

Pay strikes at German and Austrian airports; strikes, protests continue across Iran; striking Egyptian textile workers resist intimidation

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 at Lufthansa airline and German airports

Ground handling workers at Lufthansa in Germany began a two-day strike on Thursday, cancelling the majority of flights by Germany's largest airline.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* the United Services Union (Verdi) is calling for a pay rise of 12.5 percent in a year. Lufthansa has offered only 10 percent spread over 28 months (around 4.2 percent per year).

Verdi also called a one-day strike on Thursday among private airport security staff in Frankfurt and Hamburg airports, during collective bargaining negotiations over pay. The Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies offered to increase wages by 2.70 euros over two years, but Verdi has called for a one-year contract with a 2.80 euro pay rise.

Austrian Airlines crew call impromptu strike over pay

On March 1, cabin crew at Austrian Airlines in Vienna Airport decided to hold an impromptu strike over pay negotiations. A works council meeting that morning was attended by more than 1,200 workers. According to the Vida union, they decided unanimously to call a warning strike from the end of the meeting until 5pm. The *Kleine Zeitung* reported that almost 140 flights were cancelled.

The airline reportedly cancelled another 150 flights on Friday this week as another works council meeting was scheduled, although Vida later postponed the meeting. Workers rejected the Lufthansa subsidiary's pay offer of 4.5 percent, which Vida says "wouldn't even make up for inflation."

The current inflation rate is 4.2 percent but averaged 6.6 percent over the past 12 months. Vida is calling for a pay rise of at least one-third, which it says is necessary to close the pay gap between Austrian Airlines and other companies in the Lufthansa Group.

Slovenian doctors escalate indefinite strike over pay

From March 1, doctors and dentists in Slovenia escalated their indefinite strike by also refusing to work overtime. They have been on strike since January 15, but many were required by law to keep working to provide healthcare to young and elderly patients and treat urgent cases. The overtime ban will therefore have a large impact, especially as understaffed hospitals are reliant on overtime.

The Fides union says that more than half of doctors nationwide declared they would refuse overtime, according to *Slovenia Times*. The Health Ministry says the figure is 30 percent of hospital doctors and 20 percent in community health centres. Some doctors reportedly withdrew from the overtime ban after hospital managers threatened to revoke their permission to work at other healthcare providers in their own time.

Slovenia Times reports that the government recently added new minimum service requirements, including extending the group of patients who must be treated, and requiring doctors to issue medical certificates and sick notes. Fides said this decision was an illegal breach of the right to strike.

Fides is calling for a separate pay deal for doctors and dentists, which it says the government promised in 2022. The government refuses to address doctors' pay separately, insisting on joint negotiations for the whole public sector.

Energy workers strike at Enel throughout Italy against cost-cutting

Workers at Enel, the main electricity company in Italy, will hold a one-day national strike on Friday against the new strategy announced by the company. The CGIL, CISL and UIL unions have called the strategy an "attempt to outsource strategic activities and cut investments for the energy transition, putting direct and contract workers at risk," ANSA reported.

The strike will likely involve thousands of the 30,000 workers employed in Italy, many of whom will also refuse overtime until March 24.

According to *S&P Global*, Enel announced in November it would cut its capital expenditure between now and 2026 by 1.2 billion euros, to a total of 35.8 billion. Following privatisation in 1999, the Italian government owns only 23.6 percent of Enel, with 56.7 percent of the shares held by

institutional investors.

Thousands of municipal workers strike over pay in Izmir, Turkey

On Tuesday, the 5,560 municipal workers of Izmir, Turkey's third largest city, walked out on a half-day strike, *Evrensel* reported.

The city offered a 30 percent pay rise. Members of the Belediye-İş union rejected this, as it was less than half the official inflation figure for February of 67.07 percent. The union's local branch president told a rally of thousands of workers that figures from the independent Inflation Research Group showed "real inflation" as 120 percent.

National strike over pay in France at staffing agency Manpower

The workers at staffing agency Manpower held a national strike in France on Tuesday, demanding a pay rise for all the company's permanent employees. The strike was called by five unions at the French branch of the multinational company.

A union representative told *L'Union* that Manpower announced 3 percent pay rises for some individuals "based on merit," which could mean a pay freeze for some workers, with a total increase in the payroll of 5.5 million euros.

The unions called for Manpower to spend 7 million euros in total on pay rises to guarantee at least a 3 percent pay rise for everybody. They cited the 125 million euros in profits this year and massive payouts in dividends for shareholders.

Steel workers continue month-long strike in Spain

Workers at the stainless steel plant in Los Barrios, in the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia, have been on an indefinite strike since early February in a dispute over a collective agreement on pay and working conditions with Acerinox.

According to *Europa Press*, members of the ATA union walked out on February 5, followed by members of three other unions on February 10.

The Workers' Commissions (CCOO), one of the unions involved, said they were demanding Acerinox, one of the world's largest steel producers, withdraw its plans for more "flexible" working conditions. The unions say this will lead to precarious employment. The CCOO also called for the company to drop attempts to have the strike declared illegal, *Europa Press* reported.

Workers at fertiliser plant in Spain stop work to denounce unsafe conditions

Workers at Asturiana de Fertilizados, a fertiliser company operating in Asturias, Spain, held a strike Tuesday to demand health and safety measures be put in place.

According to *La Nueva España*, the SOMA-FITAG-UGT union said the company simply "continues to say that airborne dust is a by-product of the

activity," and threatened to organise an indefinite strike if measures were not taken.

The union said workers were "deceived by the Asturiana de Fertilizados company" following a two-month-long strike over safety in 2021. Asturiana de Fertilizados reportedly cited the opinion of the Superior Court of Justice of the Principality of Asturias that workers at the factory were not eligible for hazard payments.

Ten-day strike by chemical workers in Oelegem, Belgium

On Monday, work resumed at the Oleon chemicals plant in Oelegem, near Antwerp, Belgium, following a ten-day strike.

Members of the General Labour Federation of Belgium and Confederation of Christian Trade Unions walked out to demand a one-off payment to compensate for inflation, but Oleon cited poor results in 2023 to say it could not afford to pay a bonus, *Nieuwsblad* reported.

Strikers told the media that none of the fifty production workers at the Oelegem plant was working. Only 20 percent of white-collar workers crossed the picket line.

British sailors in Norwegian North Sea end year-long strike with new contracts and reinstatement of sacked colleagues

Nine crew members on the *Island Captain*, a ship servicing oil wells on the Norwegian continental shelf in the North Sea, this week ended a strike begun nearly a year ago.

The multinational oil company which runs the ship, SLB, agreed to the demands of the Norwegian Industri Energi trade union to employ the crew under a Norwegian collective agreement and reemploy three fired strikers at SLB Norway.

The crew members, British nationals employed by SLB UK, joined the Norwegian Industri Energi. They accused SLB of not paying compensation for overtime or work at night, and said they regularly worked 14-hour days. Industri Energi said it has now "secured Norwegian pay and working conditions for the nine strikers" although it did not say what this meant in concrete terms.

The deal was announced just hours before a sympathy strike in the Ekofisk oil field where the *Island Captain* operates. Seventy-five oil workers would have stopped work in support of the nine crew members, targeting ConocoPhillips which uses SLB's services and the Archer oil service group, *Reuters* reported.

Industri Energi waited to call the sympathy strike until after a Norwegian court ruled in February that a sympathy strike against a foreign company operating in Norway was legal.

Twenty-four-hour strike by junior doctors in Northern Ireland over pay

Junior doctors in Northern Ireland began a 24-hour stoppage at 8 a.m. Wednesday over pay. It is the first ever action by junior doctors in the province.

The British Medical Association (BMA) members rejected a 9.1 percent pay offer for 2023/24 backdated to April 2023 and voted to strike by an

over 97 percent majority. According to the BMA, doctors in the province have seen a 30 percent real-terms pay cut over the last 16 years. The current basic starting pay for a junior doctor in the province is £26,000.

The striking doctors held demonstrations at the Royal Victoria, Altnagelvin, Antrim, Craigavon and Ulster hospitals.

Rail maintenance staff in Derby, UK strike over lack of pay offer

Around 70 workers at Alstom Engineering based in Derby began a four-day stoppage Wednesday.

The Unite union members are responsible for preparation, maintenance and safety checks of railway carriages used by East Midlands Rail. They took the action after Alstom failed to make a pay offer.

According to the BBC, Alstom has now made a pay offer which will be put to the workforce in a ballot.

Bus controllers in London, UK set to strike over pay

Around 40 bus control staff working for the Abellio London Bus company are due to begin nine days of strikes on Thursday. The stoppages will run to March 29.

The Unite union members voted for the action after Abellio failed to improve a pay offer. The controllers are responsible for controlling the routes taken by buses. Abellio pay their controllers around £10,000 less than similar staff performing the role at other bus companies.

The strikes are expected to impact services across 12 routes in south London.

Unite union suspends stoppage of Scottish education qualification body workers after they accept new offer

Unite called off the scheduled strike of around 400 workers employed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), due February 29, after the workers accepted a new pay offer.

They had already held a one-day stoppage on February 23. The SQA is a Scottish government body responsible for accrediting educational awards.

The workers voted by over 70 percent for the stoppage, rejecting a below-inflation pay offer of 4.75 percent for 2023. The new offer accepted by the SQA workers is a 5.75 percent increase for 2023, 3.15 percent for 2024 plus a £1,000 cash lump sum.

Hundreds protest as Birmingham, UK council cuts jobs, services and imposes increased council tax

Hundreds of people including Unite, Unison and GMB union members protested outside a Labour-controlled Birmingham council meeting Tuesday evening.

Birmingham council, the largest local authority in Europe, faces enormous financial difficulties and is effectively bankrupt. The council meeting agreed to cut around 600 jobs and impose cuts of nearly £150

million this year and next. Council tax will also rise by 21 percent over the next two years.

The largest cuts in local authority history will mean library closures, cuts to children's and adult services, and cuts in highway maintenance and flood defenses.

Middle East

Continuing protests of Iranian oil workers

Sunday saw further protests by unofficial oil workers at refineries in the South Pars oil and gas field. Big protests also took place on the previous day, including a boycott of the canteen.

The demands included abolishing the contractor companies, who take a big chunk of their wages, and improved welfare for contracted workers.

On March 1, oil workers employed by the Falat Gharen Company in Lawan held a protest. Their main demands included the call to sack corrupt managers, for the removal of caps on salaries and to end the limiting of retirement pensions.

Protests by retirees and workers across Iran

On Monday, retirees of the Telecommunications Company of Iran held protests against the inadequacy of their pensions. Protests were held in Tehran, Ahvaz, Marivan and Shiraz, among other cities.

The main complaint is the failure of successive governments to uphold a 2010 law by which pensions were supposed to keep in line with inflation so their value did not fall.

Other workers have also been in dispute. Nurses in Shiraz protested against low pay and poor working conditions. In Chabahar, south-eastern Iran, technicians and engineers at a water pumping station were on strike over unpaid wages.

Workers at the Taghtiran Industrial Company in Kashan held a protest outside the Kashan governorate office over unpaid wages, while in Dehdasht petrochemical workers went on strike over unpaid wages.

In Haft Tappeh, MDF board manufacturing workers have been on strike over a week against poor working conditions.

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

Strike of Iranian machine assembly plant workers over nepotism and pay

Workers at a machine assembly plant in Tabriz in northwest Iran came out on strike on February 26, protesting the appointment of plant managers on the basis of their connections to the regime. They were also demanding implementation of a job classification plan that would boost their pay.

Lebanese university professors protest low pay and wage arrears

Tuesday saw a sit-in by several hundred hourly paid professors outside the Ministry of Education and Higher Education headquarters in Beirut.

They were demanding their status be upgraded to full-time equivalent part-timers. Their status would still be below that of regular teachers. They are paid US\$2 an hour.

The professors, led by the Lebanese University Committee of Contractual Hourly Teachers, have already held a week-long warning strike. They have been boycotting classes and marking for two weeks and threaten all-out strike action if their demands are not met.

They are also demanding wage arrears that were not paid for 2022/23, health cover and affiliation to the National Social Security Fund.

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.

Africa

Egyptian textile workers in Mahalla on strike, resist intimidation

Workers at Egypt's largest textile factory, in Mahalla al-Kubra, are continuing a strike in spite of management attempts to starve them back to work by withholding pay for work already done. "Instead of responding to our legitimate requests, the company deprives us of our salaries and uses the weapon of starvation as if we were in Gaza," said one worker.

A strike by women workers began last week, which then spread to involve large numbers of male workers. The company employs around 14,000 people.

Mahalla al-Kubra is a historic centre of the class struggle in Egypt. Textile workers there organised mass strikes against the former dictator Hosni Mubarak, playing a key role in the revolutionary struggles that led to his overthrow in 2011.

Workers at the company making oils and detergents in the city of Assiut are also on strike for the same pay increase demanded at Mahalla. In addition, around 400 temporary workers in Assiut are demanding permanent jobs after working in the company for 10 years without being hired for permanent jobs.

Dictator Abdul Fattah al-Sisi announced an increase in the monthly minimum wage for state workers to 6,000 Egyptian pounds (£150), but many workers do not even get that.

Inflation in Egypt is close to 40 percent.

Thousands protest falling living standards in Tunisia

Thousands joined a protest on March 2 outside the office of the Tunisian prime minister. They were protesting falling living standards, high prices and the government's policy of following IMF diktats at the expense of the workers and the poor.

Secretary-General of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), Noureddine Taboubi, said, "The government claims to have paid off its debts last year, yet this was done at this expense of basic foodstuffs which were missing on the national market... The economic and social situation continues to worsen."

The unions made an agreement with the government in February 2021, which was never acted on due to the government claiming "financial difficulties."

President Kais Saied has been ruling by decree since grabbing power in July 2021. In 2023 he forced through a constitution he claimed gave him unlimited powers.

Tunisia has almost zero growth and had an unemployment rate of 16.4 percent last year.

Health workers in Oyo State, Nigeria begin seven-day strike

Workers in the hospitals of Oyo State, Nigeria began a seven-day strike on March 4. They are members of the Nigerian Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP).

Their long outstanding demands include implementation of the new national hazard allowance, promotions for those who are qualified, the reintroduction of call duty allowance for dental therapists and recruitment of more health workers to fill posts left vacant by leavers and retirees.

Municipal workers in Durban strike over pay disparity

Hundreds of municipal workers from eThekweni municipality took strike action last week over wage disparity. The workers claim municipal workers in other provinces earn R3,900 a month more than those in eThekweni.

Hundreds of members of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) marched through central Durban. The strike has continued in certain areas despite Durban High Court granting an interdict against the illegal strike.

Workers from the Durban Solid Waste unit, the Cleansing and Solid Waste Unit garden refuse site services, have been active in the protests.

News reports stated that most roads in Durban were inaccessible due to the protests. Refuse workers barricaded roads and burned tyres.

Thirteen workers were arrested at the weekend for damage to infrastructure and property. The KwaZulu-Natal premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube has promised a crackdown, with increased police and security guards at sites across Durban.

Water workers on strike in Johannesburg

Johannesburg Water workers took strike action last week over pay docked for a sit-in last year. A number of areas were struggling with low water pressure or no water as leaks were not fixed due to the strike.



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