

## Regional transport workers strike in Netherlands

# 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.

### Regional transport strike in Netherlands

Regional bus and train drivers took part in a 24-hour strike on Thursday. It hit services provided by transport firms, Arriva, Connexxion and others as well as tram services in Utrecht.

The 12,000 drivers involved are seeking a 3.5 percent pay rise and improved working conditions. The members of the FNV and CNV unions say their right to have a proper toilet and food break is being eroded. The drivers say that pressure is so intense that they must drive non-stop for four hours at a stretch.

The regional transport providers are responsible for transit in almost every part of the country and handle ferry and bus services. The companies have so far rejected workers demands, but indicated willingness to continue talks.

In typical manner the unions limited the job action to one day, rather than call an open-ended strike, as a means to vent anger while creating the least possible service disruption.

### UK strikes to continue in Driver Only Operated trains dispute

Strikes are planned by workers next week at six train operating companies in the long running dispute over Driver Only Operated trains—which threatens passenger safety as well as 6,000 jobs.

Train guards at South Western Railway, Greater Anglia, Merseyrail, Arriva Rail North and the Island Line on the Isle of Wight are set to walk out on 24-hour strikes on January 8, 10 and 12. Guards on Southern will hold a 24-hour strike on January 8.

Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union representatives met with senior managers from South Western Railway and Northern Rail on Wednesday. Negotiations between the RMT and Southern Rail broke down with the RMT accusing the company of walking away from the talks.

### London, UK Crossrail construction employees to strike

Eighty electricians working on the construction of the Woolwich section of the new London Crossrail railway are to hold a one-day strike on January 10 over a pay increase and finishing bonuses. The Unite members are employed by construction giant, Balfour Beatty.

It will be the first official strike action to hit the project, although there have been unofficial stoppages.

### Museum workers in UK capital walk out on New Year's Day

Workers at the National Maritime Museum and other Royal Museum sites in London, including the Cutty Sark restored ship exhibit, struck on New Year's Day.

The 100 members of the Prospect union are protesting against low pay of £7.50 an hour—and demanding the London Living Wage of £10.20 an hour.

### Walkout by journalists at local newspaper in Swindon, England

Sixteen journalists working for the local Swindon paper, the *Swindon Advertiser*, began a two-day strike on Tuesday in a protest over pay and the threat of redundancies.

The *Swindon Advertiser* is owned by US based *Newsquest*. Its staff have been pushing for negotiations over pay since November 2016. In spite of the involvement of the government reconciliation service, Acas, talks have proved fruitless. In addition five posts—the group web editor, news editor and three content managers—are under threat.

The National Union of Journalists said its chapels in Bristol and Oxford were supporting the action.

### German Porsche workers strike

Workers at the German luxury car company Porsche in Zuffenhausen, Stuttgart held a one-hour strike on Thursday. It was part of a campaign by nearly 4 million engineering workers for a six percent pay rise and a reduction in working hours.

A series of partial strikes at major companies such as Daimler, Siemens and Thyssen-Krupp will take place from January 8 through to January 18,

when further talks between employers' representatives and the IG Metall union are due to take place.

The union is threatening 24-hour strikes after talks on January 18.

### **Walkout by Finnish bank staff**

Banks across Finland were hit by a staff walkout on December 28 and 29.

The main grievance of the workers is over plans by the banks to introduce weekend working. A further issue is the threat of layoffs as the banks seek to increase levels of exploitation.

The main union representing bank staff, Pro Litto, is not against weekend working but says it must be on a voluntary basis and with recompense.

Talks on Tuesday between the unions and employers broke down. A further two days of strikes are planned for Thursday and Friday.

### **Strike of Portuguese notaries goes ahead**

Around 4,000 staff at Portuguese registry offices and notaries began a four-day strike on December 27.

The action was to protest the government's failure to accede to a demand that a law degree should be sufficient qualification to obtain a post as a registry officer.

More than 90 percent of the workforce took part in the strike, which closed registry offices; however, a skeleton service was provided to allow register of deaths, etc.

### **Strike threat by white-collar staff in Finland's paper industry**

Around 3,000 white-collar staff employed in Finland's paper industry are set to walkout for a week from January 17 over a pay dispute. They are members of the Pro trade union.

Finland's paper industry accounts for nearly a quarter of the country's exports.

### **Protest by Albanian oil refinery workers in Ballsh**

Some 200 oil refinery workers in the southern Albanian town of Ballsh held a demonstration outside the Ministry of Energy on December 28.

They were protesting the non-payment of their last two months' salaries, plus missing social insurance payments by refinery management company, ARMO, going back over a year.

The refinery claims financial problems since its privatisation in 2008.

Following the demonstration, Energy Ministry representatives promised the wages arrears would be paid. The company is the town's biggest employer, with more than 10 percent of the population employed at the plant.

### **Cypriot Bank employees plan demonstration**

Cypriot bank staff plan to demonstrate on February 1 to protest the government's broken promises over recompensation of provident funds.

In 2013, the Cypriot government seized bank deposits as part of an attempt to resolve a financial crisis.

### **Irish health ancillary workers to strike**

Irish health care workers employed under Section 39 provision are threatening to strike on February 12. The government grant aided Section 39 organisations provide disability and community services.

The employees are demanding the government keep its promise to apply pay and working conditions in line with public sector health bodies.

### **Israeli municipal workers set to strike**

Israel's Histadrut labour federation is threatening a general strike in response to the Finance Ministry's holding back of finance funding.

Jerusalem's 2,150 strong municipal workforce could be laid off if the funding is not provided. Municipal workers have dumped rubbish at various sites throughout the city, including the Finance Ministry in protest.

### **Lebanese power workers protest**

Around 40 contract workers employed by state-owned electric power company, EDL, blockaded a road in Beirut on December 26.

They were protesting the late payment of their wages. Security staff pushed them back off the road and onto the pavement.

### **Sudanese doctors strike over wages and poor working conditions**

Sudanese doctors at Nyala Teaching Hospital, South Darfur, went out on strike on December 20 in a wages and conditions dispute.

Doctors had been promised a wage increase by the government and the health insurance companies, which has not materialised.

Besides the wage claim, the doctors complain of the lack of lifesaving medicines and a government ban on much needed recruitment of new doctors.

### **Graphite miners in Zimbabwe strike over unpaid wages**

Two hundred graphite miners at Zimbabwe's joint enterprise mine, the Zimbabwe German Graphite (ZGGM) Mine have begun strike action to demand 13 months of unpaid wages and improvements in their working

conditions.

The company has not paid its bills to Zimbabwe's electrical supplying company, with the 200 strikers left without light and fresh water to their hostels. A company spokesman cited a fall in graphite demand, and prices dropping from US \$600 to US \$340 per ton.

The Zimbabwe Diamond Workers Union raised the issues with the Mines Ministry.

### **Swaziland tax workers continue strike over wage claim redress**

Swaziland's Revenue Authority (SRA) workers are continuing a strike begun in mid-December for an increased pay settlement.

Eager to end the strike, the Swaziland Revenue Authority Workers Union (SRAWU) settled for a 6.8 percent pay raise, about half of their 13.3 percent initial demand. When news broke that managers had received a 20 percent pay rise workers returned to striking for the original demand.

SRAWU president, Tremendous Dlamini, said that members had a choice whether to strike or not, but the tax authority imposed a lockout.

Support for the strike was reflected in a turnout of 387 striking workers out of 500 members attending a December 29 union meeting. A small proportion returned to work when the SRA lifted the lockout for a day.

### **Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in Osun state call off strike**

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) called off action after three days of strikes by state employees—signing a memorandum of understanding and a promise to pay the state employees December's salaries in full.

The strike paralysed the state government.

The state chairman of the NLC thanked the state governor for acceding to "all" of its demands. The workers, however, are concerned that some aspects of the deal may not be implemented as they have been postponed for three months.

### **Kenyan rail infrastructure workers strike over lack of safety regulation**

Three hundred employees at Kenya's rail infrastructure company, Standard Gauge Rail (SGR), went on strike Wednesday in Mai Mahiu, Naivasha and demonstrated at the Mai Mahiu-Narok road, blocking traffic.

The construction workers demand better working conditions, particularly the way they are transported to their place of work. Workers complain of chest problems caused by dust inhalation, while travelling in open trucks onto sites.

Concerns over the company's safety at work policies were highlighted when six workers were swept away by a landslide after heavy rainfall. Four were rescued but two died at the scene. With proper safety equipment they would have survived, say colleagues.

Strikers are demanding the Ministry of Labour enforce safety regulations.

The Standard Gauge Railway line was constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation and financed by the Chinese government.

### **Kenyan casual hospital staff strike for unpaid wages, nurses plan stoppage over pay**

Casual workers have gone on strike at Nyeri County Referral Hospital over wages unpaid for the last three months. The workers, contracted by the hospital through a private hire agency, are responsible for sanitary condition on the wards.

They work at half the rate of a state employee and do not get provided with a risk allowance. They do not get paid overtime rates on their 12-hour days, six days a week.

Nurses in the Nyeri state's hospitals are also threatening strike action, as their wages have not been paid for the five months they were previously on strike.



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