

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.

Health sector strikes in Greece

Around 7,000 doctors working for the country's largest social security organisation, IKA, which covers 5.3 million Greeks, began a four-day strike February 7 against the deregulation of national health care.

The changes—being dictated by the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following their €110 billion (US\$149 billion) loan package to the government—are to be voted in parliament this week.

Some of the striking doctors staged a sit-in on the grounds of the health ministry. Industrial action also shut pharmacies in the capital Athens, Salonica, and across the country.

Lecturers, staff and students protest job cuts at Belfast Metropolitan College

On February 7, lecturers, staff and students gathered at Belfast Metropolitan College's campus in west Belfast in protest at the planned slashing of possibly hundreds of jobs.

University and Colleges Union Regional Officer Jim McKeown said, "The college has a financial deficit, but the savings that they are proposing to make on teachers alone would amount to £6.4m a year in order to deal with the deficit of £2.7m."

Cabin crew at British Airways to be reballoted after third vote for strike

British Airways (BA) cabin crew are to be reballoted, within the next week, over possible strike action after the Unite union once again conceded a recent vote was vulnerable to being challenged as legally invalid.

Cabin crew voted last month to hold further strikes in a long-running dispute with the airline over working conditions.

BA argued that the ballot—the third held by staff backing industrial

action—was unlawful. This is now the favoured tactic of not just BA, but many employers. A ballot is declared invalid on some technicality, after which the union involved dutifully and gratefully backs down rather than defying such machinations.

Danish bus drivers in work stoppage over retirement and training issues

Bus drivers across the country took limited strike action February 3, against government plans to phase out the early retirement programme and a change in policy that will require drivers to pay for compulsory training.

Hundreds of routes in the Greater Copenhagen area were disrupted.

Romanian rail workers threaten strike over privatisation

Railway workers have threatened to take industrial action in March against moves towards privatisation of the sector.

Collective work contracts expired this week for all three state-owned railway companies. Following talks with the International Monetary Fund February 7, one union leader said the IMF and government are in accord with the restructuring of railway companies and the privatisation of freight rail company CFR Marfa. According to one union source, 6,000 railway employees risk losing their jobs in March and April under the government's restructuring plans. Romania's railway system currently employs around 56,000 workers.

Teachers' pay strike shuts most Serbian schools

Over 80 percent of schools across the country were closed from February 1 as teaching staff took industrial action in support of a rise in wages frozen for two and a half years. Out of the total of 1,804 schools across the country, 1,427 were on strike according to the Union for the Education of Serbia (SOS). On February 6, the Association of Teachers' Trade Unions took the decision to continue the strike and request the dismissal of Education Minister Zarko Obradovic.

Iraqi leather and textile workers protest non-payment of wages

Workers employed by the General Company of Leather Products and Textile protested February 1 at the gates of the company's headquarters in Baghdad, demanding the immediate payment of their overdue wages.

Meanwhile, workers in Hilla Textile Factory, south of Baghdad, held a one-day general strike demanding payment of their overdue wages.

One of the protesters said that the factory's management had tried to prevent workers from holding a strike and speaking to the media.

Built in the early 1970s, the Hilla Textile factory is one of the oldest textile sites in Iraq. It currently has a workforce of more than 10,000. At least 40 workers were killed last May at the factory in a bomb explosion.

South African truck drivers set to strike

Truck drivers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) are due to begin strike action February 13. The strike is to push their demand for a 20 percent pay increase over the next two years. The employers represented by the Road Freight Association (RFA) have offered 7.5 percent this year and 7.5 percent next year.

Negotiations began in December. A planned meeting between unions and employers set for February 9, was called off as the RFA applied for a court interdict to prevent the strike. This will be heard on February 11. The union says the strike will go ahead on February 13.

South African Metrobus drivers set to strike

Bus workers, members of the South African Municipal Workers Union, working for Metrobus in Johannesburg were due to begin strike action February 9. The dispute is over changes in shift patterns brought in at the end of last year. The union says some bus workers have to work longer shifts as a result.

The bus workers were also involved in action over the same issue in December of last year. The company was trying to get a court interdict to prevent the strike. The union has said it will call out other sections of workers if the bus workers' demands were not met.

Nigerian oil workers' strike

Oil workers throughout the country, belonging to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), began strike action Tuesday, February 8.

The strike is in opposition to plans by oil companies to sack half of the staff represented by the union. The union first raised its alarm in a letter sent to the minister of labour and productivity in January. The

letter was entitled "Danger looms in the downstream oil sector in reaction to the planned job losses."

At the behest of the union, Labour and Productivity Minister Olowohile called a meeting of employers, the union and the ministry yesterday to discuss the issue. The union has said the strike action will continue.

Ghana bank workers threaten strike action

Around 2,500 bank workers at the Ghana Commercial Bank (GCB) are due to begin strike action February 11. The action is in response to a 25 percent income tax imposed unilaterally on the workers' consolidated allowance in January, which led to a significant reduction in their pay.

The workers have worn red armbands and flown red flags. Around a hundred of the bank workers, members of the Union of Industry, Commerce and Finance Workers, held a rally in Accra, the capital, on Wednesday.

Namibia: Fish processor workers strike

Around 400 workers at the Seaflower Whitefish Corporation in Luderitz, in southwest Namibia, began strike action last week in pursuit of a 5.5 percent pay increase. They want the increase back dated to May of last year and are also wanting the practice of having to take forced leave in the October off-season to cease.

Namibia: diamond workers strike

Workers at AMC-Gemxcel in Windhoek began strike action February 8. The action is to protest unfair labour practices by the management.

Among the issues the workers are raising is the recognition agreement signed last year, unfair warning, suspensions and dismissals. They are also calling for the removal of the general manager, Eugene Roos.

Another issue is the use of forensic polygraph tests, which are only used on black employees. The workers are members of the Miners Union of Namibia.



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