

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East and Africa

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

Europe

European air traffic controllers strike

Air traffic controllers went on strike in 28 countries Wednesday against the European Commission's plans to cut spending.

The protest was called by the Air Traffic Controllers European Unions Coordination (ATCEUC) and includes controllers in Germany, France, Portugal and Italy, and is expected to last until Friday. Airlines have been forced to cancel some flights and divert others. The budget lines EasyJet said that flights to Paris had been cut by 20 percent and Ryanair cancelled 80 flights on Wednesday. TAP Portugal also cancelled flights from Lisbon to Gatwick.

Greek doctors extend strike

Doctors at the National Organization for Healthcare Provision (EOPYY), Greece's largest health care provider, voted last week to extend their strike until February 7. The doctors have been involved in rolling strikes since November.

Doctors are opposed to a bill before the Greek parliament that proposes to change terms, conditions and procedures of suspension and forcibly transfer employees from EOPYY to different health districts. The measure includes a new pay structure that reportedly sees them earning significantly less than other doctors.

On January 23 doctors protested outside the Social Insurance Institute (IKA) office in Pagrati and held a protest rally. Ioannis Chronopoulos, the vice president of the federation of EOPYY doctors said, "We are on strike not because we ask for a salary increase or for private interests. We are on strike because we ask public health to be free for everyone. We seek for the existing health structures not to be dissolved".

According to reports, the Greek Ministry of Health could dismiss around 2,500 doctors through the reforms included in the National Primary Health Network law bill.

Public sector workers protest in Attica, Greece

Greek public workers in the Attica region held a four-hour strike

January 23 to protest the government's decision to ban a demonstration, called on January 8 in Athens, as part of protests against Greece's EU rotating presidency.

The protest also opposed the arrest at the January 8 protest of Pavlos Antonopoulos, a member of the executive of Adedy, the main public sector workers federation. Antonopoulos was due on trial on January 23 for taking part in the banned protest.

Workers in one-hour warning strike in Serbia

Workers in cities across Serbia staged a one-hour warning strike last week to oppose austerity measures that will lead to job losses and the shutdown of state industries.

The strike was organized by representatives of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia and United Branch Trade Unions Independence.

The trade unions have called for modifications to the law, as well as the dismissal of Economy Minister Saša Radulović.

Spanish Coca Cola employees to strike

Workers at Coca Cola in Spain are set to begin an indefinite strike next month, following last week's announcement that four factories are to be closed.

A calendar of strike days has been drawn up and was announced Saturday by Jesus Mateo, spokesman for Colebega, the company that produces and distributes Coca Cola products in Valencia, Alicante, Castellon, Murcia, Albacete and Cuenca. There will be daily strikes in Alicante, starting on February 3, between 1:00 PM and 3:00 PM, enabling staff from two shifts to participate.

Demonstrations have also been planned in Alicante and Valencia for February 1 and 8.

Coca Cola announced cutbacks last week that would affect 1,250 workers, and the closure of four plants in Madrid, Alicante, Palma and Asturias.

UK university staff to walk-out in February

Higher education (HE) staff in the UK will stage a third one-day strike February 6 in a dispute over a one percent pay offer.

According to the web site of the Unite trade union, "Unite, along with other HE staff unions, will strike a month after the furore caused by the revelation that vice chancellors at the elite Russell Group of universities were pocketing big pay rises, while trying to enforce the one per cent pay rise on staff."

Unite added, "Earlier this month, a Times Higher Education (THE) survey of 19 of the Russell Group's 24 members revealed that the average vice-chancellor salary in the group increased by just over £22,000 to nearly £293,000 in 2012-13. The cumulative operating surplus in the higher education sector is now over £1 billion and many higher education institutions have built up significant cash reserves. Overall staff costs in higher education, as a proportion of income, have fallen from 58 per cent in 2001/02, to 55.5 per cent in 2011/12."

Ford UK workers to vote on pensions

Some 5,000 Ford employees in the UK will vote on strike action against an attack on pensions and jobs.

A press release by the GMB union said that the result of the ballot amongst all its hourly paid members would be known by February 7. Workers at the Bridgend, Daventry, Halewood, Dunton and Dagenham production lines are to be targeted in the ballot.

The vote comes more than 12 months after Ford closed several facilities in the UK, in Southampton and the stamping and tooling operation in Dagenham (DSTO) with the loss of 1,500 jobs.

Ford has moved to link pension increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI), leading to cuts in pensions.

Cypriot bank workers threaten action

Bank employees have threatened strike measures if the Cooperative Central Bank (CCB) insists on "blackmailing" its members to accept pay cuts or face redundancy.

The ETYK union condemned the "board's provocative and unprecedented" behaviour, which attempted to force staff to sign individual contracts including pay cuts.

The CCB wants to cut its payroll by 15 percent to comply with its restructuring obligations as per the terms of its €1.5 billion state bailout.

Following a recently agreed-to deal, workers at cooperative credit institutions took a 3 percent cut on wages across the board.

The unions also agreed to additional tiered pay cuts ranging from 8 to 25 percent.

Neither agreement applies to employees of the CCB, who are all members of ETYK, with which the CCB board had been holding separate talks.

Middle East

Iranian tire company workers protest

Workers at the Iran Tire Manufacturing Company entered their seventh day of protests on January 26, against their lack of job security.

"According to ILNA, 600 workers joined the strike in protest of the trend of continued worker layoffs. ILNA reports that 80 contract workers

were laid off yesterday and another 130 were laid off today, and many more of the company's workers will lose their jobs in the next two months," said Iran's *Radio Zamaneh*.

One thousand workers are employed by the Iran Tire Company, with 600 of those working on a contract basis.

Some of the laid-off workers have reportedly worked for the company for up to 15 years.

Radio Zamaneh concluded, "The Iranian economy has been in sharp decline with high inflation and a national currency that has lost much of its value, and official reports indicate that the unemployment rate has reached critical levels."

Africa

Miners strike at South African Anglo American Platinum

A strike at South African platinum producers Anglo American Platinum, Impala Platinum and Lonmin, the largest producers of platinum in the world, began on January 23. The miners are members of the Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU).

Government sponsored talks between AMCU and the mining companies concluded Wednesday of this week without agreement. An AMCU spokesman said they had an offer to put to its members, but it was miles away from their demands.

AMCU is demanding that its 80,000 member's wages are brought up to an entry-level wage of R1250 (\$111) a month plus other allowance increases.

In response to the expected strike, platinum mining companies have built stocks to last up to eight weeks. Mood's Investment Services said of Anglo American, "We don't see a temporary loss of production as a major credit risk for Amplats, given that it has considerable stockpiles of platinum above ground." Stockpiles have also been created by Impala and Lonmin.

Justin Froneman, an equity analyst at SBG Securities told Bloomberg, "These strikes have been coming for some time and the companies have been preparing for them for 12 months plus. They're ready for this to drag out for a long time."

The mining companies have offered eight and 8.5 percent increase to band A and B bargaining units and 7.5 percent to band C, which includes miners, skilled workers and officials.

South African Life Mount Edgecombe Hospital staff walk out

Workers at Life Mount Edgecombe Hospital, part of the Life Healthcare group and a member of the Health Association of South Africa (HASA), went out on strike last Wednesday. The workers are members of the Hospital Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (*HOSPERSA*). The union initially demanded a ten percent wage increase, but subsequently reduced it to eight percent.

They struck after management rejected their demand for an eight percent pay increase. Management offered a seven percent increase, which was subsequently reduced to 6.5 percent in the course of negotiations at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

Around 75 percent of the 135 HOSPERSA members are out on strike.

Dispute at South African food processing company

220 Unilever workers, Members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), went on strike January 17 against Unilever SA and Unilever Food Solutions. The workers are demanding a 9-10 percent pay raise, and for the company to undo the addition of a new, lower pay grade introduced by the company.

Workers currently on the higher grades are progressively being transferred to the new lower grade with a view to reducing wages across the company. According to FAWU the new pay grade, at R3500, is the lowest-paid grade throughout all the Unilever companies

Health workers in Lagos, Nigeria continue action

Health staff at Lagos Teaching Hospital (LUTH) have been on strike since December 30. The striking workers strike include members of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), the Medical and Health Workers Union (MWHUN), Senior Staff Association of Universities Teaching Hospitals, Research and Allied Institutes (SSAUTHRAI) and the Non Academic Staff Union (NASU). Amongst the disputed issues are non-payment of overtime, lack of promotion opportunities and staff shortages.

Representatives of the joint unions met with management last Wednesday, but reached no agreement. Workers staged a protest at the end of the meeting to register their grievances.

Nigerian health workers hold three-day warning strike

Health workers in Nigeria ended a three-day nationwide warning strike last Friday. The workers struck to oppose the government's refusal to honour a previous agreement and to implement a unified salary structure.



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