

Teachers at publicly subsidised private schools in Basque Country, Spain begin ten days of strikes for new contract; Iranian workers at largest oil field in Persian Gulf protest over wages and conditions; primary school teachers in Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria resume pay strike

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.

Teachers at private schools in Basque Country, Spain begin ten days of strikes

Teachers at private schools in the Basque Country autonomous region of Spain walked out on strike on Wednesday and Thursday and plan a three-day strike next week and five more days in February.

Private education is publicly subsidised. It makes up 30 percent of Spanish education, a legacy of the Franco-era system in which most education was run by the Catholic Church, according to researcher Javier González-Moreno.

According to *EFE*, nearly 9,000 workers at 200 schools have been working under an expired contract for three years. Unions are demanding the Kristau Eskola and Aice-Izea employers' associations negotiate new agreements and that these agreements include, among other things, compensation for inflation.

The unions said 65 percent of workers joined the walkouts, while Kristau Eskola said it had monitored participation as being 16.3 percent. The leader of the ELA union said the high minimum service requirements imposed by the Basque government were "another step in violating the right to strike" and that meeting them would involve hiring more staff than on normal days.

Polish lorry drivers suspend blockade of border with Ukraine, Romanian farmers begin similar protests

Polish lorry drivers, who have been blockading the border between Poland and Ukraine since November, suspended their blockade Wednesday after an agreement with the government to work on their

demands.

A representative of the Committee to Protest Transporters and Transport Employers told Reuters, "We will give the government time to work as it is a new government." The protests will initially be suspended until March 1.

In June 2022, the EU exempted Ukrainian hauliers from the need to obtain permits and pay many fees, in order to facilitate the NATO-backed war in Ukraine. Polish lorry drivers, many of whom are self-employed or small business owners, say this has led to unfair competition, making it difficult for them to earn a living, and call for permits to be reintroduced for Ukrainian lorries.

The Ukrainian and Polish governments, and the European Commission all insisted this was impossible, as it would endanger the NATO war effort against Russia. Reuters writes that the deal reached with the newly elected Polish government will involve more frequent inspections of Ukrainian lorries to stop them carrying out services *not* covered by the EU agreement, although the permit-free regime seems to be continuing.

Romanian farmers, also suffering the economic consequences of the war, began their own protests on Saturday, blocking lorries at checkpoints with Ukraine and Moldova. These were ongoing as of Thursday.

Farmers demanded compensation for losses suffered due to cheap imports from Ukraine, as well as an extension of subsidies and relaxation of some regulations such as mandatory crop rotation, *Euractiv* reported. The Romanian government agreed to meet some demands but is continuing negotiations over others.

Protest in Genoa, Italy, against prosecution of participants in 2022 strike against factory closure

On Tuesday, around 1,000 people protested in Genoa, and workers at the Ansaldo Energia factory walked out, during the first hearing of the criminal prosecution of 16 participants in an October 2022 strike against the closure of the factory. The factory was eventually kept open.

According to *ANSA*, the 16 workers—14 from Ansaldo and two port workers—are being prosecuted for road blockades and "putting the safety

of people at risk" during demonstrations and could face up to seven years in prison. The preliminary hearings have been postponed to March 13-14.

Commuter rail drivers begin indefinite partial strikes over pay in Warsaw, Poland

On Thursday, drivers on the Warsaw Commuter Railway (WKD) began a campaign of daily strikes during peak hours, after the failure of negotiations over the date of a pay rise.

According to *Wawa.info*, members of the Trade Union of Machinists in Poland will stop work 6-8 a.m. and 3-5 p.m. every day.

The vice president of the union told *PAP* that last year there was no salary increase, only a one-off bonus. The union is calling for a monthly increase of 800 złoty (182 euros), while WKD proposed only 500 złoty. A two-hour warning strike took place in November.

Portuguese journalists at Global Media Group hold 24-hour strike against mass layoffs

Journalists and other workers at the Global Media Group (GMG), a media company which owns many Portuguese newspapers as well as the major national radio station TSF, held a 24-hour strike on January 10 against plans for 150 to 200 layoffs. Hundreds joined demonstrations in Lisbon and Porto to support the GMG workers.

The unions reported that participation in the strike was unanimous, and issues of GMG-owned newspapers did not appear the next day. Journalists at Lusa, around a quarter of whose stock is owned by GMG, also stopped work for an hour.

Workers are also calling for the full payment of their wages. After announcing at the start of December that it would carry out a restructuring to avoid "the more than foreseeable bankruptcy of the group," GMG had not paid December salaries, nor a Christmas bonus, by the date of the strike, *CM* reported.

Second strike against privatisation of ticket sales at the Acropolis in Athens, Greece

Guards at archaeological sites across Greece held a four-hour strike on Tuesday, opposing the government's plans to privatise ticket sales and admissions at the Acropolis in Athens. According to the Panhellenic Union of Antiquities Custodians (PEYFA), all sites were closed between 8 a.m. and noon.

PEYFA is calling for the government to cancel the tendering process, and for more staff to be hired to deal with increasing visitor numbers, which reached more than 20,000 per day in August, *Kathimerini* reported.

In December, members of PEYFA at the Acropolis also held a 24-hour strike against the privatisation plan.

Pilots at Brussels Airlines hold wildcat strike over frozen bonuses

Pilots at Brussels Airlines, Belgium's largest airline, held a 24-hour wildcat strike on Saturday, cancelling 76 of the 112 scheduled flights. The unions confirmed to the media that they did not call a strike but claimed to support it.

According to *De Standaard*, around a third of the pilots' salaries were converted into "benefits in kind" after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Salaries in Belgium are automatically increased in line with inflation, but this is not the case for "benefits in kind," so the pilots say that their value is now 12-14 percent lower than in 2020.

A court had ruled that these benefits should also be increased in line with inflation, but pilots walked out when Brussels Airlines announced it would appeal the ruling. According to *RTL*, cabin crew also joined the strike due to the brutal restructuring of their working conditions.

Serbian workers at refrigerator factory hold wildcat strike over low pay

Most workers in the morning shift at a refrigerator factory in the Serbian city of Valjevo held a one-hour wildcat strike on Tuesday, according to *NI*.

A source from the union, which confirmed it played no role in organising the stoppage, said that almost 1,000 workers—everyone on the five lowest pay grades—received only the minimum wage on Monday, which prompted the walkout.

Despite the strike being organised outside the unions, the Slovenian company Gorenje, which owns the factory, opened negotiations with the unions immediately. *Patak* reported that workers called for a pay rise of 20,000 dinars per month.

Delivery workers rally in Innsbruck, Austria during collective agreement negotiations

Couriers and food delivery workers held a protest in the Austrian city of Innsbruck on Tuesday, demanding better pay and working conditions from the ongoing collective agreement negotiations.

According to the Vida union, the employers' association representing platforms such as Lieferando (owned by Just Eat) offered a pay rise of 5.2 percent, while prices rose by 7.2 percent the last 12 months.

Only 2,000 of the 5,000 "gig economy" delivery workers in Austria are covered by a collective agreement, Vida explained. The union will meet on Friday to discuss potential strikes.

Education support workers in Northern Ireland walk out over pay and grading

Around 800 education support workers employed by the Northern Ireland Education Authority (EA) walked out on Wednesday for three days over the non-implementation of an agreed pay and regrading review.

The Unite union members work for the EA in school transport, catering, administration, cleaning and as classroom assistants. Further stoppages are scheduled for January 24-26 and February 1-2.

On Thursday, they joined the pay strike of 150,000 public sector workers in Northern Ireland. Public sector workers have suffered real-

terms pay losses as inflation soared, 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. Funds that could be available for public sector pay have been withheld.

Road-gritting workers in Northern Ireland walk out over pay and bonus scheme

Several hundred workers employed by the Northern Ireland Roads Service and Forestry Service began a week-long strike Thursday. The workers are responsible for clearing and gritting roads in snowy and icy weather. Northern Ireland is forecast to begin a period of very cold weather mid-week, with several inches of snow.

The Unite and GMB members are protesting over pay and against a bonus scheme described by the GMB as wrong and outdated. The first day of their stoppage would coincide with the one-day strike by around 150,000 public sector workers in Northern Ireland.

Further strike by bus manufacturer workers in Falkirk, Scotland over pay

Around 400 coach builders and paint sprayers working for coachbuilder Alexander Dennis Limited (ADL) in Falkirk, Scotland began a two-week strike Monday after rejecting a 4.5 percent pay offer.

The Unite members held a two-week stoppage at the beginning of December, voting by an 81 percent majority to walk out after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer.

Following the December strike, ADL upped its offer by an additional 0.5 percent, but this was overwhelmingly rejected, and a second round of strikes launched. The offer represents a real-terms pay cut. ADL, the world's largest double-decker bus manufacturer, has a full order book.

Refuse workers in Cardiff, Wales extend strike over bullying

Refuse workers employed by Cardiff council in Wales who began a four-week strike on December 28 are to extend the stoppage.

The Unite union members in the council's refuse and recycling department, who accuse the department of tolerating a widespread bullying culture, had planned to stay on strike until January 25. They have now announced they will not return till February 22, citing lack of progress in talks over the bullying claims.

The refuse workers already held 12 weeks of strikes over the autumn 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.

Further strikes by UK canteen workers at Drax power station over

pay

UK canteen workers at the Drax power station in Yorkshire ended a week-long strike on Sunday and are due to begin a two-week stoppage on January 22.

The Unite union members work for Baxter Storey, which provides canteen facilities at the power station. They held a two-week strike in December for higher pay and union recognition. Baxter Storey pays the voluntary real living wage rate but delayed implementing the newly announced annual figure by six months, leaving the workers on lower pay for half the year.

Following the December strike, Baxter Storey agreed to negotiate a voluntary recognition of the union. However, its pay offer of a one-off £380 lump sum was rejected and industrial action continues.

Baxter Storey recorded profits of £25 million for 2022.

Fujitsu workers at two UK sites strike over pay

Around 300 UK workers employed by Fujitsu based in Stratford-upon-Avon and Telford held a one-day stoppage Wednesday.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are employed by Fujitsu under contract to His Majesty's Revenues and Customs—the tax collection service. They oppose the implementation of a 3-4 percent pay rise, while Fujitsu workers at the parent company in Japan are offered up to 29 percent rises.

The workers are employed on the self-assessment tax return process, and the strike and subsequent four-week overtime and work-to-rule action are expected to impact the service. Fujitsu is the company at the centre of the Post Office postmaster scandal where its faulty Horizon software led to wrongful convictions and imprisonment of sub-postmasters for alleged theft and false accounting.

Further strikes by mental health social workers at Barnet council in London over staff shortages

Mental health workers at Barnet's north and south teams in London began a five-day stoppage on Monday over chronic staff shortages.

Since September, the Unison members have held 17 days of stoppages. They are also due to walk out February 5-9 and March 4-8.

In June last year, the Unison union branch reported nine workers of a full complement of 22 had left this year. There is also a lack of experienced workers in the teams.

Unison is calling for a 20 percent pay supplement to help staff retention. The council offered £1,000 a year, representing an average 2.5 percent increase. The council offered pay increases of between 7.5 percent and 25 percent to social workers in family services, but only 2.5 percent to those in adult services, including mental health workers.

Teachers walk out over workloads at Nottingham, UK school

Teachers at the Bulwell Academy in Nottingham walked out January 10 and 11.

National Education Union and NASUWT members are concerned about excessive workloads at the 1,000-pupil secondary school, which they say is due to management practices. The academy was rated inadequate by Ofsted in October 2022, and a June 2023 monitoring visit said more improvements were needed.

Train drivers in England announce further strikes in ongoing dispute over pay

Train drivers working for train operating companies (TOCs) across England will begin a series of rolling 24-hour strikes from January 30 until February 5.

The Aslef union members have been in dispute for 18 months, seeking a pay rise after not being offered one for the last five years. To date, they have held 14 days of stoppages. The drivers will also refuse to work overtime during the period of rolling strikes. The overtime ban is likely to have a severe impact, as the TOCs rely heavily on overtime to maintain a regular service.

The TOCs may impose a 40 percent minimum service level in the course of the rolling strikes if they choose to make use of the newly enacted legislation.

The programme of stoppages reported by Aslef includes: January 30, Southeastern, GTR Southern/Gatwick Express, GTR Great Northern, Thameslink, SWR Island Line, South Western Railway Depot Drivers, South Western Railway mainline drivers; January 31, Northern Trains, Transpennine Trains; February 2, Greater Anglia, C2C, LNER; February 3, West Midlands Trains, Avanti West Coast, East Midlands Railway; and February 5, Great Western Railway, CrossCountry, Chiltern.

UK nuclear weapons maintenance workers to hold 24-hour stoppage over pay

UK workers at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) site in Berkshire are to hold a 24-hour strike on January 24.

The Prospect union members, including scientists, engineers and administrative workers, have seen their pay stagnate for years and rejected an inadequate pay offer from AWE. They have been taking action short of striking by working to rule, working to contract and withdrawing from any voluntary duties since November 13. They will recommence the action short of strike after the January 24 stoppage.

The AWE establishment in Berkshire is responsible for maintaining the UK nuclear deterrent.

Care workers at Coventry, UK home to walk out over conditions

Around 20 staff at the HC-One-run Victoria Park care home near Coventry, England are to walk out on January 24.

The GMB members voted unanimously for the stoppage to protest the sacking of a manager who raised safety concerns.

HC-One is one of the largest UK care providers, running around 270 homes. GMB report a recent survey of HC-One staff showed concern over poor working conditions, with about 40 percent contemplating leaving because of low pay.

Widespread protests by oil workers in Iran over pay and conditions

Widespread protests by Iranian workers took place at almost all gas refineries in the South Pars field on Saturday.

Their main demands are ending the use of contractors, revision of the job classification so wages can rise and for a work rota for administrative staff of 14 days on followed by 14 days off. The protesters included newly employed workers.

The year began with a continuation of last year's strikes and protests by steel and oil workers and pensioners against plummeting living standards and authoritarian rule. Living standards have been hard hit, partly due to US sanctions, which are a precursor to war against Iran.

Primary school teachers in Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria to resume pay strike

Primary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria resumed their strike on January 15 over unpaid minimum wage arrears.

The Nigeria Union of Teachers suspended the previous strike on December 3, citing promises by the relevant authorities, which were not fulfilled.

The teachers embarked on indefinite strike action on September 11, 2023. Their demands included implementation of a 40 percent Peculiar Allowance and payment of 25 months of minimum wage arrears. One teacher, Margaret, said her colleagues had not been paid their December salaries.

Nurses in Ekiti State, Nigeria return to work but demand more security

Nurses in Ekiti State Nigeria began strike action after a corpse was stolen from the hospital on January 15.

The National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives appealed to the government to improve security and instructed the nurses to return to work. A statement by the union on January 17 asked the government "to take proactive steps and put in place legal and security frameworks to prevent incessant attack[s] on nurses and other health workers while carrying out their legitimate duties" and "to equip the hospital with the needed facilities that could enhance the operation of the hospital and enable nurses to work optimally."

Water workers in Busia County, Kenya walk out over pay

Employees of the Busia Water and Sewerage Company in Busia County, Kenya, walked out on January 11 to protest over 12 months of delayed or unpaid salaries.

Over 80 staff locked the entrance door to the company offices and refused to work.

Stanley Juma, acting spokesperson for the strikers, said, "Salaries have

been gradually delaying for the last 12 months. You can imagine it's now January, students are going to school and we cannot take our children to school since we have nothing."

He blamed the problems mainly on the county government, whose departments owe more than Kshs 13 million in water bills.

Pathology workers in Rustenburg, South Africa on indefinite strike over lack of PPE

Pathology workers in Rustenburg, South Africa walked out indefinitely on January 16 over lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), even when performing autopsies.

The HOSPERA union members say the lack of PPE violates health and safety requirements. The forensic workers lack basic equipment, such as stretchers, and say the mortuary fridge keeps breaking down, causing bodies to decompose, presenting a health risk.

Temporary municipal workers in eThekweni, South Africa protest to demand jobs back

On January 10, 100 former public employment programme (PEP) workers, who had been sacked in October, picketed the eThekweni municipality offices in KwaZulu-Natal to demand their jobs back and unpaid wages.

PEP workers carry out community projects as part of a government programme funded under the Presidential Employment Stimulus set up in October 2022. The eThekweni workers assisted with waste collection and the delivery of other services. They were sacked on October 29 when, according to *GroundUp*, the municipality ran out of money.

When the protesters arrived at the municipal offices, they were told there were no officials present to answer their demands. They then marched a further three kilometres to the local African National Congress office, where they were dispersed by metro police officers. According to the protestors, they were met with rubber bullets, which injured three of them.



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