

Amazon workers in Germany strike for pay rise; French transport workers renew plans to strike against privatisation; 1,200 Zimbabwe nurses remain sacked after union sell-out

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 December 2020

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

48-hour and four-day strikes, the third of which began Tuesday. Optare is owned by the billionaire Hinduja brothers.

Europe

Strike by staff at London's Heathrow airport

Three-day strike by German Amazon workers

German Amazon workers held a three-day strike beginning November 26, to coincide with the start of the company's Black Friday event. The Verdi union estimated around 2,500 of its members took part.

Amazon in Germany employs around 16,000 workers. Verdi members have been involved in a long-running dispute, demanding to be paid in line with other retail staff rather than as warehouse staff.

The unions at Amazon engage in stunts while opposing the cross-border unification of its global workforce in a struggle against low pay.

During the pandemic Amazon's profits have soared and the company has expanded. After the Black Friday surge in Amazon's stock value, CEO Jeff Bezos's wealth surpassed £100 billion.

Airport workers including baggage handlers, engineers, firefighters and other operatives at Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) held a one-day strike on Tuesday. They mounted socially distanced picket lines.

The Unite union members voted by an 84 percent majority to strike in opposition to HAL's plans to fire and rehire employees on reduced pay and conditions. Some workers could lose up to £8,000 a year, a quarter of their salaries.

A further one-day strike is planned for December 14, and a two-day strike beginning December 17.

Strike at Rolls Royce factory in Barnoldswick, England could extend beyond Christmas

Workers at Rolls Royce Trent jet engine blade manufacturing facility in Barnoldswick in northwest England pledged to continue their strike, begun November 6, until December 24. Management, however, hit back by announcing it would enforce an extended Christmas break at the factory from November 30 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 announced it would immediately transfer work undertaken in the blade manufacturing unit to facilities in Japan, Singapore and Spain—and workers not involved in the dispute would be furloughed from November 30. Unite announced it will consider further industrial action after Christmas 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

Portuguese postal workers' three-day strike

Workers at CTT, Portugal's postal service, began a three-day strike Tuesday. The National Union of Postal and Telecommunication Workers members are seeking a pay increase.

Strike continues of bus manufacture workers in northern England

Around 100 UK workers at the Optare bus manufacturing plant near Leeds are continuing their stoppage. The Unite union members voted by a 70 percent majority to take 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

at the Barnoldswick site in 1943.

Strike by fast food delivery workers in Sheffield, England

Food couriers working for food delivery app service Deliveroo, held a strike in Sheffield, England on November 26. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members formed a convoy of cars and drove past the food outlets for whom they deliver.

On the day of the strike requests to Deliveroo in the Sheffield area were told no couriers were available. In August Deliveroo announced it was getting rid of the minimum fee per delivery. The delivery workers set up the South Yorkshire Couriers Network to oppose the move.

Students at university in northwest England win partial reduction after rent strike

Students in halls of residence at Manchester University in northwest England have won a 30 percent cut in their rents, around £750 per student, following a rent strike.

The students began the strike after being instructed to remain in their accommodation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Security staff patrolled the grounds to maintain their detention. The authorities erected fences around the accommodation to further enforce their detention, but students tore it down. The rent strike was to protest the authoritarian manner of their treatment and to demand a rent decrease.

Students at Cambridge and Bristol universities also began rent strikes.

After Christmas, students face another term of disrupted learning, high rents and health dangers as the pandemic spirals out of control and the trade unions back the Conservative government's policy of keeping schools, campuses and workplaces open.

Strike by rail maintenance workers in Manchester, England

Workers at the Alstom rail maintenance facility in Manchester, England held a one-day strike Sunday. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members are protesting the imposition of a pay freeze. The workers are holding a series of strikes from 6pm-9pm through December in response to a pay freeze. These are on December 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22 and 23.

Workers at chemical plant in Hull, England ballot for industrial action

On Monday, around 90 workers at the Croda chemical plant in Hull, Yorkshire, began a strike ballot. The Unite trade union members have a long-standing grievance over holiday pay. Croda failed to incorporate holiday entitlement when creating shift rotas. The company recognised this but failed to rectify it. Some workers are owed thousands of pounds.

Croda is an international company with a turnover in excess of £1 billion.

Refuse collectors in Doncaster, England vote to strike

Refuse and recycling workers employed by outsourcing company Suez Recycling and Recovery Ltd under contract to Doncaster council, northern England have voted overwhelmingly to strike. The Unite union members will walk out on December 15, 24, 31 and January 4. Further strikes could be called.

The workers accuse Suez management of bullying and harassment. They say the company trawls historic CCTV video tapes to build a case against workers. Unite rep at Suez, Damien Nota was suspended by the company and later sacked.

The union says the sacking sabotaged efforts by Doncaster mayor, Roz Jones to resolve the dispute.

Workers at UK brewery to vote over fire and re-hire threat

Workers at the Heineken cider brewery in Hereford in the west midlands will take part in a consultative ballot. Around 200 Unite members at the brewery, which makes Strongbow and Bulmers cider brands, face being sacked and re-hired on inferior conditions.

Heineken want to enforce an inferior pension scheme, cancel Sunday shift premiums, reduce holiday pay and amend flexible working conditions. Unite claims the changes could result in some workers being thousands of pounds worse off. The union is urging the company to return to the negotiating table.

Scottish air traffic controllers to be balloted for industrial action

Scottish Air traffic control workers at Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) are to be balloted for industrial action. HIAL is proposing to close air traffic control facilities in the Scottish islands and instead remotely base the facilities in Inverness.

The Prospect union members are asked to take industrial action short of a strike from January 4 next year followed by individual one-day strikes. Removing the air traffic facilities from the islands would take around £22 million out of the local community.

Pay dispute of rehab workers in Leigh and Wigan, England ends

Workers at We Are With You, a drink and drug rehabilitation service based in Leigh and Wigan in northwest England, were involved in a long-sustained campaign of industrial action from August last year.

The Unison union members were demanding that their pay and work conditions be brought in line with those of National Health Service (NHS) staff. The workers had previously worked for the NHS and were promised their terms of employment would remain the same when they transferred to the charity.

The charity has agreed to pay the workers a lump sum plus a monthly top-up to make up for the losses in pay when they transferred from the

NHS. However, the top-up is only a temporary measure, and their pay will revert to its current level in March 2022.

Transport workers in French capital to strike over privatisation

Public transport workers in Paris are to strike on December 17. The SAT, Solidaires, Sud, UNSA and CGT union members are opposed to proposals to privatise transport systems in the Paris region. They fear their pay and conditions will worsen.

The strike was due mid-November but put back until December because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private companies will be able to bid to run services from January 2025. In October 2018, anger against austerity and growing poverty erupted in the yellow vest protests, which were met with state repression by the Macron government.

Middle East

Ongoing industrial action at Algerian logistics company

Industrial action has been taking place at the Numilog logistics and transport company in Bejaia in northeast Algeria. In July, three workers were sacked after they set up a branch of the UGTA union. When workers went on strike calling for their reinstatement, the company sacked a further 195 of the 250 workforce.

On November 18, courts ruled the workers should be reinstated. However, the Ministry of Labour and local authorities in Bejaia have not enforced the ruling. On November 25, in protest, some Numilog employees travelled to Algiers and held a sit-in at the Ministry of Labour. Ten of those taking part were arrested but released later in the day.

Africa

Zimbabwe government rejects court ruling in favour of nurses sacked after union sell-out

The Zimbabwe government has rejected court findings over its treatment of 1,200 nurses, sacked after a months-long strike over low pay and lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

High Court judge, Justice Martin Mafusire ruled the nurses had been treated unfairly when the government unilaterally ordered an end to flexitime and then terminated the employment of those who refused to comply.

The Zimbabwe Nurses Association (ZINA) took the government to court after it reneged on a sellout agreement to end the stoppage. 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 issued a directive to revert to normal working hours.

A government representative said the nurses “will have to get their salaries from the court.”

Zimbabwe has 10,129 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 277 deaths.

Workers continue strike at South African Broadcasting Corporation

Employees at the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation are planning to intensify their strike against 400 job losses, a three-year salary freeze and benefit cuts. Action began on November 16.

The redundancies are suspended until the end of December, but the Communication Workers Union members want the issue resolved immediately. They see the cost-cutting as a product of financial mismanagement, and a move towards commercialisation and dismantling of the public service.

South African public workers protest for jobs and wages

More than 100 workers marched to the Gauteng province’s Department of Infrastructure and Development in Pretoria, South Africa. They were demanding the reinstatement of all Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers who lost their jobs in March, and also for back pay.

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme in which unemployed people are given temporary work in the public sector but without the wages or benefits afforded to direct employees.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers members also want the province’s 5,000 EPWP workers to be on permanent contracts and given promised training. Though employed on temporary contracts, some have been working for eight years.

Frontline nurses at Kenyan hospital strike against bad conditions

Around 75 nurses at the Kakamega General Hospital walked out November 25 against bad working conditions and the lack of PPE.

Nurses have not received any risk allowance for working with COVID-19 patients, and locum nurses have not been paid for the last six months. Other concerns are the lack of testing kits and treatment for those infected with the virus.

County officials dismissed the nurses' complaints.

Kenya has 85,130 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,484 deaths.

Union calls on Nigerian academics to end long running strike

Nigerian academics who have been on strike since March are being asked to accept an agreement between the government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and return to work. The government promised N70 billion extra investment in universities.

The N70 billion comprises N40 billion for the Earned Allowance and N30 billion for the revitalisation of the university system.

The ASUU have not made public any details until they have been presented to its members.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact