

Greece: 24-hour stoppage by public sector workers; Italian dockers boycott ships carrying arms bound for Yemen war; threats of further strikes in Zimbabwe

## 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

### Greek public sector workers stage 24-hour strike

Greek public sector workers held a 24-hour strike Tuesday. They marched through the Greek capital, Athens and rallied in Syntagma Square in front of the parliament building. The strike was organised by public sector union ADEDY, the hospital workers' union POEDIN and PENEN, the merchant seamen's union.

Workers taking part included hospital staff, who maintained a skeleton service on the day. Transport workers including rail and bus employees in Athens brought the city to a standstill. Merchant seamen walked out, affecting ferry services to the islands.

The strike was in opposition to attacks on pensions proposed by the conservative New Democracy (ND) government. The government wants to privatise parts of the social security system. Four years of rule by the pseudo-left Syriza government, which imposed relentless austerity on behalf of the EU, paved the way for the return of the ND last year.

### Dockers in Italian port of Genoa call for boycott of ship taking arms to Yemen

Dockers in the Italian port Genoa called on other workers in the Genoa area to support attempts to block the docking of the Saudi Arabian ship, the Bahri Yanbu. The ship was scheduled to arrive on Monday.

Weapons loaded onboard are bound for the Yemen, where the Saudis are prosecuting a five-year US-backed genocidal war, in which 100,000 Yemenis have died.

### Strike threat by Austrian care workers

Around 125,000 care workers in Austria are threatening strike action to

demand a 35-hour working week. The GPA-djp and Vida trade union members are employed in the private nursing, health and social sector. The unions have not yet named a date for strikes. Negotiations are taking place with employers.

### Strike by Finnish retail staff averted as unions agree concessions

A strike by around 50,000 Finnish retail staff was averted on February 14 when union representatives and employers agreed a new two-year contract, including concessions for employers.

The PAM trade union members will get a two percent rise in April followed by 1.3 percent in April next year. The employers also agreed to end the unpopular "kiky" annual 24 hours of free labour.

Employers won important concessions over increased flexibility of shift planning. Workers had been on an overtime ban in pursuit of their demands.

The latest strikes and strike threats are part of a wave of industrial action that has hit Finland over the last few months. In December, following his mishandling of a widespread postal strike, Prime Minister Antti Rinne was forced to resign, to be replaced by Sanna Marin.

### Strike by French ski resort staff against Macron welfare attacks

Hundreds of seasonal workers, including chairlift workers at ski resorts in the French Alps and Pyrenees, walked out on Saturday. Members of the FO and Stalinist CGT union are opposed to Macron's welfare changes affecting seasonal workers. Under the changes, workers in precarious employment would not be entitled to unemployment benefit until six months after their latest work contract ended, instead of the current four months.

### Staff at Irish care centre set to strike

Around 40 staff who provide services to Alzheimer's sufferers in the Ballindine area in County Mayo in the Irish republic are to strike on Friday. Services affected will include the closure of the Western Alzheimer Respite centre in Ballindine for the day.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union are demanding restoration of salaries, cut after the 2008 crash.

The workers employed in organisations providing non-state social care services are partially funded by government funds known as Section 39 support. In response to the financial crisis, public sector workers had their wages cut. The cuts also applied to Section 39 workers. While directly employed public sector workers had some of their salary cuts restored, this has not happened with Section 39 workers despite government promises.

### **Sacked Turkish workers protest in Izmir**

Around 100 workers at the Kale Pratt aerospace factory in the port city of Izmir in western Turkey were sacked after joining the United Metal-is union. A legal appeal has been lodged against the sackings and some of the sacked workers are picketing the factory site.

Kale Pratt is part of the US-based Pratt and Whitney aerospace company.

### **Staff at UK government office in month-long strike**

Outsourced staff working at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London are in the third week of a month-long strike. The Public and Commercial Services union members employed by the outsourcing company Interserve provide cleaning, catering and maintenance services at the FCO.

In their latest ballot in October, workers voted unanimously on an 83 percent turnout to take action, including the current strike. They have been in dispute since March last year and held 18 days of strikes in 2019.

Among the issues in dispute are union recognition, full company sick pay for all staff and restoration of monthly salary payments rather than the current daily payments. They are also protesting cuts in pay and overtime rates.

### **London underground rail workers to strike**

London underground train drivers on the Bakerloo Line are to hold 24-hour stoppages from noon on Friday and again on Sunday. They voted overwhelmingly for the action.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposed to work rota changes that the drivers regard as unworkable because of health and safety concerns.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said, "The bottom line is that you cannot place intolerable stress and pressure on tube drivers that impacts on their safety-critical role and that is what this dispute is all about. The union remains available for talks."

The RMT is sabotaging the struggle against Driver Only Operated trains on the national rail network, which threaten the safety of both staff and passengers, as well as 6,000 safety-critical conductors' jobs. For over

three years, the RMT has isolated rail workers from each other, with token stoppages on a company by company basis while accepting precursors to DOO on several franchises.

### **Hunger strike by utility workers in Albania**

Six out of 16 workers at the Pocem water pumping station and electrical substation in Southern Albania began a hunger strike February 13. The facilities supply water and electricity to the city of Ballsh.

The workers have not received wages for the last 27 months, though they have maintained water and power supplies. The hunger strike follows other protests that have failed to resolve the issue.

The utility facilities have changed hands several times and have had financial problems.

One of the strikers appealed to the Albanian minister with responsibility for Infrastructure and Energy to intervene on their behalf.

### **Protest by petrochemical workers in Iran**

Around 30 petrochemical workers in Khuzestan province held a demonstration outside the Mahshahr Petroleum Products Distribution Company on Monday. They were protesting their sacking three months ago because of financial problems at the company.

Exports of Iran's crude oil have been slashed by 80 percent due to US sanctions that were reimposed over a year ago.

### **South Africa museum workers protest for a pay rise and equality**

South African workers picketed two of Cape Town's 11 Iziko museums, Slave Lodge and South African National Gallery, on their lunch break Monday.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members are demanding a pay rise and for members to be treated equally. The NEHAWU secretary general, and one of the curators, complained that there were disparities between housing allowances and wage levels going back over three years.

The Iziko museums in Cape Town employ 226 workers and have imposed a wage increase of five percent, while the union put in a claim for 12 percent.

The job description says the museum provides housing but does not mention that workers need a bond to secure housing, which is unaffordable for most.

A further complaint by workers, who preferred to stay anonymous, was that the staff had to pay to park while they were at work on the museums' premises.

NEHAWU warned if a resolution is not achieved Monday the picket would continue Tuesday and Wednesday.

A strike at the Robben Island Museum was suspended by the unions while further negotiations over a similar pay claim continues.

### **South African university strike to resume over pay**

The two-week strike at the University of South Africa (UNISA), Africa's largest university, is to resume February 17.

The labour court suspended the strike by the NEHAWU and the Academic and Professional Association members and gave management and the unions 72 hours to come to a wage agreement.

The unions rejected UNISA's offer of an increase of 6.3 percent, deadlocking negotiations. NEHAWU negotiators put in a claim for nine percent, complaining that UNISA's offer is less than most across the industry, at around seven percent.

### **South African demonstrations planned against jobs massacre**

The trade union leg of the tripartite African National Congress (ANC) government, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), is proposing to launch weekly demonstrations against job losses in the public and private sector.

The ANC government led by President Cyril Ramaphosa is proposing to retrench 30,000 jobs in the public sector. The official unemployment rate stands at 29.1 percent or 6.7 million workers, with youth (15-34) unemployment standing at 57.4 percent, the highest in the world.

### **South African union takes brewery to court for illegal sackings**

The Food and Allied Workers Union is to take ABInBev to the Competition Court over breaking a jobs' guarantee.

A US \$100 billion amalgamation of SABMiller creating ABInBev in 2016 agreed to retain all its employees for a five-year period. The agreement was broken last year when 33 jobs went and the case was taken to the Competition Commission, a drawn-out hearing which has not concluded.

The company is proposing a further 800 redundancies out of a workforce of 5,697, depending on the outcome of the hearing.

ABInBev produces the well-known beer brand Becks, among others.

### **Doctors strike in Sudan over pay and relocation**

Sudanese doctors went on strike in two hospitals on Monday over unpaid wages and staff relocation.

At the Osman Digna Hospital, in Port Sudan, doctors walked out over several months of unpaid wages and other dues. Doctors came out at the Kabkabiya Hospital in North Darfur over the relocation of its medical director for refusing to dissect a body.

The action paralysed surgery and other departments causing the transfer of patients to other hospitals.

### **Zimbabwe threats of further strikes over minimum wage**

While public sector workers, including doctors, in Zimbabwe have taken months of strike action to demand their wages are paid in US dollars, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) is pursuing a minimum

wage of Zimbabwe \$3,800 a month.

With inflation raging at 600 percent, workers cannot even afford to travel to work.

A meeting of the Zimbabwe Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF), consisting of unions, employers and government broke down with no agreement. The employers are offering Z\$1,200. The ZCTU suggested the Z\$ could be fixed to the South African Rand. A wage of Z\$3,800 is 75 percent of the poverty datum line.

The ZCTU has threatened indefinite industrial action, although with no firm proposals. Instead they say workers should present their own suggestions over action to take.

### **Indian workers building hospital in Mauritius walk out**

Indian workers from Bihar state at Indian owned company, Swadeshi Civil Infrastructure Limited, employed to build a cancer hospital at the Medpoint site, Phoenix in Mauritius, walked out on January 30.

The workers reported violations of human rights, including lack of sick pay. Many of the 150 workers joined the Construction, Metal, Wooden and Related Industries Employees Union (CMWE) or the Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers after the stoppage.

At 8.35pm the company signed an agreement with the CMWE to improve working and living conditions.



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