

One-day general strike in Czech Republic to oppose austerity; walkout at Iranian University in defence of students targeted for not wearing hijab; Nigerian maritime workers to strike in solidarity with truckers

## 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.*

### One-day general strike in the Czech Republic against austerity

Workers throughout the Czech Republic joined a one-day general strike to oppose the government's austerity measures.

The coalition government led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the right-wing Civic Democratic Party plans savage cuts to reduce the state deficit, as well as an increase in the retirement age.

Strikers demanded more money for public services and denounced the government for failing to control energy prices and inflation. Currently at 8.5 percent, inflation has averaged more than 12 percent over the last year.

According to the unions, teachers from most schools joined the strikes, as well as doctors and workers in the private sector, including the Czech auto company Škoda (owned by the Volkswagen Group since its privatisation between 1994 and 2000).

### Amazon workers strike across Europe countries during "Black Friday" promotion

Workers at Amazon in several countries across Europe began strikes around November 24, during the American multinational retailer's "Black Friday" event. The "Make Amazon Pay" campaign was called by the UNIGlobal union confederation, according to *RTÉ*.

*Reuters* reported that workers at five Amazon warehouses began a 24-hour strike on the night of November 23, and more than 1,000 workers at the warehouse in Coventry, UK, stopped work on November 24. Members of the CGIL union in Italy held a walkout at an Amazon warehouse in the northern town of Castel San Giovanni.

The Spanish Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union called off a strike of one hour per shift on Monday among 15,000 workers at the larger Amazon "fulfilment centres," after signing a last-minute agreement over pay and occupational health, *el Periódico* reported. A strike of 5,000

workers at smaller warehouses and delivery workers still went ahead.

### Unions and feminist groups call one-day strike in Spanish communities of Basque Country and Navarre

Feminist groups and the Basque nationalist trade unions ELA, LAB and others called a one-day general strike in the two Spanish autonomous communities of the Basque Country (Euskadi) and Navarre on Thursday, demanding "a 'public and community' care system" and "the collective right to care." They denounced "privatisation and commercialisation" and poor working conditions in the care sector in which many women work.

According to *Europa Press*, more than 1,500 works councils in the Basque Country joined the strike, and more than 39 percent of education workers walked out. High minimum service requirements were imposed in healthcare, including a complete strike ban in emergency services, so few health workers were able to stop work. Municipal workers, as well as workers in transport and manufacturing also joined the strike.

The two largest all-Spain unions, the CCOO and General Workers' Union (UGT) refused to call their members out. The UGT said it believed the poor pay and working conditions in sectors employing many women would be remedied through close collaboration with the government and employers, and that holding strikes would be "discarding all the dialogue frameworks that exist in Euskadi."

### Civil servants begin all-out strikes in Romania against pay inequality

Civil servants in the Romanian Ministry of Labour held all-out strikes between Monday and Wednesday, demanding pay parity with other government departments, and staff shortages and poor working conditions be improved.

Federation of Trade Unions of the Ministry of Labour members held short warning strikes over the past few weeks, and warned they would escalate to all-out strikes if the government did not address their demands.

*Mediafax* reported comments by unions that the difference in pay

between workers under different ministries but doing similar work can be up to 1,500 lei per month. Hundreds of workers in social security offices, labour inspectorates and pensions offices stopped work nationwide, according to reports by *Agerpres*.

According to *Spotmedia*, the unions ended the walkouts on Wednesday, after agreeing a pay rise between 330 and 1,500 lei for 3,000 civil servants.

### **Italian rail workers hold eight-hour strike after deadly crash**

Italian rail workers held a national strike on Thursday following a crash at a level crossing on Tuesday evening, which killed two people in the region of Calabria.

The traditional unions CGIL, CSIL and UIL called an eight-hour stoppage, while the USB, CUB and other “grassroots” unions called for a 24-hour strike, demanding the introduction of a crime of “murder at work.”

On Tuesday, a lorry driver was struck by a train at a level crossing, killing both the lorry driver and the conductor of the train. Matteo Salvini, Transport Minister in Italy’s neo-fascist government, said shortly after the crash that the CEO of the state-owned rail infrastructure company RFI assured him it would “invest and put out to tender 500 million for safety systems on level crossings.”

### **Self-employed Greek lawyers and taxi drivers continue strikes against new tax law**

Freelancers and self-employed workers in Greece continue to oppose a new tax bill introduced by the right-wing New Democracy government.

According to the Attica Taxi Drivers’ Union, the bill could cost some workers thousands of euros each year. The government claims to be tackling tax evasion, by replacing self-reported net profits with a “presumption” based on revenue, that can theoretically be challenged.

Taxi drivers held a 24-hour strike last week, along with a rally by thousands of other self-employed workers in Athens. They have called a new 48-hour stoppage from December 5, accusing the government of seeking “the disappearance of small and medium-size enterprises and the self-employed,” and denounced new tax exemptions which favour large corporations, *ef.syn* reported.

On Monday, members of the Athens Bar Association began a strike, currently planned to last until December 8, according to *Kathimerini*.

### **Strike continues for collective agreement at Tesla in Sweden**

Workers at Tesla maintenance workshops in Sweden continue a strike begun over a month ago to demand a collective agreement from the American electric car manufacturer.

Around 130 members of the IF Metall union walked out on October 27. They have since been joined by another 370 colleagues and supported by sympathy strikes among dock workers, postal workers, cleaners and electricians.

Swedish media widely reported that Tesla’s owner, the fascist billionaire and world’s richest person Elon Musk, personally ordered its

Swedish subsidiary not to sign any collective agreement.

The stoppage by postal workers had a significant impact, as Tesla was unable to receive new license plates for its cars. Workers at Postnord, jointly owned by the Swedish and Danish states, refused to make any deliveries to Tesla, and the Swedish Transport Agency said all license plates were handed straight from the manufacturer to Postnord, so Tesla was unable to collect them directly, the *Göteborgs-Posten* reported.

Tesla took both the Swedish Transport Agency and Postnord to court, which ruled the company should be able to collect license plates, or it would fine the Swedish Transport Agency a million kronor.

### **Warrington council in England seeks legal injunction to end ongoing refuse collectors’ pay strike**

UK refuse collectors at Warrington Borough Council began a fourth round of stoppages November 21, due to last until December 4.

In a bid to end the strike, the council applied to the courts to have the strike made illegal. A hearing took place on Tuesday at the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Presiding, Mrs Justice Eady said she was unable to give a decision that day. *Yahoo News* reported, “A council spokesperson has revealed that a decision is expected by the end of the week.”

The Unite union members ended their third round of stoppages, begun November 8, on November 20. The walkouts began in October in opposition to the nationally negotiated pay increase for local government workers. If the strike is not ruled illegal, further stoppages are expected, beginning December 5 and running till Christmas Eve.

Unite nationally rejected the offer of a £1,925 increase for 2023/24, which applies to local authority staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The GMB and Unison unions accepted the offer. Unite called strikes in several local authorities.

### **Northern Ireland to be hit by one-day transport strike affecting the whole province**

Workers employed by the public transport body Translink in Northern Ireland are to hold a 24-hour strike Friday.

Unite, GMB and SIPTU members voted by majorities of over 90 percent to walk out, after Translink announced it would not be offering a pay rise this year and refused to set a date for negotiations.

Translink provides bus and rail services in the province and the strike is expected to be highly disruptive.

### **Workers at new UK Amazon fulfilment centre vote for stoppages over pay and safety conditions**

Workers at Amazon’s new fulfilment centre at Minworth near Birmingham are to walk out over pay and safety conditions.

The GMB union members voted by a 100 percent majority for the action. A GMB press release announcing the vote stated, “Strike dates will be announced in the coming weeks.”

Workers at Amazon’s BHX4 warehouse in Coventry, UK, held a one-day strike on November 24 to fight for improved pay and working conditions as part of an international protest on “Black Friday”, one of the

most profitable days for retail firms.

### **Workers at major UK charity to walk out over pay**

Around 500 workers employed by charity Oxfam GB in Oxford, England are set to begin a 17-day stoppage on December 8.

The Unite union members voted by an 83 percent majority for the stoppage, after rejecting a 6 percent pay offer. According to Unite, the workers have seen a real-terms cut in pay of 21 percent since 2018. The stoppage is expected to disrupt the work at Oxfam offices and 200 shops. It is the first strike in the organisation's 81-year history.

### **Dates announced for strikes at Scottish distillery over pay**

One of the unions involved in a pay dispute at French-owned Chivas Brothers in Scotland has set dates for strikes.

The Unite union announced rolling strikes at the company's sites across Scotland from December 11 to 14. An overtime and short notice shift ban will be in effect from November 11.

Around 800 of the distillery workers voted to strike over a 6.4 percent pay offer rejected by the workers.

GMB members voted by an 89 percent majority, while Unite union members voted by over 91 percent. Chivas produces Chivas Regal whisky and other brands, employing around 1,600 at sites across Scotland, including the Kilmalid bottling plant in Dumbarton and the Strathclyde Grain Distillery.

GMB have yet to announce strike dates.

### **Scottish further education lecturers re-balloted over pay**

Scottish further education lecturers are being re-balloted in their long-running dispute over pay.

The Educational Institute of Scotland – Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-Fela) members have had no pay rise since 2021. The miserly current offer is dependent on job cuts.

The long-running series of strikes by lecturers at City of Glasgow College have been suspended. The EIS-Fela members were holding stoppages to oppose redundancies, including compulsory ones threatening around 100 jobs. A recent *STV* report noted the college and EIS-Fela have an agreement in principle to end the dispute. A ballot of EIS-Fela members on the proposal is being held.

### **Teachers at private school in Wirral, UK to vote on strike over attacks on pension**

UK teachers at the Birkenhead School voted by an 80 percent majority in an indicative vote to vote on a walkout over attacks on their pensions.

The National Education Union (NEU) members will now ballot at the start of January for strike action. The fee-paying independent school announced it proposes to stop paying employer contributions to the

teachers' pensions. The school also refuses to negotiate with the NEU, saying it does not recognise unions.

### **Walkout at university in Iranian capital in support of students not wearing hijab**

Psychology students at the Beheshti university in Tehran held a strike November 21. It was in response to masked men accompanied by university security members entering classrooms the previous day and confiscating IDs of female students not wearing the hijab.

Mass protests broke out across Iran after Mahsa Amini, 22, died at the hands of morality police on September 13, 2022, for improperly wearing the hijab.

Her death further fuelled ongoing protests and strikes by workers and pensioners against the cost-of-living crisis.

### **Further protests by workers and retirees in Iran over pay and social conditions**

Monday saw a protest by workers outside the Ahvaz Rolling and Pipe Mills Company in Iran. The company produces pipes for the oil and gas industry.

The workers are demanding a pay increase and implementation of a job classification plan which would raise pay scales. They are also demanding the reinstatement of sacked workers.

On Tuesday, formal oil workers (those with permanent contracts) protested outside the Oil Ministry in Tehran. Their demands include the elimination of the government-imposed salary cap and limitation of pension benefits to 30 years, whereby workers working longer than 30 years and paying more contributions do not get an increased pension and reimbursement of excess tax deductions.

Oil industry retirees also protested at the dwindling value of their pensions.

The same day saw protests in Ahvaz in front of the governor's office. Social security retirees, along with retired teachers, nurses and municipal workers, gathered to protest low incomes and poor social conditions.

Also on Tuesday, workers including professors at Mahshahr Azad University protested over wage arrears. Meanwhile in Tehran, drivers including truck drivers protested over fuel shortages and poor living conditions.

Around 60 percent of Iran's population live in poverty, due to the removal of food subsidies and US sanctions. Iran is in the firing line of US expanding wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

### **Long-running teachers' strike over wage arrears continues in Iraq**

The strike by around 58,000 teachers against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has now lasted more than two months.

The strike organised by the Kurdistan Teachers' Union has impacted around a million students. The teachers are protesting three months' arrears of wages. The walkout is the KRG's longest running strike. The arrears are a result of budget disputes between Erbil (the Kurdistan capital) and Baghdad.

Reuters journalists in Cairo, Egypt held a 24-hour strike on November 22 to protest the unfair salary structure imposed on them. Staff members complain their wages have not aligned with Egypt's economic conditions since March 2022, and are not in keeping with the salaries paid in regional offices. The strike followed a November 4 demonstration in the Cairo office.

Staff at the Cairo office of the BBC walked out for 10 days in August to demand pay increases, their third strike in three months, after which they received a rise.

### **Nigerian maritime workers ready to strike in support of truckers**

Nigerian maritime workers are threatening to walk out alongside truck drivers over the regular extortion and harassment truckers suffer from security staff on their journeys to and from ports.

The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) called on the Lagos State government to control their State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) officials. The MWUN's President General, Prince Adewale Adeyanju, complained that truckers spend exorbitant amounts on illegal payments, upwards of N30,000 per trip, at the checkpoints of LASTMA officials, who claim to be controlling traffic.

### **Nigerian court workers protest in Osun denounced by union**

Court staff at the Osun State court in Nigeria have been protesting against Osun State Chief Judge, Justice Adepele Ojo, accusing him of abuse of office and high-handedness.

From November 22, Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) members in Osun, led by local chairman, Gbenga Eludire, blocked the entrance to the State High Court in Osogbo, the state capital and prevented entry.

JUSUN issued a statement on November 23, the day after protests were met by police wielding tear gas, declaring, "Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria has never directed or approved that any of its members should proceed on any protest or picketing activity in Osun State Judiciary or any other state to settle any perceived or real political scores." The union "hereby dissociates itself from any action taken," warning its members against "illegal picketing, protest or job boycotting."

Eludire blamed the union's disavowal of the Osun action on "hitches in terms of communication."

### **South African Early Childhood Development workers march against cuts in Maguang**

Hundreds of Early Childhood Development Sector workers marched through Maguang, South Africa to the provinces education department offices where Executive councillor Makalo Mohale was attending a meeting.

The workers told *GroundUp* they are frustrated by the failures of the education system, that basic services are not being provided and budget cuts are threatened. Their representative noted that reports that should be done by officials were being demanded of lower paid workers and if they were not suitable workers are threatened with disciplinary action. They

said employees suffered "ill treatment" from officials and were "not addressed as human beings and as adults."

Workers have given the authority seven days to respond or they will shut down the service.

### **Workers protest outside government offices in Pretoria, South Africa over pay and conditions**

Public sector workers marched through Pretoria, South Africa to the offices of the Department of Trade Industries and Competition (DTIC) to demand overtime is paid and the filling of vacant posts.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) members handed a memo of grievances to Ebrahim Patel, Minister of Trade and Competition, including pay demands and recognition of job parity.

Nehawu chairperson Kenneth Bosoma told *sabcnews*, "We are working day and night without recognition, they are not respecting the rules of the game because people are not paid the same, working day and night without recognition, pushing people to work day and night and on weekends."



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