

Solidarity strikes in support of Tesla workers at Swedish subsidiary spread to Denmark, Norway and Finland; 24-hour strikes across Middle East to demand ceasefire in Gaza; teachers and university lecturers continue strike in Iraqi Kurdistan; platinum miners in Bakubung, South Africa stage underground sit-in over pay and conditions

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.

Strikes in support of Swedish Tesla workers spread to Denmark, Norway and Finland

Swedish Tesla workers, on strike since October 27 for a collective agreement, have been supported by workers in all three neighbouring countries.

After 130 members of the IF Metall union in Tesla maintenance workshops walked out, they were joined by 370 more colleagues, and dock workers, postal workers, cleaners and electricians across Sweden refused to provide services to Tesla.

The American electric car manufacturer continued to import cars into Sweden by unloading them elsewhere and transporting them overland. The United Federation of Danish Workers (3F) began a sympathy strike last week, with dock workers and lorry drivers refusing to transport Tesla cars. From December 20, members of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions will join the blockade of Tesla.

On that date, the Finnish AKT transport workers' union will also begin a blockade at ports of Tesla cars bound for Sweden.

The Swedish media reported that Tesla's owner, billionaire and the world's richest man Elon Musk, personally intervened to prevent its Swedish subsidiary from signing any collective agreement.

While workers are determined to fight for an agreement covering wages and conditions, this is not what has motivated the call for cross-border strikes by union officials, who have been careful to avoid making concrete improvements to pay and conditions a central demand of the strike.

The unions are defending the "Nordic model," in which unions enforce the dictates of big business and rein in "unaffordable" wage demands by workers, while giving friendly advice to the ruling class and businesses about how to avoid provoking an explosive response in the working class.

Large sections of the financial elite appreciate this suppression of the class struggle, so several pension funds have openly called for Tesla to sign a collective agreement.

Last week, Norway's Labour Party government sent a letter to Tesla's Norwegian management, warning that "Tesla's top management, with Elon Musk at the helm, has actively gone out against the Norwegian model, which has served Norway so well and which contributes to creating safe and predictable working conditions in Norway," *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

IndustriALL Europe, to which IF Metall is affiliated, made an explicit pitch for the unions' services in forcing workers to accept mass job losses, which will accompany the capitalist management of the transition to electric vehicles. Last week the union wrote, "Tesla has much to gain by learning from the European social model and accepting unions as partners in the automotive transformation it has aimed to lead."

Finnish workers continue strikes to oppose austerity and attacks on right to strike

On Thursday, workers from hundreds of workplaces throughout Finland joined walkouts to oppose austerity measures and attacks on the right to strike announced by the coalition government of the National Coalition Party and far-right Finns Party.

According to *YLE*, the strikes could involve up to 100,000 workers in public transport, retail, municipal services, manufacturing, construction, schools and other workplaces.

The government plans sweeping cuts to housing benefits, unemployment support, migrants' rights, and the introduction of unpaid sick leave. It will also restrict the right to strike, including sympathy and political strikes, to one day, with fines for both unions and individual workers if a court rules a strike "illegal."

Despite opposition to the measures by many workers, the unions have

only called short stoppages of one day or a few hours. The PAM union told *YLE*, calling for “genuine negotiations,” that “We haven’t used all our muscles and don’t want to. But if necessary, we naturally have to take new measures, which are not so good for society.”

Italian transport minister issues new injunction against 24-hour transport strike

Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Transport Minister, Matteo Salvini issued an injunction Tuesday evening, restricting a planned 24-hour local public transport strike this Friday to a mere four-hour stoppage. The strike was called by the “grassroots” unions, which postponed it from November 27 following a similar injunction, *ADN* reported.

Salvini, part of the government led by the fascist Brothers of Italy party, has repeatedly issued injunctions against transport workers, dishonestly claiming that he considered “[t]he right to ask for more adequate wages is sacrosanct,” but would “guarantee mobility to the 20 million Italians who take public transport every day.”

In November, when rail workers joined strikes en masse to oppose deadly working conditions after a crash claimed two lives, Salvini threatened to “do everything to ensure similar scenes are not repeated.” It was not the deadly accident which Salvini deemed “intolerable,” but the delays and train cancellations which followed, and the resulting loss of profits.

Lorry drivers from Poland, Slovakia and Hungary demand reintroduction of permits for Ukrainian carriers

Hungarian lorry drivers protested on Monday at a crossing on the border between Hungary and Ukraine, supporting the demand of Slovakian and Polish hauliers to end a permit-free regime for Ukrainian haulage.

The European Union exempted Ukrainian hauliers from the need to obtain permits and pay many fees in June 2022, to facilitate the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia.

Hauliers in other parts of Eastern Europe say this has led to unfair competition, making it difficult for them to earn a living. Protesting lorry drivers also demanded the introduction of a separate queue for empty lorries returning from Ukraine, as drivers can spend 10-12 days at the border waiting to return home.

Lorry drivers in Poland began the protests over a month ago, with a blockade of several crossings. They have been supported by several short blockages carried out by Slovakian drivers. Monday’s Hungarian protests did not block traffic, but there was still a queue of around 1,000 lorries, likely because so many were redirected from Poland. According to *Ukrinform*, around 4,300 lorries are now waiting to cross the border in total.

Ukrainian and EU officials have repeatedly urged Poland to ban the lorry drivers’ protests, explicitly criticising the fact that the blockades are endangering NATO’s war efforts against Russia, and opposing any concessions to the drivers’ demands. The head of the Association of International Road Carriers, a Ukrainian association representing haulage companies, echoed the anti-democratic calls from these officials, and claimed to *Unian*, with absolutely no evidence, that the protests were “a second economic front financed by Russia.”

Transport workers in Athens, Greece, defy strike ban

On Tuesday night, workers on the Athens metro and trams held a three-hour warning strike, defying a court decision earlier that evening which ruled their stoppage “illegal.”

According to *Kathimerini*, the unions representing transport workers accused the state-owned transport operator STASY of not applying certain articles in the collective agreement and said the Transport Ministry was “indifferent.”

Hellas Post quoted a STASY press release which said all metro and tram services were suspended after 10 p.m. on Tuesday, despite its earlier announcement that it expected workers to comply with the court ruling and resume work.

German unions betray millions of public sector workers and civil servants

The United Services Union (Verdi) and other unions representing public sector workers in Germany signed a collective bargaining agreement for over 1.2 million workers this week, ending a long-running campaign of warning strikes. The deal in the public sector is usually also applied to over a million civil servants, who do not have the right to strike.

The unions originally demanded a pay rise of 10.5 percent or 500 euros, whichever is higher, for a 12-month contract. What they accepted was around half that: a pay rise of 11 percent spread over 25 months, and a non-consolidated bonus of 3,000 euros. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, prices rose by 6.9 percent last year, and are forecast to increase by around 6 percent this year, meaning workers will be worse off at the end of the contract than they were last year.

Teachers in French vocational schools strike against “reform”

Teachers in vocational schools joined a national strike in France on Tuesday, opposing a government reform which would decrease the number of weeks spent by pupils in classes in favour of an extra six weeks spent working in internships for companies in the final year.

A PE teacher and local secretary for the National Union of Physical Education, one of the unions which called the strike, told *La Montagne* that pupils “are clearly being prevented from continuing their studies in order to have good little workers without a baccalaureate for the bosses.”

UK hospital workers in Kent walk out over non-payment of COVID bonus

Around 300 UK workers employed by 2gether Support Solutions at East Kent Hospitals were on strike Monday over non-payment of the COVID bonus of at least £1,655.

The Unite union members are also due to walk out on Friday and December 18. 2gether is a wholly owned subsidiary of the East Kent Hospitals Trust. It runs hospitals at Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Margate. The workers are employed in catering,

housekeeping and maintenance. Some workers are on pay rates of only £11.45 an hour.

Further strikes announced at UK hospital in London over pay and conditions

Around 1,000 workers employed at the St Barts Hospital Trust at its four main sites in London plan a stoppage over the next two weeks over pay and conditions.

The Unite union members employed by outsourcing company Synergy, which provides laundry and linen services, will walk out December 18-26. They are protesting the non-payment of a COVID bonus paid to staff directly employed by the National Health Service (NHS).

Staff employed directly by the NHS, who provide cleaning and portering services, will walk out December 18-22 and on December 25-26. They are fighting against low pay and staffing levels. They will be joined by laboratory technicians in the pathology department, opposing the imposition of new work rotas that will greatly impact their work/life balance.

The different groups of workers have been taking action since the autumn.

On December 20, junior doctors in the British Medical Association will walk out for three days, followed by a six-day stoppage from January 3, in their long-running dispute over pay restoration—their wages have fallen by 35 percent in real terms since 2008.

UK canteen workers at Drax power station strike over pay

UK canteen workers at the Drax power station in Yorkshire began a two-week strike on December 4.

The Unite union members work for Baxter Storey, which provides canteen facilities at the power station. They are demanding higher pay and union recognition. Baxter Storey pays the voluntary Real Living Wage Foundation rate but delays implementing the newly announced annual figure by six months, leaving the workers on lower pay for half the year.

According to Unite, Baxter Storey sent the predominantly female workforce messages stating they must complete forms saying they are on strike or they will lose legal protection. Unite told them they are under no such legal obligation and do have legal protection.

The walkout led to the cancellation of the power station's Christmas dinner on December 5 and vending machines only provided out-of-date sandwiches. Baxter Storey recorded profits of £25 million for 2022.

Three-day strike by teachers on UK Channel Island of Jersey over pay

Teachers on the UK Crown Dependency Channel Island of Jersey began a three-day strike Tuesday over pay.

The National Education Union (NEU) members rejected the latest offer from the Jersey government of 8 percent for 2024 on top of an agreed 7.9 percent rise for 2023. On Wednesday, the striking teachers rallied in St Heliers, where the States Assembly (Jersey parliament) was debating education funding.

The NASUWT union suspended work-to-rule action over pay while its members vote on the new offer.

Educational psychologists' union calls off strike in England and Wales after revised pay offer accepted

The strike of educational psychologists across 135 local authorities in England and Wales planned for Wednesday has been called off by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP).

AEP members walked out on November 15, after voting by an 86 percent majority on a 70 percent turnout. They turned down a pay offer representing an average 3 percent increase. According to the AEP, their members' pay has been eroded by around 17 percent in real terms since 2011. Educational psychologists are employed by local authorities to assess children's special needs.

The employers' body, the Local Government Association, came back with an improved offer for 2022-23, backdated to September 2022 with an additional 4 percent backdated to this September. The AEP members accepted the new offer by an 85.5 percent majority.

Council maintenance workers in Crawley, UK strike over pay and conditions

Around 20 maintenance workers at Crawley Borough Council in England were set to strike on Wednesday.

The Unite union members work as plumbers, electricians, gas engineers, painters and at other crafts for contractors Mears and Liberty Gas, contracted to provide maintenance for the council. The maintenance workers are seeking a 10 percent pay rise. Mears has offered 5 percent, while Liberty Gas has made no offer. The workers at Liberty Gas are also calling for leave entitlement to be in line with other contractors.

They are also scheduled to walk out on January 8 next year.

Fire control staff on Merseyside, UK to strike over staffing levels and shift system

Fire control staff on Merseyside, England are due to begin eight days of continuous strikes on December 27.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members voted 100 percent on a 92 percent turnout in August to strike. They oppose moves by the fire authority to reduce the number of staff on night shift from six to five and the imposition of a new shift system.

Talks at the National Joint Council between the FBU and the employer failed to resolve the dispute, so the strike is set to go ahead.

Refuse workers in Northampton, England to strike over pay and conditions

Around 80 UK refuse workers employed by contractor Veolia in Northampton plan to walk out December 28-30 and again January 2-5.

The GMB members are calling for £15 an hour. They currently earn just 3p more than the government-set minimum wage. The current minimum wage for adults over 23 years of age is £10.42.

Veolia is under contract to Northampton council to remove domestic, business and hospital waste.

Birmingham, UK council workers ballot for strike action over cuts and equal pay

Around 3,000 workers employed by Birmingham Council in England are balloting for strike action. The ballot closes mid-January.

The GMB members demand the local authority come up with a timetable for settling a £780 million pay equality bill agreed in October. Thousands of women workers in the authority are paid less than their male colleagues.

Birmingham City Council is delaying any equal pay settlement as it tries to deal with a £300 million budget deficit. In September, the local authority issued a section 114 notice, meaning it is essentially bankrupt. The council is to seek permission to increase the council tax by more than 5 percent to help plug the budget gap. Job and service cuts will also be on the agenda.

Unite union suspends strike over pay at major UK charity

The Unite union suspended the strike of around 500 workers employed by the charity Oxfam GB in Oxford, England, begun Friday.

According to a press release, Unite postponed the stoppage planned for December 14-17 after Oxfam made an improved offer, which has not been made public. The offer will be put to the workers. If it is rejected, stoppages will resume December 20.

The Unite members voted by an 83 percent majority to walk out 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 disrupted work at Oxfam offices and 200 shops. It was the first strike in the organisation's 81-year history.

Unite union ends long-running strikes of refuse collectors in Warrington, UK

The Unite union ended the long-running series of strikes by UK refuse collectors at Warrington Borough Council. The series of 35 days of strikes began in October.

The walkouts were in opposition to the nationally negotiated pay increase for local government workers. 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, including the Warrington stoppage. A Unite press release announcing the end of the strikes stated, "The deal includes a dispute resolution payment as well as improvements to terms and conditions and the creation of a number of permanent full-time roles for those on temporary seasonal contracts."

A *Warrington Worldwide* news item emphasised that no lump sum

payment was made in the deal. It stated, "The negotiations primarily focused on improvements to terms and conditions for the refuse workers, including a job evaluation scheme, the conversion of agency posts to permanent, including 17 new staff positions to enhance council waste teams, Christmas 2024 working arrangements and the consideration of a laundry allowance."

Unite union calls off UK strike by delivery drivers at Rochdale-based supermarket after new pay offer

Unite has called off a series of strikes of HGV drivers working for Wincanton and based in Rochdale in England, after the drivers accepted an 8.25 percent pay offer and improved overtime rates.

The first strike was to have taken place Wednesday, followed by seven more until the beginning of January. Wincanton is under contract to supermarket ASDA to deliver chilled foods from its distribution centre in Rochdale to ASDA stores in the north of England.

Their original demand was for parity of pay and conditions with drivers directly employed by ASDA based in Lutterworth in Leicestershire who perform the same role.

International strike call by Palestinian factions to demand ceasefire in Gaza

A coalition of Palestinian factions called for an international strike on December 11 to demand an immediate ceasefire in Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza.

Wafa, the Palestinian news agency, said the call was made by national and Islamic forces, trade unions and civil society bodies.

The call was taken up in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, with businesses, factories, government offices, schools and universities closing for the day. Major cities including Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah were impacted.

A march and rally took place in Ramallah and included marchers holding a long placard inscribed with all the names of the around 18,000 Gazans killed by the Israeli onslaught.

The strike call was taken up across the Middle East, with reports of restaurants schools, shops and workplaces in Jordan shutting down for the day in support. The capital Amman was said to be empty.

The Lebanese government announced all public and municipal buildings and bodies were closed for the day. The union, the Beirut Engineers Syndicate announced its members throughout the country would honour the strike call.

Businesses in the western Esenyurt district of Istanbul responded to the call with deserted streets bedecked with Palestinian flags.

Arab American communities in the New Jersey area of New York responded to the call.

In Tunisia thousands of teachers held a two-hour strike in opposition to the genocide unfolding in Gaza.

Official trade union federations have ignored an international appeal by Palestinian unions to stop the manufacture and transport of weapons to Israel.

Long-running educators' strike over wage arrears continues in

Kurdistan in Iraq

Around 170,000 primary and secondary teachers along with university lecturers have been on strike for over 75 days against the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

They are protesting against wage arrears, suspension of promotions and casualisation of their posts. Regular protests by the striking educational workers take place in big cities in the region.

A budget dispute between Erbil (the Kurdistan capital) and Baghdad has had a debilitating impact on the autonomous region's finances.

Continuing protests by Iranian oil workers over pay

Workers at the Abadan oil refinery in Iran held a protest December 7 against wage arrears. They also called for wage increases. The refinery uses contractors, and there are regular protests over pay and conditions.

Workers employed by the Aghajari Oil and Gas Exploitation Company protested outside the company's management office on December 6 over a cap on salaries and the limiting of retirement pensions.

On December 5, retired oil workers rallied in the city of Ahvaz to protest thefts from their pensions by government officials.

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

Underground protests by platinum miners in Bakubung, South Africa over pay and conditions

Around 250 platinum miners failed to return to the surface at the end of their shift on December 6 at the Bakubung platinum mine, South Africa to protest pay and conditions.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members finally returned to the surface on December 8. Their demands included a pay rise with a basic starting salary of R16,000 (\$840) a month. They are also calling for a review of the pregnancy policy, to ensure the safety of pregnant employees. The mine owners are seeking to retrench hundreds of jobs as they move to a different method of mining.

Underground protest ends at Gold One mine in Springs, South Africa over union recognition

Around 500 miners at the Gold One mine in Springs on the East Rand in Gauteng, South Africa took part in an underground sit from December 7 until Monday, when the miners returned to the surface.

The sit-in is part of a dispute between Gold One and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, which is seeking recognition at the expense of the NUM. They were also calling for the reinstatement of miners dismissed following a previous underground sit-in.

Police were called after some miners claimed they had been held underground against their will and assaulted. However, a *news24.com* article noted that "the company and miners later said a majority appeared to have deliberately remained underground as part of a protest."

A similar underground protest took place in October, when around 500 miners stayed underground for three days over the same issue. After that action, around 200 miners were suspended and face disciplinary hearings.

Protest by cleaning/environmental workers in Gqeberha, South Africa over wage arrears and equipment

Around 50 South African workers protested on December 7 outside a meeting of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in Gqeberha, over unpaid wages and a lack of equipment for their work.

They are employed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs to help improve waste collection, enforce landfill compliance and encourage recycling in five wards of the municipality. They are contracted to work eight hours a day at R16 an hour, but say they have not been paid since being taken on in October. They also lack essential equipment such as gloves when having to deal with unpleasant waste.

Food processing workers at Hammarsdale, South Africa win union recognition after strike

Around 500 workers at the Rainbow Chicken processing plant in Hammarsdale in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa returned to work on Monday, after the company decided to restore union negotiating rights.

The Agriculture, Food and Allied Democratic Worker Union members began their walkout on December 6 in response to the company's decision earlier in the year to withdraw union recognition.

Judicial staff in Osun State, Nigeria continue strike action

Judicial staff in Osun State will continue their strike begun November 22 after police used tear gas to disperse a protest at the Osun State High Court in Osogbo.

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) members demand the removal of the state Chief Justice, Adepole Ojo whom they accuse of indiscriminately suspending staff members. They are also protesting the non-payment of wardrobe allowances. The Chairman of JUSUN in the state, Oluwagbemiga Eludire said on December 11 their demands had not been met, so the strike would continue.

Students and staff at agricultural college in Ondo State, Nigeria protest "land-grabbing"

Staff and students at the Federal College of Agriculture (FECA) in Ondo State, held a protest against the actions of "land-grabbers" who have taken land belonging to their college.

Protesters marched to the office of the Ondo Assistant Inspector General of Police, the governor's office, and the palace of Deji of Akure. They held placards with slogans such as "Don't send FECA into extinction," "Rescue FECA from land grabbers", "FECA land is not for sale,"

“Federal Government should come to FECA’s aid.”

Doctors in Kilifi, Kenya set deadline to strike over low pay and lack of promotions

More than 100 doctors in Kilifi, Kenya protested against low remuneration and promotions. The Kenya Medical Practitioners, and Dentists’ Union (KMPDU) gave the county government a deadline of December 18 for meeting their demands.

Coast region chairman Niko Gichana said, “That is the crux of this looming strike scheduled to commence on the 19th of December. It is not an act born out of whimsy but a collective cry for justice and fairness... Lives are at stake, not just in the hospitals and clinics, but in the homes and communities that rely on the [doctors’] expertise and dedication...”

The doctors are also calling for recognition for saving lives in the Shakahola massacre—referring to the southeastern Kenyan forest where a cult leader called for his followers to commit suicide.



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