

French power workers at Grand'Maison dam join pension strikes;
130,000 Turkish metalworkers threaten walk out

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.

Strike by French power workers

Power workers at the hydroelectric site of Grand'Maison struck Tuesday shutting down the plant. The members of the Stalinist CGT union joined the ongoing protests of hundreds of thousands against the attack on pensions by the Macron government.

Power grid workers in the Paris region were also on strike on Tuesday over the same issue. The action by CGT members cut power supplies to the Rungis wholesale food market in Paris, several Parisian suburbs and Orly airport.

Transit workers in Paris walked out on December 5, only ending the strike at the weekend. Yellow vest protests have been taking place every weekend for more than a year.

The WSWs wrote that Macron was able to rely “on the close collaboration of the union bureaucracies, which had negotiated the pension cuts with him. The first attempt by the working class to overcome the resistance of the trade unions—but in a struggle limited to the national stage and controlled by the same trade unions whose opposition they were trying to smash—did not suffice to overcome all the political obstacles facing the workers.”

Pay strike by carpet workers at UK factory enters third month

Around 70 UK workers at Wessex Carpets in Dewsbury and Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire are on indefinite strike, begun two months ago. The Unite union members are opposing the company's pay offer of 2.25 percent. The company had previously given workers a three percent pay rise each year. This year profits amounted to £5 million.

The strikers mount picket lines at each morning and evening shift change. Talks held last week, under the auspices the government's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) failed to resolve the dispute. The company has begun hiring scab workers.

Portuguese court officials announce yearlong partial strike

From Wednesday, court officials in Portugal began a partial strike scheduled to last until December 21. The SOJ union members will take their allotted lunch hours and leave work at the prescribed leaving time—refusing to do unpaid extra work in the lunch break and evening. Another dispute is over retirement provision.

Baggage staff at UK Heathrow airport to strike

Staff working for Global Baggage Solutions at Heathrow airport are to walk out from February 2 until February 5 and again from February 22 to February 25. The Unite members are responsible for locating passengers' lost luggage.

The company failed to offer a pay rise last year and this year only offered a 32p an hour rise. Workers are demanding to be paid the London Living Wage of £10.75 an hour and more for senior staff.

Eighty workers at the Vanderlande company are being balloted for strike action. The Unite members are responsible for loading passenger baggage onto aircraft. They are in dispute with the company for a three percent pay rise. The company made a 2.5 percent pay offer in August, which the baggage handlers turned down.

Following mediation by Acas, the company offered three percent which workers accepted. Vanderlande refused to extend the offer to newly appointed staff, so workers are balloting for the pay rise to be available to all baggage handlers.

Strike threat by school secretaries in Ireland

Around 3,000 school secretaries in Ireland are threatening a stoppage for parity on pay and conditions with secretaries working in education and training boards. The Forsa union members earn around €12,500 a year, but have no holiday pay or pension provision.

Talks took place this week between Forsa and the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure. Andy Pike, head of education at Forsa, told the press action was possible if talks broke down.

Train meal preparation staff at UK station to strike

Workers at Rail Gourmet based at Paddington Railway station in London are to strike on January 30 and 31. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members prepare food served on trains. The issues include working rotas, underpayment of allowances and bonuses, and having to use faulty equipment.

Turkish metalworkers strike threat

Metalworkers in Turkey are threatening to walk out over pay.

Three unions representing around 130,000 Turkish metalworkers are currently in talks with the Turkish Employers Association of Metal Industries (MESS). Metalworkers are demanding a pay increase of 26 to 34 percent and improved working conditions. They want a two-year contract to replace the current contract, which expired in August.

Around 200 companies in MESS want a three-year contract. They offered an initial pay rise of around six percent but then upped it to 10 percent.

The metalworkers have already held protests and stoppages in support of their demands in the city of Bursa and the district of Gebze. The unions are threatening a strike next month if the talks break down. Metalworkers' wages have been undermined by high inflation and devaluation of the Turkish currency.

UK car manufacturer JLR announces 500 job losses at Halewood

Car manufacturer Jaguar Land Rover has announced it is cutting 500 of the 4,000 workforce at its Halewood plant in Merseyside, northwest England.

The company says the cuts are necessary as it brings in a new shift pattern in April this year. A two-shift plus pattern will replace the current three-shift one, part of plans by the company to cut 4,500 from its international workforce. The jobs to go at Halewood, one of three JLR car factories in the UK, include permanent and agency staff.

The nationalist and corporatist perspective of the trade unions offers no perspective to fight the job losses taking place in the auto industry internationally.

Responding to the announcement, Unite union national officer Des Quinn said, "This a further blow to the UK car industry and to our members... Unite will be ensuring that the commitment to limit job losses to voluntary redundancies is fully honoured."

Strike of lawyers in Algeria

Lawyers across Algeria held a one-day strike on January 15 to oppose an increase in taxes announced in this year's government budget. The strike call was issued by the Algerian National Bar Association, which represents more than 50,000 lawyers in the country.

The strikers protested outside courts nationwide. Dozens of lawyers held a rally in the lobby of the judicial Council of Algiers.

Malawi teachers' national strike over sackings and non-payment of wages

Malawi teachers have gone on a national strike over non-payment of their wages and mass sackings.

The Teachers Union of Malawi members began action on Monday to demand the reinstatement of around 5,000 teachers and the payment of their December wages.

The primary and secondary school teachers were sacked for ignoring a government demand to register in the respective school districts using their national identity cards.

The government registration campaign covers most civil servants and claims it is to remove ghost workers (employees on the books who do not exist) from the system.

Workers are protesting outside district commissions until the education authorities pay outstanding wages.

Zimbabwe junior doctors deny reports of a return to work

Zimbabwe's junior hospital doctors denied reports of a return to work. The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association (ZHDA) members walked out four months ago, demanding payment in US dollars and the equipment to carry out their jobs.

A ZHDA spokesperson said most middle level doctors were leaving the country, joined by consultants and senior doctors, because of the collapse of the health system. Junior doctors who can afford to travel are leaving to complete their training in countries like the UK, which is changing the requirements to facilitate hiring them to cover for shortages in its National Health Service.

The government owned Zimbabwe Herald reported that senior doctors, who came out in support of their junior colleagues and to demand a properly resourced healthcare system, have ended their stoppage. The ZHDA accused the paper of wrongly reporting an end to the dispute before.

The billionaire's Higher Life Foundation charity offered senior doctors a Z\$10,000 top up a month over six months and junior doctors Z\$5,000, to try and break the stoppages.

Zimbabwe teachers' union accepts government cushioning allowance

In opposition to the wishes of teachers, the Zimbabwe Teachers Association declared it will not be calling industrial action and has settled for a "cushioning" wage increase.

The government offer—sporadic payments in response to runaway inflation—was agreed by the umbrella Apex Council covering much of the public sector.

Teachers alongside doctors and other civil servants continue to demand their wages are paid in US dollars as protection from raging inflation, at the last count 600 percent. Workers say they cannot afford to travel to work.

Public sector wages declined more than 15 fold since payment in US dollars ceased in 2018.

Zimbabwe school pupils at high school demonstrate over increased tuition fees

Students protested at Bulawayo's Njube High School in Zimbabwe over the recent steep rise in tuition fees and shortage of textbooks in public schools.

The police forced students to write down why they removed the country's national flag and opposed President Mnangagwa. One pupil wrote his parents could not afford the previous fees of Z\$92—increased to Z\$440 this term.

Union suspends South Africa Robben Island Museum workers strike

The South Africa Robben Island Museum strike has been suspended by the union pending further negotiations.

The 250 National Education Health and Allied Workers Union members walked out for 11 days over a nine percent pay claim, a bonus and full-time employment for casuals. The company said it could not afford more than 6.5 percent.

Talks took place January 21 under the arbitration services, CCMA.

Anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island for almost 27 years. It is now a world heritage-listed museum.

Kenyan lecturers plan national strike over bargaining deal

Kenyan university lecturers plan a national stoppage on February 4 if the government repudiates the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) 2017–2021.

Negotiations between the government and University Academic Staff Union (UASU) broke down Friday. The UASU said the government was avoiding its commitment to the CBA, including lecturers' pay progression.

The unions costed the CBA at Sh13.8 billion, but accepted a reduced figure of Sh8.8 billion. The government is now proposing to reduce that to Sh6.6 billion in a supplementary budget.

Government negotiators refused to sign off on the 2017 CBA until October last year and then did not budget for the Sh8.8 billion deal.



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