

Greek and Italian public sector workers to walk out in nationwide stoppages; Portuguese educators plan strike action; unrest continues in Nigeria as oil workers' strike call met with oil price hike

## 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.*

### Europe

#### Greek public sector workers to strike

Greek public sector workers will walk out in a nationwide stoppage on November 26. Members of ADEDY, the federation of public sector unions, are demanding more protective equipment against COVID-19 and for more staff hired in the health service. They also want restoration of Easter and Christmas bonuses, abolished after the Syriza government imposed IMF cuts.

School students recently occupied around 700 schools to demand a safe education environment.

Greece has had 82,034 coronavirus cases with 1,288 fatalities.

#### General strike scheduled of Italian public sector workers

A general strike of Italian public sector workers has been called for November 25, involving education, health and transport workers.

The USI trade union members are demanding improved health and safety measures, workers' rights and an end to the privatisation of public sector services. Public transport workers in Rome will hold a half-day strike on the same date.

The Italian health service is close to being overwhelmed as in the last spike, with COVID-19 cases rising out of control. The number of cases recorded is 1,272,352 and 47,217 deaths.

#### Portuguese education staff to walk out

Teaching and non-teaching staff in Portugal are to strike from

November 30 to December 4. The Stop union members work in schools, vocational training and private and public research facilities.

They are demanding improved safety measures around COVID-19, including tests for all close contacts and temperature checks at educational facility entrances. Other demands include improved working conditions, extra staff to cover shortages and smaller class sizes.

Portugal recorded 236,015 coronavirus cases and 3,632 fatalities.

#### Strike vote by UK drivers of disabled children at London council

Drivers of buses that transport disabled children to schools in the London borough of Hackney, along with passenger assistants, have voted unanimously to strike. The more than 30 Unite union members are demanding an agreed £500 one-off lump sum in recognition of their role during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also raised health and safety concerns.

Unite has appealed to the Labour-controlled council to resolve the issue before it announces the strike dates.

#### Bus drivers in Bradford, England to hold strike ballot

Bus drivers at First Bus based at the Bowling Back Lane depot in Bradford, England will be balloted from November 23 for possible strike action. The Unite members are protesting excess overtime imposed on drivers as a result of temporary absences due to COVID-19.

Two drivers working for First Bus in nearby Leeds recently died of COVID-19, and scores of drivers were off sick from work having contracted the disease. Unite has not mounted any campaign to raise the safety issues around COVID-19 for bus drivers in Leeds.

#### Jet engine makers in Barnoldswick, northwest England continue strike action

Workers at the Rolls Royce Trent jet engine blade company in Barnoldswick will continue their series of departmental strikes until December 24. The Unite members work as finish inspectors, machinists, electricians and instrumentation staff.

The workers began industrial action at the beginning of November. The workforce of 500 voted by a 94 percent majority to strike, beginning last week, against company plans to move 350 jobs involved in making blades to a facility in Singapore.

The strike is impacting five departments at the factory making blades for the Trent jet engine. The strikers maintained a picket line of four in line with COVID-19 social distancing rules.

Unite is calling 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. The company was to meet with a panel of cross-party members of parliament this week to discuss its plans to outsource to Singapore.

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.

### **Industrial action by lecturers at Scottish college over job cuts**

Lecturers at Forth Valley College sites in Falkirk, Alloa and Stirling, Scotland began a programme of industrial action last week. The Educational Institute of Scotland members oppose the college's plans to cut 30 lecturing posts.

They voted by an 80 percent majority on a 53 percent turnout to work to rule. The action will escalate to include refusing to take an accurate attendance record of students, boycotting marking and not covering absent colleagues. The planned action will last until January 29 unless resolved.

### **Series of strikes announced by rail guards in Scotland**

Rail guards at ScotRail based in Glasgow voted to impose an overtime and rest day working ban plus a series of six 24-hour strikes to begin November 29. The further dates are December 6, 13, 20, 27 and January 3. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members are protesting the abuse of disciplinary procedures.

### **British Airways cargo handlers at Heathrow Airport to vote for possible strike action**

A ballot of around 850 cargo-handling staff working for British Airways (BA) based at Heathrow Airport in London began Thursday. The ballot closes December 7.

The Unite members are opposing BA's proposed pay cut of 20-25 percent for the cargo handlers. BA also wants to renegotiate its collective agreement with Unite and has threatened to outsource its cargo handling role to a subcontractor.

Unlike its passenger services, BA's cargo-handling business has maintained normal volumes during the pandemic. A strike vote could see action before Christmas but Unite stressed its commitment to talks under the auspices of the government mediation service, ACAS.

### **Pharmaceutical workers at BCM in Beeston, England to ballot over pay freeze**

Around 1,000 pharmaceutical manufacturing workers based at Boots Contracts Manufacturing (BCM) in Beeston, Nottinghamshire will be balloted over a year-long pay freeze.

BCM is owned by French billionaire Bernard Fraisse, who bought the plant in 2017. A previous consultative ballot of workers indicated they would be willing to take industrial action. However, a ballot for industrial action was not initiated because of the outbreak of the pandemic.

### **Drug and drink rehabilitation workers in north west England plan further strikes**

Workers at We Are With You, a drink and drug rehabilitation service based in Leigh and Wigan, are to take further strike action from November 25 to December 22.

The Unison members, in dispute since August 2019, undertook previous strikes to bring their pay and work conditions in line with those of National Health Service (NHS) staff. The workers previously worked for the NHS and were promised their terms of employment would remain when they transferred to the charity.

### **Teachers at London school strike over plans to expand school intake**

UK teachers at the Little Ilford School secondary in Manor Park London went on strike November 12. The National Education Union members were protesting plans to increase the school's intake from 1,470 to 1,800.

A two-day strike was also planned on November 18 and a three-day strike from November 24. Teachers voted almost unanimously on a turnout of over 70 percent to take the action.

### **Council workers in Northern Ireland to strike over conditions**

A one-day stoppage will take place in early December by local authority workers in Down, Mourne and Newry, Northern Ireland over pay and conditions. The strike is coordinated by Unite, GMB, NIPSA and SIPTU. A further strike may take place in the new year.

The workers are demanding the levelling up of pay and condition disparities between workers in the former separate authorities, which combined in April 2016.

### **Protest by sacked Georgian delicatessen workers**

Former employees of the Georgian House delicatessen store in Georgia along with supporters held a protest march in Tbilisi. They marched to the

French-owned Carrefour food retail store, which hosts the delicatessen.

Workers at the Tbilisi store walked out on November 9 this year, after which 13 workers were sacked. Protestors called for reinstatement of the 13, along with four employees sacked previously, the refund of fines imposed and improved working conditions.

## **Middle East**

### **Strike by Lebanese migrant workers**

Migrant workers employed as refuse collectors in the Lebanese city of Sidon came out on strike this week for a pay rise. It has led to piles of garbage accumulating on Sidon's streets.

## **Africa**

### **Nigerian oil workers' strike call over pay arrears met with fuel price increase**

Within 72 hours of a strike being declared by two oil unions over the introduction of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), the Petroleum Products Marketing Company (PPMC)—a subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation—raised the oil price from N147.67 per litre to N155.17.

IPPIS, an information communications technology payroll system initiated by the federal government, led to three months' salary arrears.

The trade unions are refusing any action against petrol price increases announced November 11, which are hitting the living standards of millions of workers.

Days after the increase the NLC and the TUC unions were still silent, not even replying to calls or messages. Only on November 17 did the NLC make a pro forma statement opposing the increase and threatening a strike if it was not withdrawn.

Nigeria has been engulfed in mass protests due to police brutality, poverty, mass unemployment and inequality.

### **Unions back Labour court ordering Kenyan doctors' strike to end**

Striking health workers in Meru County, Kenya were ordered to return to work by both the Labour court and the unions, despite not having been paid their salaries or given promised promotions.

The county authorities expect staff to work without pay, claiming they do not have the money to pay them. They also asked the court to ban the health workers from taking part in any activities or meetings.

The Kenya National Union of Nurses, Kenya National Union of Pharmaceutical Technologists, Kenya Union of Clinical Officers and the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union all signed a letter telling workers to return to work by the evening of November 15.

Kenya has 72,686 reported COVID-19 cases and 1,313 deaths.

### **South African police use violence against striking municipal workers**

Striking municipal workers in Tzaneen, Limpopo, South Africa were fired on with rubber bullets in efforts to disperse their protest in the business district. One person was injured.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members walked out November 10 over the loss of leave and housing allowances, unfair treatment by management and corruption within the municipality.

### **Striking South African municipal workers stop traffic in pay dispute**

Waste workers in Durban, South Africa went on strike for the third time this year. On Tuesday they used municipal vehicles to block traffic on a major highway in protests over pay.

The SAMWU members took national strike action in July in support of a claim for an across-the-board pay rise of 10 percent or R300.

### **Workers fight cuts at South Africa's public broadcasting company**

Employees at the South African Broadcasting Corporation picketed the state-owned broadcaster's Johannesburg offices Monday lunchtime.

The Communication Workers Union members will follow this with a full strike to protest restructuring involving 400 redundancies, a three-year salary freeze and the loss of annual and sick leave benefits.

Workers say they were not adequately consulted and see the cost cutting as a move towards commercialisation of the service.

### **Security workers in South Africa march in protest over pay**

South African security workers marched to the national treasury in Pretoria to demand the government office put pressure on security firms that have reneged on a collective wage agreement made November.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members want the treasury to refuse approval of contracts until the 23 firms pay the promised wage increases.

### **Sudanese dam workers and education workers' action over pay**

Sudanese workers at the Sennar Dam Reservoir are on strike over poor pay and working conditions.

Their union is considering a return to work after the irrigation minister promised to address workers' concerns.

Education workers protested in the capital, Khartoum, to demand payment of salary arrears as well as an overhaul of the salary system.

### **Truck drivers in Malawi call off action after winning pay rise**

Truck drivers in Malawi allowed the Mwanza and Dedza borders to be reopened after winning a pay rise.

The authorities agreed to a pay increase for the drivers from K60,000 a month to K140,000.



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