

Ryanair cabin crew to strike in Spain, rail strikes in UK, Nigeria rocked by strikes

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Spanish Ryanair workers prepare to strike over conditions

All cabin crews at Ryanair in Spain are preparing to take strike action on January 8, 9 and 13. The members of the USO and Sitepla unions are demanding the company bring their contracts into line with Spanish law.

Last September, 40,000 passengers had their journeys delayed during a strike against work conditions across six European countries.

In December, the Civil Aviation Authority said Irish-based Ryanair would suffer “enforcement action” due to its refusal to pay compensation to passengers whose journeys were disrupted.

In separate action, 300 airport workers employed by security company Eulen at Madrid International Airport took strike action when their employer refused to provide them with winter clothes, breaching the “law of prevention of occupational hazards.”

Strikes on British railways in run-up to Christmas and on New Year’s Eve

Rail workers in two regions—the South-West and the North—took further action over Christmas in a long-running dispute over DOO (driver only operated trains). DOO would lead to the elimination of 6,000 conductors’ jobs and threatens passenger safety.

Workers on the South Western Railway walked out at midnight on New Year’s Eve. The 24-hour strike affected rail services throughout the south of England, including Waterloo, the busiest London station. Workers on Northern Rail struck on December 29—the 42nd day of action since the dispute began—and will strike again January 5.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) union has limited action against the private rail franchises to regional, short-term strikes, isolating and dissipating struggles. It has already sealed DOO deals with rail franchises at ScotRail and Greater Anglia.

The union has also agreed to a sell-out deal “in principle” with Merseyrail and the Labour Party-led Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, whereby “door control and dispatch of the trains will transfer to the driver” on new trains.

In June, the RMT agreed to a framework deal with West Midlands Trains that “[o]n such new or modified rolling stock, train drivers will operate the train doors and undertake train dispatch in normal circumstances ...”

Lecturers at 26 colleges in England vote to strike

College lecturers at 26 colleges in England balloted 89 percent to strike over pay last month, in an overall turnout of 48 percent. At 10 colleges, the turnout met the 50 percent threshold for legal action.

The University and College union (UCU) suspended action at four colleges in Wales after accepting pay rises of 3.5 percent for lower grades, and two and 1.5 for higher grades.

Lecturers at Scotland’s Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, are balloting for strike action against 40 job losses. A UCU official explained the union decided to ballot because management “refused to rule out compulsory redundancies.”

Last April, the UCU sold out a 14-day national strike by 50,000 university staff in defence of their pensions.

British public sector union suspends pension strike at Historic Royal Palaces

The Public and Commercial Services union suspended strike action at UK’s Historic Royal Palaces, proposed for three hours each day on December 28 and January 2, pending negotiations.

The workers, including beefeater guards at the Tower of London and staff at Kensington Palace and Hampton Court, are opposed to plans to replace their pension with an inferior scheme.

Refuse workers take work to rule action in Birmingham, UK

Refuse workers in the UK city of Birmingham are working-to-rule over payments made by their employers to colleagues who did not take part in a series of strikes in 2017. Ninety-five percent voted for industrial action out of a 75 percent turnout. The action began December 29.

Workers in the GMB union, who did not take part in 222 days of strikes called by the Unite union in 2017, were paid £4,000 each.

The council have brought in contractors to collect rubbish. In 2017, the council spent £6.3 million in its strike-breaking operations.

Irish Tesco supermarket workers strike at two branches

Supermarket workers employed by Tesco in and around Sligo, Ireland carried out a two-day strike on December 28 and 29. They picketed two stores in Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon. Some of their grievances are the withdrawal of canteen service and the subjection of staff to body searches.

Ninety-seven percent of the workers voted to strike on an 85 percent turnout.

German armed drivers set to strike

Around 12,500 armed drivers in Germany, who transport large amounts of cash for banks and retail stores, were due to strike from January 2 to 4.

The Verdi union members are demanding a €250 monthly increase. The union, one of Germany's largest, has engaged in five rounds of wage talks. Another round is due to take place on Thursday and Friday.

The workers currently earn from €1,800 to €2,400 per month in the eastern part of Germany, whereas pay is €2,200 to €2,900 in the west—a division that the unions have helped create.

Registry and notary workers strike in Portugal

About 90 percent of employees at the Registry and Notary Services in Portugal went out on strike December 26-28.

The demands of the strikers include ending the proposed revision of the legal framework within which they work, the hiring of 1,500 more staff and better training for new employees.

Protesting Iranian teachers face anti-riot forces and arbitrary arrests

Riot police used tear gas against teachers in Isfahan, Iran on December 27. They were protesting the arrest of a colleague sentenced to a ten and a half-year prison sentence for “assembly and collusion.”

Iran's Appeals Court sentenced Mohammad Habibi to 74 lashes, a minimum of seven and a half years in jail and a ban on political and social activities for two years upon his release. In addition to the charge of “assembly and collusion against national security,” Habibi was convicted of “propaganda against the state” and “disturbing public order.”

One of the protesters explained that though many were retired teachers, they were confronted within minutes by “anti-riot units and policemen on motorcycles” who “attacked and released tear gas”, as well as making several arrests.

Tunisian journalists call for general strike

Tunisian journalists are calling for a general strike on January 14 to commemorate the eighth anniversary of the Arab Spring revolts.

Protesters clashed with riot police over the New Year after journalist Aberrazak Zorgui, 32, set himself alight to protest rising unemployment.

Teachers have been warned by the Intelligence Ministry they will be fired and arrested if they continue to protest.

Morocco hit by three days of protest strikes

Protest groups in Morocco called strikes January 2-4 to condemn precarious work conditions, high unemployment, price rises, and attacks on pensions and labour freedoms.

A coalition of Moroccan unions have said they may declare January a “month of anger” should the government fail to review its position on improving working conditions, in particular raising wages. In addition the Democratic Labor Federation has said it will hold a march on Tangier Road beginning January 11.

Sudan New Year marked by protests over living costs

Workers marched in Sudan's capital Khartoum and other areas on New Year's Eve to protest government austerity and rising prices. Security forces attacked protesters with tear gas and live fire.

Last week journalists went on a three-day strike to protest government censorship of media coverage of the ongoing protests. Amnesty International estimate 37 people have been killed during the last three weeks of protests.

Zimbabwe doctors strike continues as public sector workers threaten national strike

Newly qualified doctors in Zimbabwe have refused to scab on the month-long doctors' strike. Doctors are demanding a pay increase, pay in US dollars, better working conditions, provision of medicines and working medical equipment.

Five hundred and fifty mainly junior doctors out of a national workforce of 1,000 have been suspended since the action began.

Workers across the public sector are calling for strikes to demand improved wages and conditions. Members of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe are threatening to strike alongside the doctors.

Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions President Mutasa said there might be a nationwide stoppage in January “to force the government to the negotiating table.”

Workers have suffered a three-fold decline in the value of their wages over the last year.

Workers in Nigeria threaten general strike over non-implementation of minimum wage

Workers in Nigeria are poised to come out in a general strike over pay on January 9. The federal government missed the deadline for introducing a N30,000 minimum wage bill in the national assembly on December 31.

Under labour law, the national minimum wage—which expired last

September—is reviewed every five years. Workers demanded a new minimum wage of around N56,000 to N65,000, but the National Labour Congress (NLC) settled for half that amount in November.

The NLC previously called off a general strike planned for November 5, accepting promises of an early government bill on a minimum wage agreement.

Academics at Nigerian universities continue two-month long strike

Academics at Nigeria’s public universities are continuing their two-month strike over poor conditions, lack of funding and the non-implementation of the 2009 conditions of employment contract.

The NGO, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, called on the United Nations to intervene to pressure the federal government to fund higher education, which is becoming the privilege of the rich.

Education in the private universities has continued since the strike began last November 4.

Nigerian polytechnic staff continue six-week wages and funding strike

Staff at Nigeria’s polytechnics are continuing their indefinite strike begun December 12 over unpaid wages and underfunding.

The college unions’ umbrella organisation, the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, called off planned strikes in October and November to negotiate with the government.

The government promised a N603 billion revitalisation programme for the polytechnics in 2009. This was reduced to N15 billion in 2017, then completely abandoned. The under-funding has left many colleges unable to pay multiple months of wages and allowances.

Nigeria’s parliamentary civil servants ignore union’s call to end strike

Most of Nigeria’s 3,000 striking parliamentary civil servants have ignored their union’s back-to-work order.

Members of the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN) held a warning strike to demand implementation of a pay increase and a 2009 conditions of service agreement. PASAN called off the stoppage after four days, claiming parliamentary management had agreed to their demands.

Nigerian aviation managers strike over promotions

Workers at the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority threatened to strike January 2 unless their members received a promotion.

Members of the National Union of Air Transport Employees and Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria complain the issue has been ignored for over a year. Rather than promoting workers internally, staff at senior managerial level have been brought in from outside agencies.

Kenyan teachers to strike over dictatorial relocation policy

Kenyan teachers threatened strike action January 3, preventing students’ returning to classes after the Christmas break. Members of the Kenyan National Union of Teachers (KNUT) are demanding employer, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), retract a relocation decree.

KNUT called its 180,000 members to stay away from work to protest the transfer of head teachers, outstanding promotions and the teacher qualification tests. Over 3,000 teachers have been transferred, often breaking up families.

A labour court ordered KNUT to abandon the strike for discussions with employers, but TSC did not show up. The KNUT leadership said, “Teachers have in the past gone on strike even when there are court orders.”



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