

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

## Germany: Public workers protest

Public sector workers staged limited strikes February 9 in the states of Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Württemberg, in a long-running wage dispute.

The strike call affected road maintenance, regional government, public administration and school workers in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein. Many of them are civil servants and so not legally allowed to strike.

In the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg, university workers, student unions and regional administrators staged warning strikes. More strikes are planned in the region later in the week.

The public workers union Verdi and civil servants union DBB are entering a third round of wage talks with the German states at the weekend in Potsdam. They are demanding an 8 percent wage increase or a minimum of €200 more per month for the 700,000 workers in the two unions.

## Italy: Factory workers oppose closure

Workers at the electronics plant AGD Indesit in Turin are protesting against plans to close the factory and move production to Poland.

Since the beginning of the month, 650 employees at the factory have blocked streets in the area and have mounted a demonstration to protect their jobs.

The Italian paper *La Repubblica* reported that the union rejected a company proposal to provide severance pay of €20,000-30,000 per employee upon closure of the plant. The final decision on the fate of the company plant in Turin is to be taken by the end of February.

## Sweden: refuse collection workers call off strike

A strike by refuse/garbage collection workers in Stockholm, which began February 6, has ended. According to *thelocal.se*, both sides claimed victory after workers returned to work February 10.

Hans-Göran Grännby, CEO of waste management firm Liselotte Lööf AB, told news agency TT, "The strike is over."

The *Local* reported on Monday that the garbage workers had been

threatened with a lawsuit by their employers if they did not go back to work by the end of the day. According to an ombudsman at the transport workers union, the striking garbage workers took a vote and elected to return to work early on Tuesday.

The newspaper reported that the dispute over employment conditions and pay at the centre of the conflict had not been resolved, but the parties had "agreed to discuss the issue."

The workers were protesting against new employment terms. The changes would have resulted in substantial pay cuts, garbage workers argued. According to LLAB, having fixed salaries will provide workers with a monthly wages of 27,000 to 29,000 kronor (\$3,300-3,600), higher than the industry average of 23,000 kronor per month.

The new terms are intended to replace a current points-based system and introduce a regular 40-hour working week.

## Greece: Doctors strike over wages and health provision

Hospital doctors set February 12 for the start of a 48-hour strike.

The doctors are opposing a bill from the Health Ministry which, they say, provides for small increases in basic salaries, compared to those agreed between their federation and the ministry's leadership. Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos is to announce the precise provisions of the bill.

There is also anger over hospital supplies, which have ceased because suppliers maintain they have not been paid.

## UK: London tube strike warning

The two rail unions organising the most workers on the London Underground warned of strike action across the network to prevent compulsory job losses, according to the *Evening Standard*, February 11.

The unions say up to 3,500 jobs could be lost—more than double the figure disclosed by the employer, Transport for London. Some staff staged a protest outside London Underground headquarters February 11, above St. James's station, in protest over the cuts.

Tube bosses have refused to rule out compulsory redundancies in a drive to save £2.4 billion.

## UK: Rail freight workers to strike over job losses

DB Schenker, formerly EWS and currently the UK's largest rail freight company, is facing strike action following an announcement that 530 jobs are to go at the German-owned firm.

Industrial action could cause serious disruption to rail freight movements to and from Britain's major ports.

More than 700 workers have been balloted by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) over possible strike action. According to the union, the rail freight company plans to cut jobs, impose a pay freeze, introduce zero-hours contracts and alter working conditions for hundreds of staff.

The *Independent* reported that the union also announced that 250 of its members employed by Nexus on the Tyne and Wear Metro are to be balloted for strikes in a separate dispute over jobs and conditions.

### Montenegrin aluminium workers protest over unpaid wages

On February 9, in Podgorica, aluminium workers demanded unpaid wages and an immediate restart of suspended production at the Kombinat Aluminijuma Podgorica (KAP), a Russian-owned plant.

*Reuters* reported that metal workers from the central town of Niksic and tobacco workers from Podgorica said they would also later rally at Montenegro's main government building.

### Bosnian aluminium workers protest

Workers at Bosnia's only aluminium producer Birac protested February 9 in Banja Luka, demanding wages and government support to offset falling metal prices.

According to *Reuters*, amongst the banners carried by the protestors were those reading, "The Factory is Our Life" and "Who will Feed our Children?"

### Egypt: Rail workers strike over broken pay agreements

Rail workers at a workshop in Kom Abu Radi in al-Wasta went on strike February 9, demanding the implementation of earlier promises of increased monthly incentives.

According to reports by *al-Youm al-Sabi*, clashes took place between workers and central security forces as they gathered in the station in al-Wasta, stopping some trains.

At least ten workers and one officer were injured.

The strike continued February 11. A meeting was held with the manager of the company for railway services on Wednesday, where he agreed to implement some of the demands of the workers. No union officials took part in the meeting, according to the workers.

Iraq: State petrochemical company uses military to attack workers' protest

On January 28, a demonstration in Basra to demand the payment of wage arrears from one of the many state-operated petrochemical facilities in the south of the country was attacked by the Iraqi military.

The army intervened in the peaceful protest and took protesters to a military holding camp for interrogation.

On February 2, management of the company began its own inquiry into the peaceful right of assembly, and targeted four workers with leading the

protest: Kifaah Hassan Ibraheem, Qasim Abbas Muhsin, Kareem Johi Sahan, and Waleed Salih.

The union is filing complaints with the government over the company's handling of this dispute.

### Zimbabwe government hires retirees to run trains after mass walkout

Following a mass walkout by rail workers in early January—to demand annual salaries of 3,000 South African rand (US\$309) for the lowest paid employees—the Zimbabwe government is now hiring retired rail workers to replace the strikers and run the trains. The Zimbabwean dollar is now effectively worthless due to hyperinflation.

Half of the wagons owned by the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) are derelict because there is no foreign currency to import spare parts. A deal with China to modernize equipment did not go ahead because Zimbabwe was unable to raise the required deposit.

### Nigerian oil workers threaten strike due to safety concerns

Nigerian oil workers threatened a national strike from February 11 onwards due to the increasing level of risk. The strike was cancelled at the last minute, but workers at Total Oil facility in Port Harcourt went ahead with their strike.

The workers belong to the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN). The president of NUPENG said earlier, "We are not going on strike; we are going to just stay away from work since we can no longer work with any assurance to the safety of our lives and that of our families."

The unions gave the government a 21-day ultimatum, but that ran out at the start of February.



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