

Nigerian Labor Unions Stage Strike to Raise Minimum Wage

Runaway inflation has worsened the conditions for the working class in Africa's most populous state

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During late May, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) called upon its members to stay away from work in order to demand a raise in the minimum wage and for a price cut in the cost of electricity.

In recent years the rate of inflation in this West African state has skyrocketed to the point where today the exchange rate stands at 1,503 in the local currency, the Naira, to one United States dollar.

Although the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populous state on the African continent with 218.5 million people and is rich with crude oil and natural gas, the country is reeling from what workers describe as "starvation wages." Costs for fuel and electricity have accelerated since the government of President Bola Tinubu eliminated subsidies after taking office in 2023. The annual rate of inflation in Nigeria is calculated at 33%. (See [this](#))

A campaign for raising the minimum wage has been met with strong resistance by the Tinubu administration along with various state governments throughout the vast country. The NLC and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) issued an ultimatum in late May saying if the government did not take immediate measures to raise the wages of workers, they would call for a general strike.

In a memorandum from the Secretary General of the NLC, Emmanuel Ugboaja, to all of its affiliates issued on June 2, called for a nationwide strike until their demands were met. [The message to the workers read in part:](#)

"This is to inform you of the commencement of the proposed indefinite nationwide

strike beginning on Monday, June 3, 2024, as a result of the failure of the Nigerian state to agree on a new national minimum wage and subsequently pass it into law before the end of this month as they were notified; reverse the hike in electricity tariff without consulting the stakeholders as required by the law to N225/kwh back to N66/kwh and to stop the apartheid categorization of Nigerian electricity consumers into bands.”

NLC President Joe Ajaero told the national government that the unions wanted a definitive signed agreement. He said that they would not accept a verbal assurance through a phone call or letter.

Similar labor actions were carried out during October of 2023. However, due to the continuing rise in the cost of living, the agreements reached with the federal government eight months ago are now meaningless.

Ajaero in a statement to the media [stressed that](#):

“As of today, there is no minimum wage for Nigerian workers. Technically, the minimum wage had expired on the 18th of April. As of now, we are operating without any law backing up the minimum wage. They were talking about a 100 per cent increase. That is what they have offered, but the 100 per cent increase amounts to one loaf of bread per day for 30 days. They (the government) are not looking at the quality or the value of what they are offering to us.... If we take even the N600,000 we are proposing today, by next week, it will not make any impact. So, we have to look at them holistically and see what we can do to save the working class in Nigeria. We are not doing a strike that will be one month without a bite. I’m not sure where you have labor centers in a country embarking on a strike for one month and you don’t listen to them.”

In conjunction with the NLC and TUC, other unions in critical sectors of the national economy had notified their members to comply with the strike. These labor organizations included the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG); National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE); Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN); and National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE).

This is the fourth strike since the Tinubu administration took office. As a result of these industrial actions, the power grid was shut down along with the main airports inside the country.

Government offices, schools and banks were closed between June 3-4. Although domestic flights were grounded, international flights continued to fly in and out of the country.

Despite these declarations from the union leadership, after one day, the NLC and the TUC suspended their strike saying they would continue discussions with the government over the period of one week. This deadline expired on June 10 without an agreement which is acceptable to the workers.

The government promised to increase the minimum wage. However, the actual pledge by the federal government amounts to approximately \$40 U.S. dollars per month.

Impact of Nigerian Economic Crisis on Other Regional States

Nigeria provides countries in the West Africa region with power supplies which are vital to

the normal functioning within these states. Due to the necessity of carrying out maintenance on the natural gas pipelines and power grids, Ghana, Benin, Togo and other states have been inflicted with reductions and outages.

Popularly described as “load shedding”, the Ghana government announced that over the next three weeks, the country would be impacted by cuts to the electrical power supplies.

[In a report published by the Nigerian Chronicle](#), the infrastructural problems in the country will affect the capacity of regional states to provide regular service to their populations. This article notes:

“Power outages are anticipated to endure for three weeks in parts of Ghana due to a scarcity of supply from Nigeria. According to a statement from the state electricity company, the cause of the temporary stoppage was maintenance work at an unnamed Nigerian gas supplier. Ghanaians have experienced years of frequent power outages, and they even have their own term, ‘dumsor,’ which means on and off in the Akan language. Power demand has consistently increased over the last two decades, owing to rising urbanization and population development. The state-owned power company in Ghana has announced that load-shedding will be used to distribute available supply as efficiently as feasible. ‘We wish to assure the public that we are collaborating with other stakeholders... to ensure minimal impact of the reduction in gas supply on consumers,’ the Electricity Company of Ghana said on Thursday (June 13) in a joint statement with the Ghana Grid Company. The companies promised to handle the disruptions effectively so that important services were not disrupted during the period of reduced gas supply. It comes just two months after President Nana Akufo-Addo stopped electricity supplies to Togo, Burkina Faso, and Benin due to supply issues. Power shortages have worsened in recent years as the country faces its worst economic crisis in a decade.”

These problems undoubtedly are hampering economic and public activities throughout the West Africa region. If industrial sites and other institutions such as small businesses, schools and healthcare facilities do not have adequate power supplies, it will have broad implications for these societies as a whole.

Even though the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the 15-member regional organization, says it is committed to greater cooperation and integration, these objectives appear to be far from realization. Western imperialist influence within leading ECOWAS states represents a major impediment to resolving the problems related to power supplies to the entire region.

In recent months, three Sahel states, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, have withdrawn from ECOWAS due the threats made against the military governments which took power away from imperialist-backed political leaders. These administrations have formed an Alliance of Sahel States and have refused to return to the ECOWAS grouping despite the lifting of sanctions.

During 2023, Tinubu of Nigeria was encouraged by France and the U.S. to mobilize a regional military force to invade neighboring Niger to reinstall the overthrown imperialist-backed administration of President Mohamed Bazoum. However, public opposition throughout the West Africa region to such a scheme doomed the interventionist proposal to failure.

Consequently, the only real solution to the regional economic crises is a firm break with the dependency upon the western capitalist governments. The African Union (AU) 2063 plan for integration and economic development cannot be achieved absent of continental planning independent of imperialist domination.

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