

Continuing retirees' protests across Iran joined by striking steelworkers, electrical workers and goldsmiths; general practice doctors begin walkout in Germany; transport workers strike in Northern Ireland

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 December 2023

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Protests and strikes continue across Iran by steelworkers, electrical workers and retirees against poverty and state oppression

Protests and strikes directed against the government by steelworkers, nurses and retirees are continuing across Iran over plummeting living standards, government corruption and state oppression.

Steelworkers at the Ahvaz National Steel Company began a walkout on December 23, followed by a protest march from company headquarters on December 25 demanding that 38 workers sacked during previous strikes be reinstated. Slogans on the march included, "Threats and imprisonment no longer work," and "Death to the oppressor, long live the worker."

On December 25, telecommunication retirees in 15 provinces protested outside the state-run Telecommunication Company's offices. Other retirees, including former oil workers, teachers and other former public sector workers, also protested in many towns and cities. Slogans included, "The government is betraying us, the parliament is supporting it," "Enough of oppression and tyranny, our tables are empty," and "Today is a day of mourning, the wages of retirees have been plundered by the mullahs."

The same day goldsmiths in Tehran and Hamadan went on strike to protest an increase in taxes, joining other goldsmiths across Iran.

Electrical workers staged a protest on December 23 outside National Employment Organisation buildings in Tehran and other cities over wages and conditions.

According to the government-run website, IRNA, inflation has risen to 250 percent the past two years, impoverishing workers. Iran's economic problems have been exacerbated by US sanctions. Iran is in the line of sights of NATO's widening battlefronts, including in the Israel's genocide in Gaza and the war against Russia in the Ukraine.

German doctors stop work to oppose Social Democratic Party's health policies

Many GP practices in Germany closed on Wednesday, in a protest planned to last until the new year. Doctors are opposed to the policies of the Social Democratic Party's Minister of Health Karl Lauterbach and are calling for a reduction in bureaucracy for clinics.

The protests were called by 20 medical associations, as part of a long-running campaign for increased funding for clinics and other improvements to conditions in healthcare. According to *RBB*, the *Virchowbund*, which represents 144,000 doctors, called its members to participate and estimated that 70 percent would do so.

Lauterbach attacked doctors who joined the protests, telling *RBB*, "The demands of the medical profession are known; they do not need to be presented again, so there is no need to strike now, especially when so many people are sick." He said he would meet doctors in January to discuss their issues.

Retail and warehouse workers strike in Portugal

On December 24, supermarket workers in Portugal held a 24-hour strike, closing some shops in Lisbon and other cities, *The Portugal News* reported. The Union of Commerce, Office and Service Workers of Portugal called for a 150-euro increase to monthly salaries, more staff and improved working hours.

Warehouse and other distribution workers also began a two-day strike on December 23. The Services Sector Workers' Union said that despite a very profitable year for the sector, the Portuguese Association of Distribution Companies refused to negotiate over new national salaries, *Lusa* reported. The union said that after the strike was announced, some companies made local offers of pay rises and bonuses to try and avoid a large impact on Christmas trade.

Workers at Greek energy company and Acropolis oppose privatisation measures

Last week, two strikes began in Greece against the right-wing New

Democracy government's privatisation measures. On December 19, the Panhellenic Union of Antiquities Custodians called a 24-hour strike which closed the Acropolis in Athens. The Ministry of Culture had announced plans to open bidding to private companies for the two-million-euro contract for ticket sales and admissions, *Kathimerini* reported.

Workers at refineries run by HelleniQ Energy also held three days of strikes last week and stopped work on Thursday this week, against plans to sell more of the minority share the state owns in the company.

According to *ef.syn*, the strike was initially called by the Panhellenic Union of Employees in Hellenic Petroleum (PSEEP), but a court ruled their strike "illegal." Another walkout was called for the remaining days by the Panhellenic Energy Federation, the second largest union of refinery workers. A court reportedly rejected HelleniQ Energy's attempts to have this second strike notice ruled illegal.

The PSEEP accused the government of selling 13 million shares at 0.50 euros below their value and asked why it was selling shares for 93 million euros, which have brought in around a billion euros in state revenue over the last decade.

Strike by infrastructure workers in France over bonus payment closes Channel Tunnel

Workers at the French company Getlink held a stoppage on December 21, which led to the closing of the Channel Tunnel between Britain and France until the evening. Getlink operates the tunnel infrastructure and runs some of the train services.

The workers had rejected a 1,000-euro bonus and demanded 3,000 euros. According to *Le Monde*, a deal was reached to end the strike on the evening of December 21, but neither the unions nor Getlink gave details of what was agreed. A delegate from the Force Ouvrière union said negotiations "brought results that satisfy us."

The Minister of Transport responded by declaring the strike "unacceptable," echoing previous political campaigns against air traffic controllers striking during the holiday season, which led to the introduction of restrictions on their right to strike.

Amazon workers begin indefinite campaign of partial strikes over pay cuts at warehouse in Andalusia, Spain

Workers at the Amazon warehouse in the Spanish town of Dos Hermanas in Andalusia have been holding partial strikes since last week.

It was called by three unions after Amazon imposed "a pay cut," and demanded "a fair wage", *Información* reported. The unions also accused the American multinational of "a long list of non-compliance" with workers' rights.

The unions said that 95 percent of the 1,500 workers at the warehouse joined the stoppages, while Amazon said only 25 percent stopped work. The unions say Amazon attempted to intimidate workers to stop them joining the strike, claiming the walkouts were "illegal" and denying they had the legal right to hang banners.

Información also reported that the ELA and LAB unions called a five-day strike at an Amazon warehouse in the Basque Country last week.

Air traffic controllers at Belgian airport hold two-hour wildcat strike

Air traffic controllers working for Skeyes at Brussels Airport held a two-hour wildcat strike on Saturday evening.

According to *Nieuwsblad*, Skeyes, the state-owned company that provides air traffic control throughout Belgium, cancelled the paternity leave of a controller it had previously agreed, claiming this was necessary to provide a continuous service. The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions said this was "the final straw for the staff."

Further pay strike by public transport workers in Northern Ireland

Workers employed by the public transport body Translink in Northern Ireland held a 24-hour strike December 22. Translink is responsible for train and bus services in the province, and the strike caused major disruption in the run-up to Christmas.

The Unite, GMB and SIPTU members walked out previously on December 15 for 48 hours and on December 1 for 24 hours. They voted by majorities of over 90 percent to strike, after Translink announced it would not be offering a pay rise this year and refused to set a date for negotiations.

Translink said it could not offer a pay rise because of budget issues. Public sector workers have been in a long-running dispute over pay, suffering real-terms losses in pay as inflation soared. The situation was exacerbated by the stalemate over the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont.

The assembly was suspended after the Democratic Unionist Party pulled its support over Brexit arrangements for the export of goods into the province from the rest of the UK.

Wider strikes by public sector workers are set for January 18, when health workers, teachers, civil servants, radiographers and midwives plan simultaneous action.

Ancillary hospital staff Christmas stoppage at London hospital over staff shortages and COVID bonus

Laundry service workers, porters, cleaners and cooks walked out at Barts National Health Service (NHS) Trust in the UK capital on Christmas Day and Boxing Day over pay and conditions.

Unite union members are in dispute at three hospital trusts, holding previous strikes and a protest outside the Department of Health. Involved are workers at Barts Health NHS Trust in East London, employees at Together Support Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of East Kent Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust, and those employed by contractor Mitie at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust. The dispute is widening, with pathology workers at Barts joining the action.

The dispute is over staffing levels and the refusal of employers to pay the so-called COVID bonus of £1,650 received by most NHS workers in June as part of their pay settlement. Further stoppages are planned in the New Year.

In a separate dispute NHS junior doctors in England walked out for four days from December 20. The British Medical Association (BMA) members will strike again January 3-9 in pursuit of 35 percent in pay restoration. Their action faces isolation since the other health sector unions pushed through below-inflation deals for nurses, ambulance and other health workers. The BMA is putting a sellout deal to specialist doctors and consultants.

Ferry workers' dispute on Isle of Man steam packet over on-board living terms escalates

Ferry workers on the Isle of Man steam packet began action short of a strike on December 27 over changes to work conditions. Workers are refusing overtime and to act up to cover senior absences.

Crewing agency Manx Sea Transport Guernsey, on behalf of the Isle of Man Steam Packet company, issued termination notices three days before Christmas to workers who refused living-on-board terms on ferries between the Isle of Man capital Douglas and Heysham, England. The new arrangements mean workers staying on board new vessel Manxman on their days off rather than going home to rest.

It is unclear how many Nautilus International union members were threatened with dismissal, to come into effect on March 15 if they do not accept the new contract. Of 70 officers employed by the government-owned ferry service, 48 are in the union. Nautilus members balloted by 81 percent to support a walkout, and 89 percent to work to rule in a 77 percent turnout.

The Isle of Man, off the coast of England in the Irish Sea, is a self-governing British Crown dependency.

First-ever strike planned at UK Asda supermarket in Gosport over pay and conditions

Shop workers at Asda superstore in Gosport, Hampshire, will walk out January 12-26, in the first-ever strike at any UK Asda store.

The GMB union members have concerns over wages, health and safety and a "toxic" work environment. Further stoppages are possible.

Despite workers in retail being among the lowest paid, GMB Regional Organiser Nicola Nixon said, "To my knowledge, no ASDA store has been balloted before," appealing to the company to resume talks.

Nigerian judicial workers in Osun State continue strike

Judicial workers in Osun State, Nigeria have continued their strike up to Christmas. The workers walked out November 29 to protest actions by judicial leaders headed by Justice Adepelẹ Ojo, Osun's chief judge, whom they accuse of high-handedness in indiscriminately suspending staff. They are also protesting the non-payment of wardrobe allowances.

On December 24, the Nigerian Bar Association, Ile-Ife Branch, urged the state government to intervene in the strike.

Nigerian polytechnic workers protest non-payment of salaries

Non-academic staff at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Ondo State, Nigeria held a protest on December 20 over salaries, withheld for the last 11 months.

Members of the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions and the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnics (SSANIP) marched to the administration building singing solidarity songs. The chairman of SSANIP, Nafiu Okoro, admitted the polytechnic workers received irregular salary payments for more than

eight years.

The two unions released a statement threatening an indefinite strike at all state-owned universities and colleges from January 2 unless salary arrears are paid in full.

A large proportion of Nigerian federal government employees were still not paid their December salaries by December 26, depriving them of any Christmas celebration. The only exceptions were workers in profit-making agencies, including banks and the Federal Inland Revenue Service.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact