

National public sector demonstration in Belgium against cuts in public spending; daily protests by workers and retirees continue across Iran over collapsing living standards; medical and dental consultants in seven-day warning strike in Nigeria over staff shortages, pay and conditions

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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### Thousands of Belgian workers in national demonstration against austerity measures

Between 25,000 and 40,000 workers in healthcare, social services, education and other public services marched and protested November 7 in Brussels, Belgium over ongoing shortfalls in public spending.

The ACV Pulse and other union members oppose staff shortages and increasing workloads in the public sector, saying more investment from the government is needed.

### Government food scientists in Belgium strike against low pay and budget cuts

Food standards scientific analysts employed by the Belgian government's Authority for Food and Economic Security (ASAE) began a series of one-day strikes Tuesday. Another nine will follow before the end of the year, each affecting a different office.

The ASAE Employees Union Association members are protesting against low wages, staff shortages and funding cuts, which leave them under-resourced and unable to do their work effectively.

### German private bus company drivers' strike for pay increase

Bus drivers in the Schleswig-Holstein area of Germany held a three-day strike November 15 to put pressure on the employers' body, Omnibus

Verband Nord (OVN), which represents 80 private companies with 1,700 buses.

The Verdi union members say OVN reneged on a previously negotiated agreement, and they threaten further stoppages if their pay demands are not met.

### Non-medical staff in French hospital stop work in dispute over pay and hours

Support staff such as secretaries, porters and laundry workers at Montelimar Hospital in France stopped work Tuesday in protest at a longer working day.

The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) members are expected to stay an extra half hour in exchange for a longer lunch break. They say they often work through their lunch anyway, without pay.

### Brewery workers at Heineken in the Netherlands strike for pay rise

Thousands of brewery workers at two Heineken breweries in the Netherlands walked out Wednesday and are threatening further stoppages if the drinks giant does not meet their demands over pay. There has not been a strike at the company for 20 years.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions and the Christian National Trade Union Federation members demand a 7 percent salary increase, but Heineken offered 5.5 percent over two years.

### Strike by rail infrastructure staff in London, UK over pay and working conditions

Workers employed by Rail for London Infrastructure (RFLI) held a 24-hour stoppage beginning Saturday, November 15.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members are in dispute over several issues, including rostering practices that lead to health and safety risks, delays in skill-based pay progression and concerns over inadequate work planning leading to compromises of safety.

RFLI is a subsidiary of Transport for London. It is responsible for the repair and maintenance of the Crossrail Central Operating Section (CCOS) of the rail network in London. CCOS makes up most of the ultramodern cross-London Elizabeth Line, opened in 2022.

### **GMB suspends strike of hospital staff in Liverpool, UK over COVID bonus as hospital agrees payment**

On Wednesday, the GMB union announced the suspension of the strike by around 130 UK workers at the Royal Liverpool Hospital, who had begun a two-week walkout on Monday. They work as caterers, cleaners and porters.

The GMB members had previously held 18 days of strikes demanding to be paid the £1,655 bonus in recognition of the stress endured working throughout the pandemic. On Monday, the hospital made an offer to pay the bonus, and the offer was accepted by the GMB members in a vote held Tuesday evening.

The bonus had been paid to all directly employed NHS staff employed during the pandemic. At that time, the workers were employed by outsourcing company ISS, but were taken back in-house in April 2023. They argued they should have been paid the bonus.

### **Protests continue in Iran over deteriorating social conditions**

Protests and strikes are continuing on a near daily basis across Iran as living standards plummet.

Sunday saw protests by emergency workers and nurses in Shiraz. Their demands included improved working conditions and payment of wages arrears. The same day saw two major protests in Tehran, as oil industry retirees and Social Security Organisation retirees held protests over their inadequate pensions.

That day also saw protests by steel industry retirees in the city of Isfahan, demanding higher pensions as inflation erodes their buying power.

Protests that took place on Saturday included one by nurses at Loghman hospital in Tehran, demanding unpaid wages and overtime pay. On the same day in Tehran teachers demanded improved pay.

Iran's unemployment rate was almost 10 percent in 2023. According to the International Monetary Fund, inflation stands at 31.7 percent this year. The collapse in living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions, grows ever worse in the face of US and Israel war preparations against the country.

## **Africa**

### **Nigerian medical and dental consultants begin seven-day nationwide strike**

Medical and dental consultants in Nigeria began a seven-day national warning strike on November 18.

Over the last five years, 1,106 out of Nigeria's 6,137 consultants left to work in other countries because of poor pay and conditions. A third of those remaining are over 55 and liable to retire in the next five years.

The Medical and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) members criticise the criteria used in filling appointments, causing suitably qualified medical and dental professionals to be rejected.

MDCAN's answer to stem the migration and shortage of consultants is to raise the retirement age to 70. MDCAN also demands consultants are paid according to the Consolidated Medical Salary Structure, which determines national terms on pay and conditions.

Consultants have the highest qualification in their profession. They train doctors, do research and treat patients.

### **Bus drivers in Osun State, Nigeria walk out after police shooting**

Commercial transporters, including bus drivers, held a day of strike action in protest at the shooting and hospitalisation of the chairman of the Osun State Park Management System, in Osun State, Nigeria. The strike meant many students and children missed their classes due to lack of transport.

Nurudeen Iyanda, known locally as Alowonle, was shot in the stomach after being arrested over a domestic incident by the Osun State Police Command. He was rushed to the Osun State University Teaching Hospital in Osogbo for treatment, and is currently on a life support machine.

The police claim Alowonle was shot trying to escape from custody.

### **Metalworkers at ArcelorMittal, South Africa on indefinite strike over job losses**

Metalworkers at three of ArcelorMittal South Africa's (AMSA) eight plants walked out from November 14 after the company announced 107 jobs would go from Coke Making Battery 6 and 7.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members picketed the AMSA plant in Vanderbijlpark, south of Johannesburg. Also affected were plants at Newcastle and Vereeniging.

AMSA is among the world's biggest mining and steelmaking operations, with plants in 15 countries.

According to IndustriALL, NUMSA complained that AMSA did not offer voluntary redundancy or early retirement, or discuss with the union how jobs could be saved. Also, 200 workers stand to lose benefits due to reorganisation at the Flat Steel Plant.

A court order November 13 determined that maintenance workers should not strike. AMSA employs 6,000 workers in total.

Statistics South Africa recorded unemployment in South Africa at 33.5 percent in the second quarter of 2024.

### **Ghanaian teachers and education workers strike over their conditions of work**

Ghanaian teachers and other education workers began a nationwide strike on November 18, after years of government refusal to make any

improvement to their conditions of work.

The Teachers and Educational Workers Union of the Trade Union Congress (TEWU) members are increasingly angry at years of fruitless negotiations held by the union with government representatives.



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