

Rail workers, teachers and nurses strike in Portugal over cost of living crisis, retail and technology workers walk out in Finland as union shuts down industrial workers' strike with below-inflation pay deal; rail and bus workers begin five-day pay strike in the Netherlands; university academics join UK strike wave; Israeli secondary school teachers' warning strike over pay

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.

Portuguese rail workers hold two-day stoppage, then begin partial strikes over pay

Rail workers in Portugal began a two-day total stoppage on Wednesday at state-owned rail company Comboios de Portugal (CP), which brought nearly all rail services to a halt. After that, the CP Drivers' Union has called a partial strike until February 16 of, on average, half an hour per day, *The Portugal News* reported.

CP and public rail infrastructure company Infraestruturas de Portugal made pay offers below inflation, which the CP Drivers' Union says are "indirect wage cuts, in some cases even higher than those that took place during the troika," referring to the austerity measures demanded by the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund in 2011.

Portuguese teachers strike, while most unions call an end to walkouts

Portuguese teachers held rolling strikes throughout the country this week, in a dispute over pay, staffing levels, class sizes and career progression rules which began with several stoppages in December. Despite the government imposing minimum service levels on the teachers' strike, tens of thousands joined demonstrations and walkouts.

According to *Lusa*, thousands demonstrated in Porto on Wednesday with the slogan "is a revolution necessary?" *Lusa* also reported that the leader of the National Federation of Teachers (Fenprof) said on Tuesday that the government's attacks on striking teachers meant more teachers

were walking out "with each passing day."

Despite this militant rhetoric, Fenprof and most unions have not called any more strikes after the end of the current stoppages on Thursday, after which only members of the Union of All Teachers will be on strike.

Several strikes by nurses across Portugal over pay and conditions

Nurses in Portugal walked out on several strikes this week to demand improvements in their pay and working conditions. On Thursday, *Impala* reported that nurses from three hospitals in Lisbon walked out as part of a national day of protest on Thursday.

The Portuguese Nurses Union (SEP) said that it was asking Lisbon hospitals and the government to sign a collective bargaining agreement, including 35 working hours per week and investment in hospitals.

Nurses in the Algarve also joined a strike called by the SEP on Wednesday, *The Portugal News* reported, demanding fairer application of a law on career progression, and backdated payments for those not previously eligible for pay rises.

Retail and technology workers walk out in Finland as union shuts down industrial workers' strike with below-inflation pay deal

Workers in the retail and technology sectors in Finland began strikes this week, during negotiations over national collective agreements. *YLE* reported that around 160 shops nationwide closed on Thursday, at the start of retail workers' two-day strike, and workers at 18 technology companies also walked out for three days from Thursday.

Logistics workers were also planning to strike on Monday, but the Social Democrat-led coalition government imposed a two-week delay,

after the National Mediator claimed the stoppage “targets critical services and harms the public interest.” The industrial workers’ strike which began last week was also ended, by the Industrial Union, which signed a two-year collective agreement with the Technology Industry Employers of Finland covering 90,000 workers.

The industrial sector deal is commonly viewed in Finland as setting the pattern for the rest of the economy. It amounts to a massive real terms pay cut, with only a 3.5 percent pay increase this year and a 400 euro one-off payment. For 2024, wages will rise by only 2 percent. Inflation rose to 9.1 percent in Finland, so if current price increases continue, real wages will have fallen by 11.3 percent by the end of the contract.

Workers replying to the Industrial Union’s Twitter account denounced the deal as a “A lousy result! We don’t pay your membership fees for nothing. Wage increases must ALWAYS exceed inflation, that is the minimum requirement.”

Spanish lawyers continue indefinite pay strike into third week

Public lawyers throughout Spain are now in the third week of an indefinite strike, which has cancelled and delayed thousands of trials and other legal proceedings nationwide. According to *Ideal*, lawyers demand their salaries are increased in line with the additional responsibilities they were handed by a 2009 legal reform.

The secretary of state for justice claimed the government had met all but one of the lawyers’ demands in April last year and refused to meet with the strike committee. The three unions which called the strike accuse the ministry of justice of having breached the April agreement.

Workers begin five-day pay strike in Dutch regional transport

On Monday, transport workers in the regional bus and train services of the Netherlands began a five-day strike during collective bargaining negotiations between the unions and private operators, mostly multinational companies such as Arriva and Keolis. The strike had a large impact as many thousands of workers stopped work, reportedly stopping half of all bus services, and in many regions all train services were cancelled.

The Public Transport Employers Association (VWV) made a below-inflation pay offer of 8 percent this year and 3 percent next year for the more than 14,000 workers covered by their agreements. This was rejected by both the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions and Christian National Trade Union Federation, which called for a 14 percent pay rise and reduced workloads.

The VWV threatened to take even its below-inflation pay rise off the table if strikes went ahead, allowing the current collective agreement to expire without negotiating a replacement.

Sailors hold 48-hour strike for collective agreement in Greece

Workers on ships in Greece began a 48-hour strike on Wednesday to demand a national collective agreement covering all sailors, and with substantial pay increases. According to *ef.syn*, workers also demanded permanent financial support for unemployed sailors and an end to

unofficial, uninsured work.

The Panhellenic Maritime Federation accused employers of refusing to begin negotiations for a new collective agreement. Workers on tugboats and lifeboats, covered by a different collective agreement, also joined the strike from Wednesday, and will walk out on Friday and Saturday. The Panhellenic Union of Tug and Lifeboat Crews say that after signing a preliminary agreement with the employers’ organisation, the employer asked them to sign a final agreement with a number of changes the union had not accepted, *ef.syn* reported.

Workers strike against closure of Sàfilo eyewear factory in Longarone, Italy

Workers in the Italian town of Longarone held an eight-hour strike on Thursday against the plan to close the local plant owned by Sàfilo, which employs 472 people, *ANSA* reported. Around 2,000 workers from the plant near Longarone and Sàfilo factories in nearby Venice and Padua joined a rally against the closure.

Sàfilo makes sports and designer glasses, and is licensed to produce eyewear by many fashion designers and brands. According to *ANSA*, 400 jobs at Sàfilo had already been cut by “voluntary” redundancies in a restructuring between 2019 and 2022.

Rather than mobilising broader sections of the working class in defence of jobs, which are under attack across Europe, the unions made a nationalist appeal to the Minister for Business and Made In Italy, from the ruling far-right Brothers of Italy party. *Il Gazzettino* quoted the complaints of the CGIL union that “Made in Italy, a world-famous brand [is] unfortunately violated by laws that leave companies ample room to move production abroad. ... And on this point, politics, which should govern the production processes of a nation in the collective interest, does not seem to withstand the pressures of lobbies.”

Cleaning and service workers strike at university hospital in Göttingen, Germany

Cleaning and service workers at the university hospital in the German city of Göttingen began a two-day stoppage on Thursday, demanding a wage increase of at least 20 percent and inclusion in the collective agreement.

The hospital employs many service staff through a subsidiary UMG-Klinikservice, according to the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, and workers at the subsidiary are calling for equal treatment with those employed directly by the hospital.

This is the second strike at the hospital after the United Services Union (Verdi) called a three-day walkout from January 25. The hospital management said it had offered a 20 percent pay rise, but it was spread over three years. At the current rate of inflation, 8.7 percent, prices would rise by 28.4 percent over three years, making the hospital’s offer a substantial pay cut.

UK university academics strike over pay and conditions

Around 70,000 university academic staff at 150 universities across the

UK walked out on Thursday and are due to be out Friday.

They took part in the coordinated strike on February 1 alongside teachers, civil servants and rail workers over pay, conditions and to protest anti-strike laws being legislated.

The University and College Union (UCU) members are protesting the latest 5 percent pay offer from the employers' body. The RPI inflation figure is around 13 percent. They are also calling for a reversal in the cuts to pension provision previously pushed through. The latest offer was rejected by 80 percent of UCU members who took part in an on-line poll. They are also protesting working conditions, particularly the use of short-term contracts that give no security of employment.

Following the planned two-day strike this week, a further 15 days of stoppages are planned. These are three three-day strikes, a two-day and a four-day strike throughout February and March.

A UCU press release said the action will impact around 2.5 million students and that picket lines will be mounted at all 150 institutions involved.

UK University of Manchester students stage occupation over rent costs and in support of striking university staff

University of Manchester (UoM) students who last month began a rent strike to protest the high cost of student accommodation began an occupation of university buildings on Wednesday night.

They have occupied the Engineering building, the Samuel Alexander building and the high security senior management John Owens building, where the university vice-chancellor has her office. The occupying students were able to evade security to hold the buildings.

Their demands include for a £1,500 payment to counter the erosion of maintenance loans by inflation. They are also calling for the university to meet the demands of the striking UoM academic staff, belonging to the UCU union who began a two-day strike Thursday.

The students say they will maintain the occupation until their demands are met. A *Manchester Evening News* article reported signs outside the occupied John Owens building: "We demand affordable rent. Nancy earns £260K". This was a reference to Nancy Rothwell, the university president/vice-chancellor and her quarter of a million pounds plus salary.

According to the *Tab* student news website, Professor Brian Cox, after leaving a lecture he had given at the university on Wednesday night, stopped to be photographed with one of the occupiers in a gesture of support.

Walkout by non-teaching staff at Leeds University, England over pay

On Wednesday, hundreds of non-teaching staff at Leeds University began a three-day strike over pay. The Unite and Unison union members are protesting a 3 percent pay rise imposed by university umbrella employer body, the University and College Employers Association. They will be joined by academic staff on Thursday and Friday.

Further strike dates are scheduled in February and March. Unison announced a total of eight days of stoppages with further strikes on February 11, 12, 22, 23 and 24. Unite announced three further stoppages, on February 22, 23 and 24.

UK firefighters' union try to push through below inflation pay deal

The UK firefighters' union is attempting to push through a below-inflation pay deal after the latest union/employer talks.

Last month, Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members returned a big vote in favour of strike action after rejecting a 5 percent pay offer. Following the vote, the FBU did not announce any strike dates for strikes but entered discussions with the employers' body.

A new pay offer was put on the table on Tuesday, for a 7 percent pay increase backdated to July 1, 2022, plus a 5 percent increase from July 1 this year. The offer is now being put to a ballot of FBU members, postponing any strikes until the result is known.

Firefighters have seen a real-terms cut in pay of 12 percent since 2010 and jobs have been cut by around 20 percent over the same period. Firefighters last held a national strike 20 years ago.

Maintenance workers on cross-London rail strike over pay parity

Rail maintenance workers employed on the Elizabeth cross-London rail line held a 24-hour strike beginning the evening of February 3. They want a pay rise in line with other rail maintenance workers.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union members working for Rail for London Infrastructure were offered a 4 percent pay rise. Maintenance workers employed by MTR, the outsourced part of the Elizabeth Line, were given an 8.2 percent rise while those employed by Docklands Light Railway were given nearly 10 percent.

It was the third strike in the campaign of the rail maintenance workers fight for pay parity.

Engineers at Scottish pharmaceutical plant strike over bonus payment

Around 40 workers employed by contractor Kaefer Limited began a week-long strike on Monday at GSK's pharmaceutical plant in Irvine, Scotland.

The strike follows an ongoing overtime ban and a previous stoppage from January 9 to 23. The Unite members work in engineering construction roles at the plant. They want a bonus payment of £2.37 an hour, the maximum figure allowed under the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry.

BP Petrofac Installations offshore oil maintenance workers strike off Scottish coast over rota changes and pay

On Wednesday, around 80 offshore oil maintenance workers employed on BP Petrofac Installations began a 48-hour strike.

The Unite members oppose changes to the current three days on, three days off rota and pay. The workers are employed on platforms off the Scottish coast as well on the Glen Lyon floating production facility west of Shetland. They are employed as deck crew, pipe fitters, riggers and safety technicians.

Three 48-hour stoppages are planned until March 3. Petrofac workers

previously walked out in November. They voted by more than 98 percent majority in favour of stoppages. BP recently announced record profits for last year at \$27.7 billion.

Distillery engineers at Scottish plant strike over pay cut

Engineers working for Diageo's distillery in Leven, Scotland began taking strike action at weekends on February 3. The action is due to last until April 3.

The Unite members are protesting a change in pay rates which leaves them 6 percent worse off. The distillery produces the well-known brand Johnnie Walker. The striking workers will protest outside the Johnnie Walker Experience on Princes Street in Edinburgh on Saturday.

Staff at Scottish airports to walk out over pay offer

Staff working for Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL) are to walk out after rejecting a 5 percent pay offer from the company, which is wholly owned by the Scottish government.

The Unite members work as administrators, baggage handlers, fire and rescue workers, ground crew and in security. HIAL operates 11 airports in the north of Scotland.

Stoppages will be held at Dundee Airport on February 17 and 20, while strikes will take place at Barra Airport, Benbecula Airport, Campbeltown Airport, Inverness Airport, Islay Airport, Kirkwall Airport, Stornoway Airport, Sumburgh Airport, Tiree Airport, Wick Airport on February 21, 22 and 23.

UK civil servants plan all-out one-day strike to coincide with budget day announcement

Around 100,000 UK civil servants in 123 government departments will walk out on March 15. March 15 is the date that Conservative government Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt will announce his budget, further decimating the living conditions of workers.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are currently taking partial sectional strike action. They want a 10 percent pay rise, and are protesting attacks on jobs, pensions and redundancy terms.

Strikes by British Museum staff, DVLA driving licence, border force and Department of Works and Pensions workers, staff at the Department for Education and Ofsted among others have so far taken place. DVLA workers are to hold a further six days of stoppages. DVLA workers employed in Drivers Medical in Swansea and Birmingham are to strike February 20 to 25.

The vote to strike was announced in November. More than 85 percent voted in favour, with a turnout of over 50 percent.

Teachers in the National Education Union will also be out on that day as well as March 16.

Around 30,000 PCS members in His Majesty's Revenue & Customs, in Care Quality Commission, Companies House and the National Museum of Wales are currently balloting and could be part of the national day of action.

Meanwhile Prospect, the union representing managers and senior

personnel working for the civil service is currently balloting its membership over pay and attacks on jobs, pension and redundancy terms. Its ballot closes on February 24. In an indicative ballot Prospect members voted overwhelmingly to strike.

Prospect represents staff working in the Animal and Plant Health Agency, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, the Health and Safety Executive, the Met Office, Natural England, Trinity House (Marine safety) and UK Research and Innovation.

Power grid workers at UK firm ballot over pay

Around 1,300 workers employed by UK Power Networks are currently balloting over pay. The ballot closes March 7.

The Unite members work in administration as well as maintaining and repairing the electricity grid covering London, and the south east and east of England. They rejected a two-year pay deal of an already imposed 7 percent for this year and an average of RPI and CPI inflation figures for 2023/24.

UK Power Networks made £2.4 billion in profits between 2017 and 2021, with a profit rate five times the FTSE-100 average for the period.

In a consultative ballot, the workers rejected the pay offer by a 98 percent majority. A Unite press release stated any stoppages would begin in March.

Israeli secondary school teachers strike over pay

Teachers in Israeli secondary schools held a one-day warning strike on Sunday.

The Israeli Secondary School Teachers' Association is calling for a pay increase and for the starting pay of a new teacher to be 12,000 NIS per month. They were joined by some teachers in middle schools who are members of the association.

The teachers' union has accused the Finance and Education Ministries of procrastination over discussions on a new collective agreement as the previous one expired over a year ago.

Strike call in response to far-right Israeli government judicial reforms

The Movement for Quality Government that has called Saturday night protests against the judicial reforms of Israel's far-right Netanyahu coalition government has called for a general strike next Monday.

The strike call was made at a press conference on Tuesday. The vote on the changes is due to take place on Monday.

The planned judicial reforms will give more power to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in making judicial appointments, undermining judicial independence.

Lebanese food and grocery delivery drivers strike over pay

Last week, delivery drivers working for the Lebanese delivery company

Toters held a partial strike.

The delivery drivers, who mainly use motor scooters to deliver goods, are classed as independent contractors and have no medical cover. They will typically make 20 to 25 trips a day often on unsafe roads. The drivers were demanding to be paid LL35,000 LL a trip, however they ended their strike on February 3 after accepting an offer of LL26,000 a trip.

Lebanon is suffering a continuing economic crisis which has seen the value of the lira fall while prices particularly of food and fuel continue to rise. Around 80 percent of the population live in poverty.

Sudanese weather station workers and teachers continue long-running strikes over pay and conditions

Workers at the Sudanese Meteorological Corporation (SMC) have been on strike for seven weeks. The strike committee decided to continue the stoppage after management failed to agree to the demands of the strike committee for a pay increase.

The strike at the SMC forced the closure of seven airports. Kamaleldin Ibrahim, of the Meteorological Media Committee, stated that “airports and meteorological stations in the country are in complete paralysis.”

Teachers in Sudan have also been on strike for almost two months. They are demanding higher public spending on education, improved working conditions and an increase in the minimum wage.

Libyan workers at Misrata Airport on strike over unpaid wages

Ground service workers at Misrata Airport began an indefinite sit-down strike on February 5 to demand payment of suspended salaries.

Workers’ demands include payment of salaries, delayed for 19 months, and the integration of the Libyan Handling Company employees into the Ministry of Transportation, so they can receive salaries regularly until the company’s finances improve.

The Benghazi Ground Services Union announced its withdrawal from the General Union of Air Transport of the Libyan Workers Union—citing its failure to defend its members—having allowed the suspension of their salaries for over a year and a half without lifting a finger.

Nigerian transport workers threaten strike over high fuel prices

Transport workers in Nigeria are threatening to strike and occupy the headquarters of Nigeria National Petroleum Limited to protest the high cost of fuel. Fuel price hikes have forced many workers to abandon their buses, motorcycles and other vehicles and lose their livelihoods.

The Commercial Motorcycles Association of Nigeria, Tricycles Owners Association of Nigeria, National Association of Traders of Nigeria, Luxurious Bus Operators Union, Market Women Association of Nigeria and Trailer Drivers Association of Nigeria, issued a communique following a day-long meeting.

The communique warned: “That a three-day warning of civil strike action be issued to the Federal Government to quickly fix anomalies in the oil and gas sector leading to hardship across the country.”

Actors on South African television drama Muvhango strike over nonpayment of wages

Actors on the South African television channel SABC2 drama Muvhango based in Johannesburg took strike action when informed their salaries would not be paid. This is the second time in three months.

According to *news24*, Muvhango producer Word of Mouth Pictures has sacked their CEO Mandla KaNozulu for alleged mismanagement of millions of rands.

An actor told *news 24*, “We are not working this week because no one has been paid. The cast members from Venda (in Limpopo 384 km away) left and no scenes have been shot because our salaries are not in. We have asked them to inform us in time when there are [money] issues because it can’t be that we are always informed at the eleventh hour.”

Distell Brewery workers in South Africa strike for union recognition

Over 50 workers at Distell Brewery walked out for union recognition earlier this week and picketed the Adam Tas brewery in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. The workers, who include warehouse, machine operators, order pickers and cellar staff want recognition and bargaining rights with Solidarity, the largest union at that site.

Ground Up reported that the recognized unions the Food and Allied Workers Union and The National Union of Food, Beverage, Wine, Spirit and Allied Workers were not helping workers enough and did not consult them before concluding negotiations. Distell worker Belinda Appollis said, “We want a union who will fight for our rights.”



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