

French transport strike continues into the New Year; German and Portuguese airport workers carry out stoppages

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

French transport workers' strike continues

French transport workers and other workers are maintaining their strike begun December 5, in defiance of the CFDT and UNSA unions' call for a Christmas truce. They are opposing pension "reforms" put forward by Macron's right-wing government.

In Paris overnight transport on New Year's Eve was hit—in previous years some Metro, tram and bus services ran all night to allow people celebrating the New Year to get home. This year it was restricted to buses and three out of eight of the city's tram services.

The restrictions continued New Year's Day with a severely limited service being provided by RATP, which runs the public transport facilities in Paris and the surrounding area.

CGT union members are planning a blockade of oil refineries across France from January 7 to 10, which would quickly lead to fuel shortages at French filling stations.

Talks with the government are scheduled for January 7. The unions will likely attempt a climb down in the face of the government's determination to impose the attacks on pensions.

French workers need to take the initiative and intervene independently of the unions. On December 24 the World Socialist Web Site wrote that "strikers are increasingly demanding to decide their own actions independently of union bosses who negotiate with the state. The only possible progressive outcome of this confrontation between the working class and the government is for the working class to bring down Macron."

Strike by airline cabin crew at Germanwings

Cabin crew at Germanwings came out on strike midnight on Sunday and were to remain out until midnight New Year's Day. The low-cost subsidiary of Lufthansa was expected to cancel around 180 flights because of the action.

The UFO union members are seeking higher pay, improved benefits and for those on temporary contracts to be given long-term contracts. Talks to avert the strike broke down on Saturday. Berlin-Tegel, Cologne-Bonn, Hamburg and Munich were among the airports hardest hit by the strike.

A Lufthansa-wide strike by cabin crew members took place at the

beginning of November. It received wide support as working conditions have deteriorated in recent years. Twenty years ago, working as a steward for Lufthansa was considered a well-paid and secure job. Today it is a low-paid, insecure and demanding role.

Flights cancelled as Portuguese ground staff strike at Lisbon airport

Ground staff at Lisbon airport began a three-day stoppage December 27. The National Union for Civil Aviation Workers (SINTAC) members were protesting the failure of their employer to end a wage freeze.

According to the union an agreement to end a three-year freeze was scheduled to expire in November. Employer Portway did not lift the freeze because the workers rejected a revised employment contract put forward by the company in August.

Around 20 scheduled flights to and from the airport were cancelled, including from Paris, London and Manchester. According to Reuters, SINTAC plans further weekend strikes and a ban on overtime running up to the end of March.

Rail workers in southwest England ballot for further strike action

Rail workers employed by the South Western rail company are being balloted for further strike action. The result will be announced at the end of January. Any proposed strike would take place in February.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have been striking throughout December, save for election day, December 12. They are opposing the extension of the use of driver only operated (DOO) trains. December's strike by around 800 rail staff was part of an ongoing two-year old dispute against DOO. The action in December led to the cancellation of around 40 percent of the company's scheduled trains. Services into southwest London were particularly hard hit.

The strike was part of a long-running dispute against DOO, which threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guard jobs. Action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at numerous private train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

Finnish technology workers' struggle continues into the new year

Finnish technology workers walked out December 9 against a wage offer of 0.5 percent for 2020. Talks between the technology workers' union, the Industrial Union and the employers' body broke down. They were due to resume Thursday.

Collective bargaining agreements covering several public and service sector groups of workers are to expire in the first half of 2020.

Finland has been engulfed in a strike wave against austerity, rising inequality, attacks on wages, and growing opposition to the entire political establishment—the same issues radicalising working people around the world.

A two-week strike by postal workers in November was carried out against the transfer of 700 parcel delivery workers to an outsourced subsidiary of Posti (the Finnish national post service), resulting in wage cuts of up to 30 percent. Thousands of transport workers launched a solidarity strike, resulting in the cancellation of 300 flights by national airline Finnair.

Benefit staff in two Northern Ireland offices walk out

The strike by around 50 workers at Jobs and Benefits MOU (Mail Opening Units) offices in Coleraine and Limavady in Northern Ireland which began on December 23 is due to end Friday. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) members, responsible for opening mail and inputting data, are involved in an unresolved pay dispute.

NIPSA members at the Child Maintenance Service unit in Belfast were scheduled to strike Thursday and Friday. Workers at the Employment Support Allowance Branch in Belfast are set to walk out on Monday.

The workers are protesting delays to their scheduled annual pay rise.

Home help staff in Dublin, Ireland to conduct strike ballots

Around 500 Irish home help staff will be balloted for strike action beginning January 20. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members work for around 50 organisations providing home care services in the capital Dublin and surrounding area.

They work for Section 39 bodies, meaning they receive state financial support to provide home care provision.

Employers failed to implement an agreement signed in April last year under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission. The agreement was to restore the pay of Section 39 body employees, cut following the 2008 financial crash.

At the end of January, SIPTU is to ballot 250 Section 39 bodies across Ireland that provide health and social service provision over pay cuts.

Africa

South African nuclear energy workers in Durban demonstrate over unpaid wages

Workers at the South African nuclear energy facility demonstrated outside its offices in Durban demanding their December wages.

The state-owned Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa (NECSA) said it will be difficult to pay wages up until March.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union say if the company does not pay December wages it will be a declaration of war, but it has no plan for industrial action. It previously offered to discuss a rescue plan with NECSA.

Employees of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) faced Christmas without wages.

Hundreds of ANC staff received a letter informing them they would not receive increments this year but saying that wages would be paid. A spokesman claimed the lack of funds is due to lack of donations because of the unpopularity of the party.

Nigerian power workers' strike threat

Nigerian Power generation and distribution workers resumed their threat to walk out unless management honour an agreement that ended a previous strike a fortnight ago.

The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) called off the stoppage at Transition Company of Nigeria (TCN)—planned for 21 days—after one day because the strike was deemed illegal.

Workers are demanding outstanding wages, the payment of dues and protesting sackings since the company was privatised.

TCN was formed in 2004 when the state-owned Power Holding Company of Nigeria was privatised. Thousands of workers were sacked without promised redundancy payments.

The TNC has not paid the union dues of company union Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies (SSAEAC) members for the last 33 months, worth N25 million. Around 70 percent of members left the SSAEAC and joined the NUEE.

Nigerian hospital university workers in Ekiti state threaten stoppage over sackings

Workers at the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital (EKSUTH) Nigeria are threatening industrial action over proposed sackings and outstanding wages.

Trade Union Congress, Nigerian Labour Congress, and Joint Negotiating Council have given the teaching hospital fourteen days to withdraw the sackings or their members will strike.

Ekiti State University sacked 900 of its workforce three weeks ago claiming they were irregularly appointed and the university was overstaffed. Workers claim the hospital is understaffed and is losing trained staff to a brain drain abroad.

Further strikes loom in Nigeria over unimplemented minimum wage

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) has threatened a confrontation over the minimum wage (MW) unless 31 outstanding states pay up by the end of the year. The NLC is proposing a warning strike from January 6.

Many states that have not paid the MW have formed committees for negotiations with the unions. While the N30,000 MW was agreed over a year ago, some workers did not get the previous MW of N18,000, or get paid at all or only received partial wages.



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