

Workers and youth demand jobs in Tunisia; national four-hour walk out in Italy; union betrays nurses' strike in Zimbabwe; community health workers strike continues in South Africa

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.

Middle East

Jobs protests in Tunisia

On Wednesday, protestors demanding jobs closed down the state-run Gafsa Phosphate plant. The plant is an important source of income for Tunisia and is the country's only phosphate producer.

As part of the same protest workers carried out a general strike in the northern city of Beja. It led to the closure of shops and government facilities. Young workers surrounded the governor's office in the town of Gafsa.

In 2011, country-wide protests led to the ousting of the hated corrupt dictator President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali, which sparked off the Arab Spring.

Europe

Public sector general strike in Italy

A four-hour public sector strike took place in Italy on Wednesday. It hit transport, education and health services across the country, including bus services in Rome.

The strike organised by the Unione Sindacale Italiana public sector union was to demand the defence of workers' rights, for improved workplace safety and to protest against the privatisation of public services. Attacks on public sector workers jobs and conditions have accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has experienced 52,208 deaths due to the disease and has seen a marked increase in social inequality.

Swedish construction workers set to strike

Construction workers in Sweden were set to strike today. The Byggnads trade union members are seeking a pay rise and demanding safer working conditions. They are opposed to changes proposed by the employers' body on how wages are set.

The initial stoppage will involve 1,400 workers across 87 sites. It will escalate next week with more workers out, and again in a fortnight with eventually 2,700 workers on strike.

British Gas workers to hold strike ballot

Around 20,000 workers working for British Gas will be balloted for possible strike action. An indicative ballot by the GMB members in August showed a 95 percent majority prepared to take industrial action. In July, British Gas parent company Centrica announced plans to fire and rehire the entire workforce on inferior pay and conditions.

Strike at Rolls Royce factory in Barnoldswick, northwest England continues

Workers at Rolls Royce Trent jet engine blade manufacturing facility in Barnoldswick in northwest England are continuing their strike, begun November 6, until December 24.

Management hit back by announcing it would enforce an extended Christmas break at the blade manufacturing unit from Monday until after Christmas.

Five hundred Unite union members voted by a 94 percent majority to strike against company plans to move 350 jobs involved in making blades overseas. The strikers include finish inspectors, machinists, electricians and instrumentation staff.

Management also announced it would immediately transfer work undertaken in the blade manufacturing unit to facilities in Japan, Singapore and Spain. Also, workers not involved in the dispute would be furloughed from Monday until December 18, on 80 percent of their

wages.

Unite had called for a reversal of the company decision, or for alternative work employing the same number of workers to be carried out at the Barnoldswick factory. Rolls Royce is the major employer in the town, where the jet engine was developed. Rolls Royce began production at the Barnoldswick site in 1943.

Strike continues of bus manufacture workers in northern England

Around 100 workers at the Optare bus manufacturing plant near Leeds are stepping up industrial action. The Unite union members voted by a 70 percent majority to take industrial action after the company failed to implement a pay rise agreed in November last year.

They began an overtime ban on October 14, followed by a series of 48-hour strikes and four-day strikes, the second of which began Tuesday. Optare is owned by the billionaire Hinduja brothers.

Irish health workers to strike

Irish health workers at CoAction and South Doc in Cork and Kerry voted in favour of strike action. The SIPTU union members work for Section 39 organisations, which provide health services but are not directly funded by the government. The one-day strikes will take place in December.

The action by Cork and Kerry Section 39 workers is part of nationwide action. In December, Section 39 staff in the Dublin area will be balloted.

At issue is the longstanding fight for the restoration of pay and conditions in line with staff directly employed by the Irish state. Directly employed health staff had their pay reduced following the 2008 financial crisis. This was later restored but pay and conditions for Section 39 staff have not been restored.

Around 1,000 Section 39 staff held a 24-hour stoppage in February over the issue, but further action was suspended with the pandemic.

Strike by Scottish railway guards

Guards at ScotRail based in Glasgow, Scotland are to strike Sunday over the abuse of disciplinary measures. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members will also take action for subsequent Sundays, as well as refusing to work rest days as overtime.

Meanwhile, 2,500 ScotRail workers are being balloted for strike action for a pay rise.

Strike by Icelandic coastguard helicopter mechanics continues

Mechanics responsible for the maintenance of the Icelandic coastguard service's helicopters have been on strike since November 5. The Association of Icelandic Aircraft Engineers members are seeking a pay rise.

The coastguard service has three helicopters in service, but two are out

of commission due to the strike. The third helicopter was to come out of service Wednesday for planned maintenance, leaving no helicopters available.

The Icelandic mediation service was involved in negotiations and according to press reports the strike is likely to be resolved this week. However, even if the strike is resolved it will take time to get the helicopters in service.

Africa

Over 1,200 Zimbabwean nurses struck from payroll after union betrays strike

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zimbabwe government removed over 1,200 nurses from the payroll for November, after the nurses' strike over low pay and lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) was betrayed by the union.

The Zimbabwe Nurses Association (ZINA) reached a sellout agreement to end the months-long strike. With inflation running at over 800 percent, nurses were demanding payment in US dollars. ZINA agreed a two-day working week, with shifts of up to 12 hours, to lower transport costs so nurses can live on low salaries.

The government then reneged on the agreement, with a directive to revert to normal working hours. The union told its members to defy the order as individuals, rather than mobilising the whole membership in strike action.

Nurses were told to reapply for their jobs and that they face being put on temporary contracts.

ZINA is now pleading with the government and claiming that the courts will intercede on behalf of the aggrieved nurses.

Zimbabwe has 9,508 reported COVID-19 cases and 274 deaths.

Community health workers in South Africa continue strikes and demonstrations over pay and conditions

On Thursday, thousands of South African community health workers marched nationwide for better working conditions and pay increases. In Northern Cape province hundreds of community health workers have been out for two weeks.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members also demand to be employed permanently by provincial health departments rather than outsourced to NGOs, where they lose out on pay, benefits and security.

South African hospital workers suspended after protest over unsafe conditions

Eight employees at Northdale Hospital, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa have been suspended following a protest in which the CEO of the hospital was forced out of the building.

The NEHAWU members were protesting the lack of PPE and management negligence.

South Africa has recorded 775,502 coronavirus cases with 21,201 fatalities.

Seafood workers in South Africa locked out after strike

A hundred fish processing workers at seafood company, I&J in Western Cape, South Africa were locked out of the workplace by management November 16, after striking over pay.

The Independent Commercial Hospitality and Allied Workers union members are demanding a nine percent wage increase, but the firm say they must accept 5.5 percent if they want their jobs back. The union's general secretary is barred from visiting work sites.

Gambian judicial workers on sit-down strike over pay and allowances

Gambian judicial workers are on a sit-down strike for five demands, including an end to daily pay and payment of risk allowances. The strike has brought the legal system in most courts to a standstill.

The strike began on November 18, as the courts faced a backlog of cases built up due to the pandemic when they were shut down for several months.

Strikers include bailiffs, legal secretaries, messengers, cleaners, drivers, registrars, accounts staff and interpreters. They arrive and leave at normal times but sit without working for the whole day.

"I have been working here for 21 years and still I am paid as grade one of the Government payment scale," an elderly cleaner complained. Only accounts staff, bailiffs and process servers are paid risk allowances.

A spokesperson for the strikers said, "They [the judges] are not better than us because we are all important in the Judiciary—without us they cannot work."

Health workers in Mombasa County, Kenya on strike to demand better conditions

A strike of nurses, clinical officers and other health workers in Mombasa County, Kenya has entered its second week. Only doctors are working in public hospitals.

The strikers' demands include remittance of third-party deductions, an end to salary payment delays, COVID-19 risk allowances and medical cover.

More than 78 nurses have been infected with the virus at the hospital and two tragically died.

Kenya has 79,322 reported COVID-19 cases and 1,417 deaths.



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