

Further strikes by German engineering workers

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Further strikes by German engineering workers

Around 30,000 German engineering workers, including 10,000 at automobile manufacturer Daimler, struck on Tuesday. The one-day strike is part of a campaign of token strikes called by the IG Metall union, which is proposing a 6 percent pay rise and cut in working hours during talks for new contracts covering 3.9 million industrial workers. On Wednesday, a further 30,000 engineering workers joined the action, including 8,000 at Opel carmaker factories across Germany.

## Spanish Ford workers face struggle

Demanding that workers accept a “new competitive plan,” Ford is seeking to impose sweeping concessions on 9,000 workers at its Almassafes plant in the Spanish province of Valencia. Last year Ford Europe invested 750 million euros in the plant to produce its Kuga medium sized sports utility.

Talks between Ford and the General Labor Union (UGT), which is linked to the Socialist Party (PSOE), are ongoing with the company demanding cuts in medical leave pay, the closure of the apprenticeship school, freezing bonuses for working in the paint booth, working special shifts and overnight. In December, Ford laid off 280 temporary workers at the plant.

## Cinema staff in London continue struggle for pay rise

Staff at several Picturehouse cinemas throughout London are to take strike action between January 20 and February 2, continuing their ongoing fight to be paid the current London Living Wage of £10.20 and secure improved sickness payments. Management at one of the cinemas, the Ritz in Brixton, have threatened to lock out the Bectu union if the strike goes ahead.

## UK care staff in Birmingham to strike

Around 350 home care workers in Birmingham are to hold a token two-

and-a-half-hour strike tomorrow, followed by a similar job action on February 6. The workers are part of specialist teams that provide support to people for six weeks following their discharge from hospital.

The vote for action was near unanimous. The Unison trade union members are striking against plans by Birmingham city council to cut the number of home care staff by 40 percent and a new rota system that will increase workloads.

## Cammell Laird shipbuilders set to walk out in Birkenhead, north west England

Five hundred shipbuilders at the Cammell Laird yard in Birkenhead, north west England, are due to strike on January 26 and 29, with further strikes planned in February. The workers belong to the Unite and GMB unions and are seeking a substantial pay increase and improved working conditions. Management are due to meet GMB officials on January 22.

## Ballot for pension strike by UK academics closes today

Today is the last day of balloting by university academic and support staff in the UK to launch a strike to oppose plans by nearly 70 universities to scrap the current defined benefits under the Universities Superannuation Scheme. Officials plan to replace it with a substandard defined contribution scheme.

The ballot was organised by the University and College Union (UCU). The UCU Higher Education Committee will discuss the result next Monday with any planned strikes likely to take place in February.

## Italian Ryanair staff strike call

Ground staff, cabin crew and some pilots working for the Italian wing of Dublin-based budget airline Ryanair have announced they will strike on February 10. The strike has been called against Ryanair’s decision to only negotiate with the main pilots union, ANPAC. Ryanair recently reversed its 32-year-old policy of refusing to negotiate with any union. The three unions being left out by Ryanair Italy are Filt Cgil, Fit Cisl and Uiltrasporti.

### **Dutch transport unions call off planned strike**

FNV and CNV unions have called off planned strike action by 12,000 regional bus and train transport workers in Holland after the union signed a sell-out deal. The transport workers held a one-day strike on January 4 for a 3.5 percent pay rise, an easing of work pressure and the right to a comfort break. Under the deal workers will get an 8.3 percent pay rise over three years and the right to have a comfort break after 2.5 hours.

### **Planned strike of Slovenian public sector staff**

Sixteen Slovenian public sector unions are to hold a one-day strike on January 24. A further six unions will march in front of the government palace on the same day, calling for new elections in protest to planned government budget cuts. Taking part in the strike will be nurses, medics, pharmacists, nursery and university staff and administration workers.

### **Iranian sugar workers continue struggle**

On Monday, a representative of the 500 Haft Tappeh Sugar plant workers announced the workers would continue their strike. They are fighting for back wages owed to them and for temporary staff to be given permanent jobs. Workers have also threatened to occupy the plant at the weekend if their demands were not met.

### **Histradut union federation sells out Israeli telecom workers dispute**

Staff at ECI Israeli telecom, a telecom equipment manufacturer, ended their strike Monday following a sell-out deal by the Histradut labour federation. ECI had been seeking to cut the workforce by 100 and in the end reduced the number of redundancies to 60. A collective labour agreement will be agreed over the next few weeks.

### **South African food manufacturer workers in month-long strike**

Food manufacturing workers have been out on strike in South Africa since December demanding a pay increase. Around 230 shantytown workers are striking at BM Food Manufacturers in Lanseria for an increase in their daily pay to at least R90 (US\$7.34) from R79 (US\$6.44).

The manufacturer produces food for the food retailer Pick and Pay and many others. On December 15, the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa issued the toothless call for a boycott of BM.

### **South African pharmacy workers strike over bonuses**

National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) have gone on strike at South Africa's Dis-Chem Pharmacies, over union recognition and bonus payments. The action started Wednesday this week and followed a certificate of non-resolution issued by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

A seven-day notice to strike terminated Tuesday with workers downing tools Wednesday. Around 500 strikers gathered at Dis-Chem headquarters in Midrand as the union threatened to paralyse the company nationally. Workers who are union members say they are being specifically targeted for punishment. Those not in the union received their bonuses in December while union members were excluded, they say.

### **Developing strike movement in South Africa's higher education institutions**

Employees at the University of South Africa in Pretoria struck Wednesday to demand a pay increase and decasualisation. The National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) has put in for a 12 percent pay increase against a pay offer of 6.5 percent, and is campaigning for all contract workers to be directly employed.

Staff in four unions at Wits University, Johannesburg, are demanding an 8 percent pay increase in opposition to a 6.8 percent offer. College unions began strike action on Monday at Durban University of Technology over failed wage negotiations last September. The NEHAWU is also threatening strike action at the National Student Financial Aid Scheme in Cape Town over unresolved wage demands, increased health care costs, and demands to convert contract workers into full-time employees.

### **Violent attack on Nigerian protests against sackings of teachers and civil servants**

Workers in Nigeria's Kaduna state were attacked last week for protesting the mass sackings of state employees. The Nigerian National Labour Congress (NLC) accused the Kaduna state government of organised thuggery in its pursuit of mass sackings, which the International Monetary Fund is demanding as the price of a loan.

The NLC said, "We have been reliably informed that the thugs who were sent to attack workers during our mass protest in Kaduna on Thursday were led by the Special Assistant to the Governor of Kaduna State on Public Affairs, Mouktar Maigamo, who was seen among the machetes wielding hoodlums as they moved towards the secretariat of the State Council of Nigeria Labour Congress in Kaduna."

Official state forces were also mobilised against a mass demonstration on January 12 that was demanding the Kaduna state governor respects a court ruling that all 36,000 sacked public employees be reinstated. Police and security guards blocked roads preventing protesters entering Kaduna city.

Many state governments throughout Nigeria are demanding workers continue to work without pay.

### **Union calls off Swaziland revenue workers' strike**

The Swaziland Revenue Workers Union (SRWU) shut down a month-

long strike over wage increases after accepting a worthless promise from the government that it would resume negotiations this Tuesday. Instead Prime Minister Dr Sibusiso Dlamini instructed the Swaziland Revenue Authority (SRA) not to negotiate with the union.

SRA threatened workers who did not return to work on Monday with a lockout and demanded workers sign an acceptance of conditions form. When the 300 workers opposed ending the strike, the union secretary general dictated the return to work Tuesday. The SRWU said it had effectively achieved union recognition, while indicating it would not be defending the principle that locked-out public workers get paid.



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