

National “Strike for Palestine” in Italy; public sector workers walk out indefinitely in Lebanon over pay as inflation rages; public sector national strike in Nigeria against low wages and high prices

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 February 2024

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

National “Strike for Palestine” in Italy

On February 23 workers in Italy joined a national “Strike for Palestine” called by “grassroots” trade unions. Workers in school, public transport, logistics and other sectors stopped work to demand an end to Italian support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza, and oppose the war in Ukraine and attacks on the working class domestically.

According to SI Cobas, one of the unions which called the strike, many workers in warehouses, schools and universities stopped work. Protests targeted the port in Genoa, where Israeli shipping company Zim was loading military equipment, and the Naples factory of Italian arms company Leonardo was also picketed.

ANSA reported that around 50 workers at a Carrefour warehouse near Turin went on strike and blocked lorries for three hours, opposing the French supermarket chain’s operations. The BDS movement reported that Carrefour signed a franchise agreement with Israel’s Electra Consumer Products, meaning Carrefour products will be sold in shops in illegal settlements.

Students who joined pro-Palestine demonstration on the same day were brutally attacked by police, with footage of police beating schoolchildren with truncheons in Pisa triggering widespread anger.

24-hour strike in Greece on anniversary of Tempi train disaster

Tens of thousands of workers and students joined strikes and protests in Athens on Wednesday, marking the anniversary of the Tempi train disaster last year. A passenger train from Athens to Thessaloniki collided with a freight train travelling in the opposite direction, killing 57.

Transport workers, sailors, teachers and healthcare workers joined the strike called by the Civil Servants’ Confederation (ADEDY). Taxi drivers began a two-day strike on Tuesday to coincide with the strike and oppose new regulations and fuel prices, *Kathimerini* reported.

Protesters demanded an investigation into those in authority responsible

for the disaster. According to *Reuters*, dozens have been arrested and a trial is likely to begin in June, but politicians, who are responsible for the underfunding and degradation of the rail network, are protected from prosecution. Almost 1.2 million people have signed a petition calling such immunity “not consistent with morality or democracy, virtues of which we are proud!”

Shedding crocodile tears, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on television “I share the country’s grief.”

Experts and railway officials told *Reuters* that the rail network still did not have fully functioning safety systems.

Politicians from the pseudo-left SYRIZA party joined the protest in Athens and claimed to be fighting for the “whole truth”, *ef.syn* reported. SYRIZA president Stefanos Kasselakis also signed the petition against politicians’ immunity, although he did not point out that among those who most deserve to be prosecuted are members of the former SYRIZA government.

As part of the imposition of the EU and IMF austerity programme, SYRIZA privatised state-owned rail infrastructure and maintenance companies, leaving Greece the only rail network in the EU without standard train protection systems, an EU report in 2022 confirmed.

Three-day teachers’ strike in Madrid, Spain

Teachers in the Community of Madrid, the region containing Spain’s capital, began a three-day strike on Tuesday, demanding a reduction of teaching hours and class sizes, and pay rises to compensate for real-terms losses since 2010.

The CGT, STEM, and CNT unions, which called the strikes, said that 5,000 teachers stopped work, between 15 and 18 percent of the workforce, and 200 people protested on Tuesday.

The Community of Madrid said its figures showed 7 percent of teachers walked out. The strike was not supported by the Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union, Spain’s largest unions, which are negotiating a new collective agreement for schools. The unions that did call a strike called the latest proposed agreement “unacceptable” as it would not return teaching hours to pre-2011 levels until 2026, *el Diario* reported.

A high minimum service requirement of 50 percent was imposed, according to *El Salto*, ensuring schools remained open with one teacher

for every fifty children in secondary schools.

Partial strikes begin at Spanish Airbus factory

On Friday, maintenance workers employed by Siemens at the Airbus aircraft factory in Illescas, Spain, will begin partial strikes of two hours per shift, *Europa Press* reported.

The CCOO is calling for Siemens to recognise the tasks actually carried out by 11 workers who are employed as “handling operators” but reportedly carry out maintenance and repair work beyond their job description. Siemens reportedly employs 77 people at the Airbus plant in total, all of whom are covered by the strike call.

Despite the CCOO’s occasional statements claiming to support the Palestinians, Airbus’s Illescas factory is part of the supply chain enabling European support for Israel’s attacks on the population of Gaza. According to Airbus, the plant manufactures components of the Eurofighter jet, a process involving facilities in Spain, Germany, Italy and the UK.

Germany announced in January that it would allow the sale of Eurofighters to Saudi Arabia as urged by the UK, which Germany had vetoed since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, the *Financial Times* reported. German Green Party politician and Deputy Chancellor Robert Habeck admitted the Saudi human rights record “still doesn’t meet our standards” but claimed with its attacks on Houthi rebels in Yemen, “Saudi Arabian defensive missiles are also protecting Israel.”

Portuguese prison guards and probation officers strike over pay and career progression

Prison guards and probation officers in Portugal have held strikes against low pay and a lack of career progression over the last few weeks. Prison guards began their strike on February 13 and intend to continue until March 9, *Observador* reported, causing thousands of trials to be postponed.

The National Union of the Prison Guard Corps accused the government of refusing to respond to its demands, saying “no one has even deigned to speak to the prison guard staff.” The union told *Lusa* that a guard who had worked for 20 years could earn only slightly more than the minimum wage.

Probation officers also held a strike and protested in Lisbon on February 23, to demand improvements in their own career progression and an increase in staffing levels. The Union of Technicians of the General Directorate of Probation and Prison Services also called an overtime ban from the start of January.

Romanian postal workers protest low wages

Postal workers of the Romanian postal service Poșta Română held daily protests outside the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitisation in Bucharest to denounce low wages in the company.

The National Trade Union Bloc said almost 60 percent of employees of Poșta Română were paid the minimum wage, and the average salary in the company was not much higher, *Agerpres* reported. Poșta Română

management claimed that no employees at all are paid the minimum wage.

The Romanian Postal Workers’ Union called for a new collective agreement and warned that the increase in the minimum wage in January may lead to either the insolvency of Poșta Română or mass layoffs at the company, which is 93.5 percent owned by the state.

Five-day strike at Eiffel Tower for better maintenance of French monument

The Eiffel Tower in Paris was closed to visitors most of last week as workers at the Eiffel Tower Operating Company (SETE) began a five-day strike on February 19.

The strike ended after an agreement was reached between the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and SETE to “regularly monitor the economic model” and investments in maintenance through meetings every six months, *Ouest France* reported.

The strike followed a one-day walkout in January called by the CGT on the centenary of the death of the tower’s designer Gustave Eiffel. The CGT accused management of “leading the SETE straight into the wall.” Eiffel recommended repainting the tower every seven years to prevent rust, but it has reportedly not had a complete repaint since 2010.

Junior doctors in England hold five-day strike over pay

Tens of thousands of junior doctors in England began a five-day stoppage on Saturday.

It was the tenth round of stoppages by British Medical Association (BMA) members, whose last strike was a six-day walkout at the beginning of January. Since then, the BMA junior doctors’ committee negotiations with the Conservative government health secretary, Victoria Atkins, have made no progress.

Their original demand was for full restoration of pay lost since 2008, a 35 percent rise. The government increased its previously imposed 8.8 percent rise by a further 3 percent but spread across grades. The junior doctors have been in dispute since March last year.

Around 3,000 junior doctors in Wales began a 72-hour stoppage on February 21 over similar issues and plan to walk out for four days beginning March 25. National Health Service (NHS) unions, including the Royal College of Nursing, have divided the struggle of health workers over pay and funding, cutting below-inflation deals while the NHS collapses.

Hospital ancillary staff in Dudley, UK strike over unpaid lump sum

Around 300 UK ancillary hospital staff working for outsourcer Mitie, under contract to Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, held a 24-hour stoppage on February 23, and are due to walk out again on Thursday.

The Unison union members work as caterers, cleaners and porters, among other ancillary roles. They are protesting not being paid the COVID bonus lump sum of at least £1,655 paid to directly employed NHS staff as part of their 2022/23 pay settlement.

Striking aviation support staff at East Midlands Airport, UK continue extended walkout over pay offer

Around 180 workers employed by DHL Aviation at East Midlands Airport, England are in the final full week of an extended stoppage begun February 9. They are on strike Monday to Friday this week and March 4.

The Unite members rejected a 9.8 percent offer due in April 2023, when RPI inflation was 11.3 percent, so the offer was a real-terms cut. The workers employed in aircraft handling and overseeing the airport tower are paid as little as £10.96 an hour. They are aggrieved their pay offer is less than that made to their counterparts at Bristol and Gatwick airports.

Unite says the workers, who were responsible for unloading medical supplies during the pandemic, have lost over 6 percent in pay in real terms since 2020.

A Unite press release notes, “While DHL is squeezing the pay of its workers it is continuing to boost its own profits. DHL Aviation recorded a £66 million profit last year and the German-owned parent company recorded profits of £6.7 billion in 2022. It is currently in the process of bidding for an estimated €15-20 billion takeover of DB Schenker.”

Scottish education qualification body workers’ stoppage over pay

Around 400 workers employed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) walked out on February 23, and are due to strike again Thursday.

The SQA is a Scottish government body responsible for accrediting educational awards.

The Unite union members voted by over 70 percent for the stoppage, protesting below-inflation pay offers of 5.75 percent for 2023 and 3.15 percent for 2024. The offers represent real-terms pay cuts. Pickets were mounted at the SQA sites in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The SQA workers are also carrying out industrial action short of striking, including an overtime and weekend working ban.

Student occupation at London college in opposition to Gaza genocide

Students at Goldsmiths, University of London began the occupation of rooms in the Professor Stuart Hall building on February 20. They are protesting the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The students issued an open letter to senior management at Goldsmiths. In part, it states, “Whilst calling for a ‘humanitarian ceasefire’ marks a positive step, there is no naming of the genocide being perpetrated by the Israeli state on the Palestinian people.

“The misleading term ‘Middle East crisis’ fails to name the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people.

“Your failure to use more decisive, articulate and compassionate language to describe the ongoing and well-documented Nakba in Gaza is received in such a way that is at least ineffectual as well as patronising to all those concerned.”

The students issued a series of demands, including “Immediate divestment from [Israeli] surveillance company Nice Ltd,” an audit of all HP equipment and cancellation of any outstanding orders, a commitment to BDS investment policy, and “removal of the IHRA definition of antisemitism; adopted by the College in 2022... immediately,” to be replaced by the Jerusalem Declaration definition.

The occupying students have organised teach-ins, film showings and

other events.

Workers at London housing association strike over pay

Around 50 housing repair workers employed by Sanctuary Housing association based in Hackney, London walked out on Thursday and Friday and plan to strike on March 4.

The Unite union members are protesting an imposed 4 percent pay offer for 2023 when RPI inflation was 11.4 percent. It was the first-ever strike by the Sanctuary Housing workers. Sanctuary refuses to recognise Unite for negotiations.

Walkout by traffic enforcement staff in Slough, UK over pay

Around 30 UK traffic enforcement staff, including wardens, working for Saba Park Services in Slough began a two-week strike on Monday.

The Unite union members who enforce parking restrictions, check pay and display car parks and monitor bus lanes are protesting not being paid the market rate for their role. They are demanding a 24 percent increase. Saba, under contract to Conservative-controlled Slough borough council to provide traffic enforcement, reported a £19 million turnover for the last year.

Strikes by Lebanese public sector workers over pay and conditions

Around 3,000 workers at the Lebanese Ministry of Finance began an open-ended strike on February 22. The stoppage was in response to Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s decision to freeze a productivity bonus paid only to some sections of civil servants, including Finance Ministry workers. The bonus is worth about 20 percent of a civil servant’s salary.

On Monday, municipal workers across Lebanon walked out demanding pay and conditions in line with other public administration workers. They threatened to take further action if their demands are not met.

Lebanese workers are seeing an ongoing erosion of the real value of their wages, as they are hit by inflation of more than 177 percent and the sharp devaluation of the Lebanese pound.

Iranian steel workers return to work but vow further action

Thousands of workers at the National Steel Industrial Group in Ahvaz in southwest Iran returned to work on Tuesday. Management accepted the temporary return of previously dismissed workers, but the workers vowed to continue their fight against existing pay and conditions.

Iran, with inflation around 35 percent, has been hard hit by US sanctions and is in the crosshairs of US/NATO’s widening war in the Middle East and Ukraine against Russia

Clashes between South African public sector workers on strike and police in Matjhabeng, Free State Province

Municipal workers in Matjhabeng, Free State Province, South Africa, have been on strike for four weeks over political interference with jobs, financial improprieties, and mistreatment of workers. They are demanding the sacking of Mayor Thanduxolo Khalipha, who they say is responsible. They will continue to strike until he steps down.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members are not collecting refuse or fixing water and electricity breakdowns.

Tension over the issues led to violent confrontations on Monday between the strikers and councillors, with workers setting up barricades of burning tyres and throwing stones. The police used stun grenades, tear smoke and rubber bullets, provoking strikers. Some protesters were arrested.

Strikers state that the bullying, harassment of officials and interference have created intolerable conditions.

Striking workers at the University of Pretoria, South Africa attacked by tear gas and rubber bullets

Support and administration workers in their third week of strike action were attacked at a protest Monday by local police firing tear gas and rubber bullets. Three strikers were injured following the clashes.

The strikers are demanding a 7 percent increase, a thirteenth cheque, a one-off bonus and five days leave. The University say they can only afford 4 percent due to lack of government funding. The University is also owed more than half a billion in student debt, which they state is exacerbating the crisis.

The university made classes online and sought to obtain a court order to limit strike activities and pickets. Strikers are prohibited from approaching non-striking employees, replacement labour, or any other individuals, as well as obstructing vehicles or traffic entering or leaving the university premises.

Nurses launch go-slow protest in Eastern Cape, South Africa over pay

Nurses at Dora Nginza Hospital, Eastern Cape, South Africa held a go-slow protest last week over non-payment of their December overtime. Other hospitals in the region had similar problems, which were resolved following similar protests. The overtime had not been paid because hospital management had delayed making the payment submissions to the provincial government.

Hundreds of healthcare workers protest in Pretoria, South Africa over lack of jobs

Hundreds of unemployed healthcare workers protested outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria last Friday about the high number of unemployed health care professionals in South Africa.

Tebogo Moalusi from Rise Mzansi told *sabcnews*, "If we have more than 800 doctors who are qualified, who are able to work and not in our

hospitals—it means longer waiting time, longer lines, which means that our people will die in those lines. We cannot have this as a people. This government continues to fail us, and we must stand in solidarity with healthcare professionals to say we will fight with you."

Dr. Cedric Sihlangu, the general secretary of the South African Medical Association Trade Union said, "The staff shortages are a long-known phenomenon. Our belief is that the health system in the public sector is actually collapsing. We have clinics and hospitals without a single doctor and yet we have numerous unemployed doctors sitting at home."

Nigerian public sector workers' national strike against low pay and high prices

Nigerian state-employed workers and unionised workers began a national strike on February 27 to demand an end to high prices and low pay.

The strike was called by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) after months of inaction and prevarication.

Shortly before a rally in Abuja, NLC president Joe Ajaero told the media workers were protesting against growing hardship and the poor response by government. In October, unions agreed with the government to end strikes, based on promises of monthly subsidies to cushion the removal of fuel subsidies.

Since taking office last year, President Bola Tinubu scrapped fuel subsidies and unified exchange rates, causing a devaluation of the naira against the dollar and rising inflation. Petrol prices more than doubled and inflation shot up, reaching almost 30 percent last month, a record figure for nearly three decades.

The strike follows big demonstrations in Benin City, Ibadan, Lagos and other cities. "Prices keep soaring, the aid the government said it would dole out has not been provided," said a shop owner in Abuja, the federal capital.

Health workers in Zimbabwe hold two-day strike over low pay

Health workers in Zimbabwe began a 48-hour stoppage on February 29 to protest low salaries. The strike was called by the Health Apex panel, an umbrella of the various health unions.

A Health Apex statement admitted that Zimbabwean nurses survive on a salary worth "less than US\$10," a situation that has led many nurses to seek better pay in Europe, the US or Australia.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact