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.

Public sector workers strike for pay increases in Germany

On February 3, public sector workers struck in various regions of Germany to demand pay increases. Staff employed in schools, hospitals, clinics and council offices struck in the states of Saxony, Lower Saxony and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. The action was called by the public sector trade union Ver.di and the teachers' union GEW.

The unions are demanding an 8 percent pay increase for state employees and a minimum bonus of €200 per month for workers who are lower-paid. According to the head of the GEW, 200 schools in Leipzig and about 99 in Dresden were disrupted by the action.

In a separate dispute, public transport was severely hit in 10 cities across Bavaria, including Munich and Nuremberg. The action was called by Ver.di. In Munich an estimated 900 workers walked off the job affecting subway, tram and bus services. The strike did not affect main-line and suburban lines in the city or train services, but led to an increase in traffic levels.

Ver.di is calling for a pay increase of 9.5 percent for the 6,500 employees of Bavarian municipal transport.

Students protest in Dublin, Ireland against planned reintroduction of fees

Up to 15,000 students protested in Dublin, Ireland on February 4 in opposition to the reintroduction of third-level fees. The demonstration began in Parnell Square and proceeded to Leinster House. It was called by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

The student body said that the reintroduction of fees would prevent poorer students from being able to attend colleges.

The Minister for Education, Batt O'Keeffe, plans to make recommendations to the government in April regarding students paying fees. This week a spokesperson for O'Keeffe said, "In the current economic climate, difficult choices have to be made in prioritising scarce public resources".

Council employees in Nottingham, England protest job cuts

Several hundred employees of Nottingham City Council in England protested against the proposed slashing of hundreds of jobs on February 3. This year the council plans to cut some 350 posts and a number of vacant positions in an attempt to save £12 million.

The demonstration, held in the Old Market Square was called by the UNISON, GMB and Unite trade unions.

TV and newspaper staff in Finland strike against redundancies

On February 4, staff at the Nelonen TV-news in Finland took industrial action to protest planned redundancies. As a result of the strike the evening news broadcast of commercial TV channel Nelonen was halted.

There are plans to dismiss or put 35 employees on part-time contracts. Nelonen is making the cuts in advance of cutting news broadcasts from half an hour to 15 minutes by the summer.

According to a report on the Helsingin Sanomat web site, a shop steward said this week that it would not be possible to produce a 15-minute news bulletin, radio news, and an online news service with a workforce about half its present size.

Cuts in the workforce are also being planned at the *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* newspaper. Seven journalists, all over the age of 57, are to be made redundant. Journalists at the newspaper walked off the job on

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February 3, leaving the following day's edition to be completed by senior editors.

Workers strike Serbian factory to demand years of back pay

Workers employed in a factory in central Serbia are striking this week to protest not having been paid for eight years. According to the b92.net web site, the Partizan Kragujevac Company has also failed to pay health and pension insurance for the past five years and owes the workers a total of 185 million Serbian dinars.

Due to the non-payment of health and pension premiums, a number of older employees are not able to retire.

Signalmen strike in Egypt

Around 700 signalmen employed by the Egyptian Railway Authority went on strike for three hours in protest against not receiving their bonuses on January 27. The rail workers staged a sit-in at Cairo Station and struck until 3:30 p.m., when their union told them the minister of transport had promised to meet their demands within 48 hours.

The strikers threatened further industrial action if their demands were not met by the end of this week. An official source with the Ministry of Transport told *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, that the Railway Authority would submit a proposal for salary adjustments to the minister of transport and the prime minister, to be effective as of July.

Minister of Manpower Aisha Abdel Hadi said that the cabinet is to discuss the problems of the railway workers next week.

South African university closes as staff go on strike

Staff at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in South Africa went out on strike February 2 over a pay dispute.

Members of staff are demanding a 14.6 percent wage increase, while management is offering 9 percent. Negotiations had been continuing since September last year, but reached a deadlock the week before the strike began.

Students have also refused to attend their lectures in protest at the lack of student accommodation.

Kenyan teachers' strike continues as government threatens arrests

Lessons remain canceled in most of the Kenya's 18,000 public primary schools, as 230,000 teachers continue their strike. The teachers, members of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), are demanding that the government honor an agreed pay increase immediately rather than phasing it in over three years.

Kenyan Education Minister Ongeri denounced the strike as illegal, warning that striking teachers would be sacked or have their salaries withheld. He also threatened that any teacher "inciting" others to strike would be arrested.

According to the Kenyan *Daily Nation*, 42 teachers and union officials were arrested on the first day of the strike alone.

Zimbabwean teachers still on strike in spite of government threats

Teachers in Zimbabwe are being threatened with dismissal if their strike over pay continues for 30 days.

The government has also threatened to freeze the salaries of those teachers who stay out on strike for 14 or more days.

Sifiso Ndlovu, the acting chief executive officer of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA), described the threats as "laughable" and said they showed how out of touch the government was. He said no one was interested in becoming a teacher, so dismissing the existing teachers would solve nothing.

The teachers are demanding that they be paid in foreign currency because the Zimbabwean dollar is now worthless.

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