more than Sh320 million.

Mozambique truck drivers strike for better conditions

Over 200 truck drivers in Mozambique walked out on October 1, to protest against poor working conditions and illegal behaviour by their various employers.

The drivers parked their trucks on the main access highway north to south to the capital, Maputo. They said they would only leave when their demands were met.

Antonio Ferro, chairperson of the Mozambican Association of Truck Drivers, said, "Our wages are low. When we make long journeys...they give us an allowance of only 3,000 meticais (US\$42), although they know that we will spend several days on the road."

Europe

Trade union ends Tate gallery workers' strike in UK capital

After 42 days of strike action, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union at the Tate art gallery's commercial arm ended its stoppage on October 1. This followed talks mediated by the government's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service with Tate Enterprises management.

Details of the final offer are yet to be made public, but include job losses, improved redeployment and re-employment measures within Tate Enterprises for some staff. Staff threatened with redundancy will have preferential access to apply for vacancies within the Tate organisation, and there will be enhanced redundancy terms for those made redundant.

In June, the museum announced plans to cut 313 jobs from its commercial arm. Those facing redundancy are employed in retail, catering and publishing services across Tate Enterprises.

The workers voted by a near 90 percent majority on a large turnout to strike. On August 12, the Tate confirmed the job cuts.

The strikers' demands included that the Tate use 10 percent of a government £7 million grant to defend jobs, that no redundancies take place while senior staff are in receipt of six-figure salaries, and that the gallery join the union in demanding a bigger bailout from the government.

An open letter in support of the striking Tate gallery workers was signed by 300 artists, including 2008 Turner prize winner Mark Leckey, as well as four of last year's winners. Renowned filmmaker Ken Loach also signed.

Strike ballot at London's Heathrow Airport

Balloting of workers employed by Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) began on Thursday. The ballot is due to close November 5. HAL intends to fire and rehire its 4,000 workers on worse pay and conditions. Under the new contract, Unite union members, including airside operatives, engineers, firefighters and security staff, would lose a quarter of their pay, around £8,000.

HAL is using the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic to push through long-sought cuts in pay and conditions. HAL's chief executive was paid £3 million in salary and pensions last year, and directors were each paid around half a million.

The Unite union is desperate to avoid strike action, saying it has overseen the loss of 800 jobs at the airport through voluntary redundancies and would be prepared to accept a temporary cut in pay and conditions. Its offer was rejected by HAL management.

Unite regional coordinating officer Wayne King said, "We urge HAL to drop these appalling fire and rehire plans and instead enter into constructive and honest negotiations with Unite."

Redundant retail staff picket Irish ruling party office

Irish workers made redundant by retailer Debenhams picketed the office headquarters of government coalition party Fianna Fail on October 1. The date marked 175 days of protest by the redundant Debenhams staff.

In April, Debenhams closed all its 11 stores in the Irish republic with the loss of 1,000 directly employed workers and a similar number of concession outlet workers.

The Mandate union members are seeking enhanced redundancy terms as laid out in a previous agreement. The liquidator KPMG has offered an additional €1 million on top of statutory terms to be shared among redundant staff, which workers rejected. KPMG has refused to reopen talks with the Mandate union.

Debenhams is also carrying out cuts among its workforce in England. On top of closures and 4,000 job losses announced earlier in the year, the company announced a further 2,500 job losses last month in the UK, with the closure of department stores and distribution centres.

The unions have organised no industrial action, limiting their demands to no compulsory redundancies and to be included in talks to facilitate restructuring.

Strike by UK rail sleeper staff

Rail staff at the Serco-run Caledonian sleeper service began a 48-hour strike on Sunday. The sleeper service runs overnight from London to various destinations in Scotland. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are protesting Serco's failure to provide sufficient berths for onboard staff to enable them to take rest breaks.

Picket lines were mounted at stations including Euston, Fort William, Glasgow and Inverness. The workers are to hold a further 48-hour strike beginning October 11, as well as taking action short of a strike.

Protest by food delivery workers in York, England

Delivery drivers working for Deliveroo held a protest in York, England,

this week. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) members protested outside a Five Guys chain restaurant to highlight the issue of waiting time. They can wait up to 40 minutes while food is prepared for delivery. As they are paid per delivery, this can mean them earning less than £4 an hour.

According to the IWGB website, Five Guys, along with Wagamama, are Deliveroo's biggest clients.

Protest by UK musicians over impact of COVID-19 on jobs and lack of government support

On Tuesday, around 400 UK professional freelance musicians protested in Parliament Square in London. It was organised by the #WeMakeEvents and #LetMusicLive and supported by the Musicians' Union. They were protesting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on live music and the lack of financial support threatening their livelihoods.

The musicians held a two-minute silence and then played 20 percent of Gustav Holst's "Mars" movement from *The Planets* suite, conducted by distinguished conductor David Hill. The 20 percent fraction represented the 20 percent maximum freelance musicians are entitled to under the current Self-Employed Income Support Scheme grant.

A similar demonstration took place at the same time in Birmingham's Symphony Hall in the Midlands. Musicians dressed in black also held a two-minute silence. Their protest was to highlight the plight of live music, fearing the industry is on the brink of collapse.

Strike by Norwegian oil workers

On September 30, oil production workers at Norway's largest offshore oilfield, the Johan Sverdrup, operated by Equinor, walked out. The 43 Lederne trade union members are seeking an improved pay offer. The two other unions representing offshore oil workers, Industri Energi and Safe, are not taking part in the strike.

On Monday, a further 129 Lederne members came out, bringing to six the total number of oilfields affected. With nearly 17 percent of the 1,000 offshore workforce on strike production is down around 8 percent.

Strike by power workers in Northern Cyprus

Workers at the Turkish state electricity company KIR-TFK in Turkish-controlled Northern Cyprus are taking strike action. The EL-SEN union members oppose plans to privatise the company, which is attempting to rid itself of debts. Police interrogated EL-SEN members at the Tekneçik power station to intimidate workers

Journalist organisations protest arrest of Turkish journalists

Journalist organisations have protested the recent arrest of four Turkish journalists. They were arrested for reporting that the Turkish army had tortured two detained Kurdish villagers and then thrown them from a

flying helicopter in September.

Mesopotamia Agency reporters Adnan Bilen and Cemil U?ur were arrested for reporting the abuses, along with Jinnews reporters ?ehriban Abi and Nazan Sala. A former worker, newspaper distributor ?ükran Erdem, was also detained.

The Turkey Journalists Union warned that the arrests were intended to "marginalise the journalists." Ayse Guney, of the Mesopotamia Women Journalists Platform, said the government was determined to intimidate journalists "who do not swear allegiance to them." She said, "Journalism is not a crime."

Middle East

Algerian lawyers in national court boycott

Lawyers across Algeria staged a national two-day court boycott on September 29 in support of striking colleagues in the capital, Algiers. It was reported that all scheduled trials were postponed. The week-long strike in Algiers, begun with a sit-in outside the main court on June 27, was announced to demand "respect for the right to a defence."

The National Union for the Algerian Bar Association called the action in support, protesting against violations of the right to counsel. Since the popular protests that rocked the regime of corrupt president Abdelaziz Bouteflika last year, and led to his downfall, the ruling class has increased political pressure and repression.

Lawyers say arbitrary arrests have accompanied attempts to push through a new constitution. Court action has increased against journalists and protesters as well as against corrupt allies of Bouteflika. The bar association has said that recent hearings "did not meet the criteria for a fair trial."



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