

Nigerian airport workers one-day strike; council workers continue land occupation in Zimbabwe; ballots for strikes by UK workers at Rolls Royce factory, Scottish university academic staff vote to strike

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 October 2020

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

### Africa

#### Nigerian Federal airport workers in one-day warning strike

Workers at the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) took part in a one-day warning strike October 16, despite government efforts to undermine it. The Minister of Aviation, Hadi Sirika, was prevented from addressing workers to head off the strike when the gates to FAAN headquarters were locked.

Workers are demanding the restoration of full pay. The Nigerian government owes China around \$1 billion for building four international airports in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano. This is paid for by FAAN through cuts in workers' wages.

The strike takes place under conditions of mass unemployment, poverty and inequality in Africa's most populous country—which has fueled mass protests against state violence.

#### Council workers in Zimbabwe occupy land to protest inequality

Over 1,000 council workers in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe staged a land-grab over the weekend of October 17-18 in neighbouring Manyame district in anger over their employers allowing large-scale land grabs by the rich, while denying workers land to build houses on. Workers pegged out areas in pastures and fields in protest.

They also demanded the dismissal of all the Chitungwiza municipality managers over growing inequality. Some workers worked for the council for more than 30 years but still did not own their own home.

#### Teachers in Zimbabwe continue strike despite intimidation

Teachers in Zimbabwe are continuing their stoppage for higher wages

begun September 28. Ignoring the hardship teachers face, Education Minister Cain Mathema claimed schools can function with the 29 percent of staff not taking part in the strike.

The teachers' wage is equivalent to US\$20 a month, making it impossible to live.

#### Man killed after police use violence against South African workers in strike for living wage

On October 13, police in Johannesburg, South Africa used rubber bullets against workers on the first day of their national strike against dairy distribution firm, Clover Industries. While fleeing, one man was hit by a car and died immediately.

The General Industries Workers Union of South Africa members walked out after Clover offered a five percent wage increase to workers' demand for 16 percent. They also want a housing subsidy, medical insurance, travel allowances, double pay for overtime work and casual agency workers to be made permanent employees.

Workers suffer overwork, low pay, prohibitively expensive travel costs, exorbitant rents and poor working conditions under the ANC government. The union will bring criminal charges against the police.

#### Demonstrating South African students clash with police

On October 14, hundreds of students marched to the government buildings in South African capital, Pretoria to be met with violence when police attempted to disperse the angry crowd after their petition was ignored. Six students were arrested.

The South African Students Congress members were marching as part of a national day of action to demand more funding for Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges, which is the poor relation of university education.

#### South African civil servants strike for more pay and better conditions

More than 50 employees at the National Student Financial Aid Scheme in Cape Town, South Africa have been on indefinite strike since October 5 for an eight percent wage rise and better working conditions.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union members say the strike will continue until their demands are met.

### **Kenyan doctors and registrars strike at two hospitals**

Doctors and registrars walked out at two major Kenyan public hospitals—the Kenyatta National and Mathari National Teaching and Referral hospitals—October 14. They were joined by other medical practitioners, pharmacists and dentists.

The strike threatened to bring services at the hospitals to a standstill.

### **Airport workers in Ghana strike over safety concerns**

A strike by airport workers in response to safety concerns caused the cancellation of all domestic flights in Ghana. The strike began on October 14.

Private developers have been encroaching on the airport's grounds, causing cables to be cut.

### **Europe**

### **Academic staff at Scottish university vote to strike**

Scottish staff at the Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh have voted for strike action. On a 66 percent turnout, 77 percent voted to take action over plans by the university to cut 130 jobs. The university cut 70 posts in 2017.

The University and College Union (UCU) is seeking voluntary redundancies. UCU official Mary Senior said in the Union News website, "The employer has made good progress on seeking volunteers and should now take compulsory redundancies off the table, to give staff some job security and stability, and students the reassurances they need on the learning environment. It's not too late for the university to avoid strike action but they need to act now."

### **Fuel delivery drivers in north west England to strike**

UK fuel delivery drivers employed by Hoyer Petrolog at Stanlow in Cheshire have voted by a 96 percent majority to strike. The 20 or so drivers are opposing company plans to make six workers redundant. The Unite union has announced 14 24-hour strikes to take place over the month of November. The strike would severely disrupt fuel supplies to filling stations and airports in the north of England.

### **Strike vote by aircraft engine makers at north west England factory**

UK workers at Rolls Royce's Trent jet engine blade factory in Barnoldswick, Lancashire have voted by a 94 percent majority to strike. The strike threat is in response to company plans to move the 350 jobs involved in making the blades to a facility in Singapore. The factory currently employs around 500 workers.

The Unite union is calling for a reversal of the decision or to carry out alternative work at the Barnoldswick factory, employing the same number of workers. Rolls Royce is the major employer in the town and is where the jet engine was developed.

### **Union offers to return UK workers' bonus payments at London airport if company drops fire and rehire plan**

The UK company running Heathrow Airport (HAL) is seeking to fire and rehire its staff on around 75 percent of their current wages. Some workers would lose up to £8,000 a year. Around half of HAL's 4,700 workforce would be affected, including cleaners, engineers and security staff.

The Unite union members are currently being balloted for possible strike action over the plan. The ballot runs until November 5.

Unite proposed workers return their 2019 £700 bonuses from the company if the company drops fire and rehire plans and if executives returned their bonus payment entitlements for this year and shareholders this year's profit dividends. John Kayne HAL CEO received a half million-pound bonus this year, while shareholders got £100 million in dividends. HAL rejected the proposal.

### **Hunger strike by Albanian oil refinery workers**

Some former employees of the Ballsh oil refinery in Albania, managed by the Tosk Energy Company, have been on hunger strike since the end of September. Last week, when 10 stopped due to medical problems, their place was taken by female former employees.

The refinery stopped production in September last year leaving around 700 workers out of a job. They are demanding a year's wages owed to the redundant workers. They also want the plant recommissioned.

The workers called on the Albanian prime minister to intervene, but he refused. On October 14, a group of workers broke through security guards to enter the oil refinery site. They reported the site appeared abandoned.

### **Unions postpone strike by Icelandic aluminium workers**

A planned strike by 400 workers at the Rio Tinto-owned aluminium Straumsvik smelter plant near Reykjavik, Iceland has been postponed for a week. The workers in five unions are pushing for a pay rise in line with an agreement signed by the Icelandic Confederation of Enterprises last year. Further company/union discussions will take place.

The stoppage was to take the form of rolling one-day strikes throughout different departments in the plant, to last until the end of November. From December 1, all-out strike action at the plant is planned if no agreement is reached.

### **Strike action by Irish school secretaries deferred**

A strike by Irish school secretaries in primary and secondary schools has been deferred pending a meeting of the Workplace Relations Commission scheduled for October 27. Around 1,000 Forsa trade union members have been in a long-term dispute over pay and conditions.

The two-tier system of pay leaves many school secretaries earning only €12,500 a year as their contracts only cover term time, meaning they have to sign on for unemployment benefits during school holidays.

### **Staff at Irish youth detention centre ballot for industrial action**

Staff working at the Oberstown youth detention centre in northeast Ireland are taking part in an indicative ballot. The Forsa union members are concerned a female detainee was placed in a unit which currently holds only male detainees. The staff worry it could lead to difficulties dealing with the young people.

#### **Middle East**

### **Strike by Iranian oil refinery workers**

Iranian oil refinery workers at the Parsian refinery in Lamerd, Fars province walked out over non-payment of wages. The Iranian government is facing a wave of strikes and protests over low wages and the non-payment of wages. The refinery workers took sporadic strike action over the same issue in August.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**