

Finnish workers strike to oppose government attacks on unemployed

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Finland: Workers strike to oppose government attacks on unemployed

Over 100,000 Finnish industrial workers are expected to join Friday's 24-hour strike to protest government plans to cut unemployment benefits. Transport and construction workers, affecting Metro, tram and bus services in the capital, Helsinki, will join them. SAK, the central organisation of trade unions, has also called a demonstration in Helsinki against the cuts.

The strike targets the government's activation model for unemployment security. Imposed at the beginning of the year, the activation model stipulates that claimants will lose a portion of their benefits if they fail to meet a list of criteria. There appears to be broad public opposition to the measure. A citizen's initiative opposing the measure quickly gained sufficient support to be considered by parliament.

Construction workers walk off site in Hull, UK, over safety

Around 300 construction workers took unofficial action, forming a picket line outside the Energy Works power station in Hull on Tuesday. They were protesting over pay and safety at the site against the main contractor M+W.

They struck for two days the previous week—concerned that fire alarms around the site either did not work or were inaudible. One picket, speaking anonymously to the *Hull Daily Mail* for fear of blacklisting, said: "No one wants to go to work and not be safe."

UK: London Docklands Light Rail strike

Staff on the Docklands Light Rail system, which serves the financial quarter in London, began a 48-hour strike on Thursday. The workers, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, are employed by contractor ISS, which provides cleaning, security and revenue protection services for KeoliAmey Docklands. The ongoing dispute is over pay and conditions.

Strike at UK Birkenhead shipbuilding yard

Around 500 workers at the Cammell Laird shipbuilding and repair yard at Birkenhead in the northwest UK held a 24-hour strike on Monday, following strike action the previous Friday. They are seeking increased pay, a reduction in the working week, and improved pension and working conditions at the site. They want a new contract for three years rather than the five years wanted by the employer.

The strikes took place after months of fruitless negotiations between management and the GMB and Unite unions.

UK academics set to strike over pensions

Lecturers at 61 universities throughout the UK are due to strike for two days from February 22 and three days from February 26, with further action planned for March. Academics at a further seven universities, who voted in favour of striking but failed to achieve a 50 percent turnout, are being re-balloted.

The University and College Union members are protesting proposals to transform their current defined benefits pension scheme to an inferior defined contribution one. Some scheme members could lose around 200,000 in the value of their pension.

UK: London school strike over academy plans

Teachers and support staff at the Village special school in Kingsbury, northwest London, began a three-day strike on Tuesday against plans by the Labour-led Brent Council to turn the school into an academy. They are members of the National Education Union.

UK: Yorkshire health workers to be balloted to oppose outsourcing

Hospital workers in the Yorkshire region are to be balloted over plans by hospitals to outsource services such as portering, cleaning, catering and laundry services. The hospital trusts affected are Harrogate, Mid-Yorkshire, Airedale and Bradford.

If the ballot organised by the Unison union results in a yes vote, it will be followed by another ballot on whether to take strike action.

Scotland teachers seek pay rise

Scottish teachers are seeking a pay rise to claw back previous years of no or low pay rises. The workers in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) are demanding a 10 percent rise in upcoming talks with the Scottish government. Teachers' pay has declined by 20 percent in real terms over the last 10 years.

The EIS and the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) have, however, yet to ballot their membership over the issue.

Protest by German workers against job losses at Siemens

Around 300 Siemens AG workers protested outside the company's annual shareholders' meeting on Wednesday. The company has announced plans to cut around 7,000 jobs across its worldwide operation, of which roughly half would be in Germany—citing a fall in demand for its power production machinery. The IG Metall union is in talks with management.

Ireland: Health workers vote to strike

Around 7,000 health and social care staff employed by Section 39 organisations have voted by a 97 percent majority to hold an initial 24-hour strike on February 14. Section 39 organisations are independent bodies providing health and social care funded by the Department of Health.

Staff are seeking the restoration of previous pay cuts and parity with health and social workers employed directly by the government. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union.

Strike by Belgian supermarket workers after job loss threat

Staff at many of the French multinational Carrefour supermarkets in Belgium took unofficial action on January 26. The previous day, the company had announced plans to close some supermarkets and cut around 1,200 jobs—including 180 jobs at its headquarters in Evere and branch closures in Genk and near Liege.

A spokesperson for the BBTK union told *Flanders Today*, "The union is not calling for a strike, but we support their action and want to send a message to the management."

Carrefour is one of the world's largest supermarket chains. In September, it announced plans to enlarge the Internet ordering side of its business as part of an ongoing restructuring.

Maltese medics announce industrial action

The Maltese Medical Association (MAM) announced doctors would begin industrial action on Monday to protest the transfer of hospital services. Services at Karen Grech, Luga and Gozo General hospitals will be transferred from current provider VGH to Steward Healthcare.

MAM argues the government has not given the agreed amount of notice. MAM wants the government Financial Services Authority to investigate where the €60 million given to VGH went before any transfer goes ahead. MAM has not indicated what form the industrial action will take.

Middle East

Iranian sugar workers continue strikes and demonstrations over pay

Sugar workers at the Haft Tapeh sugar refining factory in Sush, Iran, are continuing their struggle for wages unpaid since July last year. On January 15, a worker who had spoken out against the company at demonstration at the factory was beaten by masked men on his way home. The next day he was arrested.

Strike by Israeli teachers in Jerusalem

Teachers in elementary schools, preschools and junior high schools in Jerusalem held a two-hour strike on Monday in response to an attack on a teacher by a parent. The attack took place Friday of last week at the Tali Gilo elementary school.

Africa

South Africa: Durban University striking workers attacked

Security guards fired rubber bullets injuring 16 striking workers and two students at Durban University of Technology (DUT).

Up to 70 percent of staff at DUT, in the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), the Tertiary Education National Union of SA and the National Tertiary Education Union, struck to demand a 10 percent wage rise. Management refuse to negotiate, with a static offer of 6 percent.

Also on strike this week were NEHAWU members at Kimberley's Sol Plaatje University, demanding a 10 percent wage increase and a 100 percent bonus raise.

Members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa continued their week-long strike alongside NEHAWU members at Witwatersrand University. Workers are demanding a 12 percent pay rise while the university has offered 8 percent.

An agreement was reached between NEHAWU and the University of South Africa to give security guards a 20 percent pay rise, while the rest of NEHAWU's lowest paid members will only get between 6.5 and 8.5 percent increase. Contract workers with 15 years or more experience will be made permanent.

Togo health sector workers strike

Togo health workers took strike action on Wednesday, to demand more equipment and nursing staff. The Union of Hospital Practitioners of Togo will be on their second strike this month, following a three-hour sit-down strike in early January.

Primary and public school teachers were also on strike, demanding an increase in their wages, while students are protesting a sharp rise in tuition fees. There is mounting opposition to the government and calls for the resignation of President Faure Gnassingbe.

Nigerian maritime workers threaten strike over dangerous infrastructure

Nigerian dockworkers threatened to strike on February 5 if potholes in the approach roads to ports such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Calabar and Warri are not filled. A strike was called off in May last year, but since then workers have been killed on the Oshodi-Apapa dual carriageway.

Members of the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria are threatening national strike action unless the government diverts all vehicles to the Oshodi-Apapa approach, to permit road repairs.

Nigerian Population Commission workers strike suspended

The National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria's three-week strike was called off Monday after the intervention of the National Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress. A meeting scheduled for Tuesday between the presidents of the two union bodies and the government was cancelled.

Workers who are protesting the reappointment of the director general are calling for an investigation into the finances of the NPC and demanding improved working conditions.

Nigerian research workers continue strike

Workers at the Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria, Iyanomo, Edo State demonstrated as part of their nationwide strike since November of last year. Their demands include the payment of 12 months' salary arrears, retirement at 65 years, and increased research funding.

They are members of the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and Academic Staff Union of Research Institutes (ASURI).

Nigerian Labour Congress orders workers back to work

The Nigerian Labour Congress, alongside other unions, ordered striking workers back to work in Oyo State after a seven-day followed by a three-day warning strike. The unions went into negotiations with state officials on Friday last week and met again on Wednesday.

The public sector workers took solidarity action in support of a 13-week strike of workers in the tertiary institutions and the sacking of 256 workers at the Ladoko Akintola University Teaching Hospital. They are owed well over a year's wages, and pensioners have not been paid for nearly five

years.

The state chairman of the NLC said the meetings had expressed the "sincerity of the government to resolve the dispute." A week earlier, the state governor referred to the strike as "illegal, unwarranted and unjustifiable", adding, "[S]uch moves must be stopped."

Nigerian non-academic unions continue two-month strike

Nigerian workers in 84 universities are continuing their indefinite strike, ongoing for nearly two months under the aegis of the Joint Action Committee.

The national strike, which began on December 4, concerns several outstanding issues, including N66 billion (US \$183.5 million) in allowances and unfair distribution of funds towards a wages settlement.



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