

National strike in France against massive cuts in public spending; workers and retirees continue protests across Iran against dire living conditions; three-day stoppage by health workers in Lagos, Nigeria over pay

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 December 2024

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

Hundreds of thousands in national strike across France over public spending cuts

An estimated 200,000 teachers, hospital staff, energy workers and other public servants took part in a national strike and over 200 demonstrations across France December 5, in opposition to cuts in public spending.

The General Confederation of Labour and other union members were also protesting poor pay, deteriorating working conditions and the destruction of public services.

The government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier was brought down December 4 over the Social Security Budget, with millions of workers opposed to the 60 billion euros proposed cuts. Sections of the ruling class are demanding more cuts to satisfy the demands of business and finance, with France increasing military spending and threatening to send troops to Ukraine.

Tens of thousands of Volkswagen workers in further strikes throughout Germany

Volkswagen workers took part in four-hour long walkouts Monday at nine plants across Germany, with 68,000 demonstrating outside the main factory in Wolfsburg, also home to the company's headquarters.

The IG Metall union members are in ongoing protests against threatened closures, mass redundancies and wage cuts.

Mass redundancies in the auto industry are planned worldwide as part of restructuring to cut costs in the move to electric vehicles—at Stellantis in the US, Italy and the UK, Ford's in Germany and the US, Nissan globally, and involving tens of thousands in China.

Educators walk out in Berlin, Germany for improved working conditions

Hundreds of teachers, social educators and school psychologists went on a one-day strike in Berlin December 5. Around 2,000 demonstrated at a protest rally outside the House of Representatives.

The Education and Science Union members demand smaller classes and better working conditions.

Belgian prison officers strike for better working conditions

Prison staff in Brussels and the wider Flanders region, Belgium went on a 24-hour strike December 6, in a series of protests against prison overcrowding and short staffing.

The General Union of Public Services and the Free Syndicate of Public Servants members say they also face unnecessary aggression due to prisoners being confined in unsuitable conditions.

Public service workers in Portugal strike over pay and conditions

Many hundreds of civil service workers in Portugal held a 24-hour strike December 6, affecting schools and health services throughout the country.

The National Federation of Independent Public Administration Trade Unions members are fighting for pay rises, a revision of job assessments and a fixed career progression for operational assistants in schools and auxiliary technicians in hospitals. They also want €10.20 in meal vouchers per day.

Spanish fishermen stop work to protest cuts to permitted fishing allowance

Spanish fishermen went on strike for 48 hours December 6 to protest new European Union sustainability measures, which they say will limit their ability to support themselves.

Representatives demonstrated at European Commission offices in Madrid, warning that 17,000 jobs will be lost if the maximum annual number of fishing days per Mediterranean trawler is reduced from 130 to 27.

Further strikes by teachers at some UK sixth-form colleges over pay

Around 2,000 teachers in 32 sixth-form colleges across England are set to walk out on Friday over pay. They held stoppages on November 28 and December 3-4.

National Education Union members at 40 sixth-form colleges were balloted after the recent 5.5 percent pay rise for teachers was not awarded to those in non-academised colleges. The ballot saw a 97 percent vote in favour of a walkout, on a 62 percent turnout. The result gave 32 colleges a mandate for stoppages.

The Sixth Form Colleges Association is asking for a judicial review of the Labour government's award of a 5.5 percent pay rise to teachers but excluding those teaching in colleges that do not have academy status. Sixth-form colleges with academy status were given additional funding to pay the rise.

The action by NEU members is the first widespread stoppage since the election of the Labour government in July. Further stoppages are planned for January 7-9.

Colleges across England are taking part in the strikes including in Birmingham, Bristol, Bolton, Cambridge, Huddersfield, Hull, London, Manchester and Southampton.

Strike by UK hospital ancillary staff at East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Trust over outsourcing to be extended

Around 350 UK ancillary hospital workers employed by East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust (ESNEFT), who began a three-week stoppage against outsourcing November 25, will remain out until the end of the year.

The Unison union members work as cleaners, housekeepers and porters at Colchester hospital and community hospital sites, Aldeburgh and Felixstowe. They began the current round of action prior to the ESNEFT decision Monday to proceed with its outsourcing proposal. It will not name the bidder until after December 17.

Ancillary staff employed by outsourcing company OCS at Ipswich hospital, part of the ESNEFT, are on inferior conditions. They get less leave and sick pay than their directly NHS-employed colleagues.

The workers, who had already held 20 days of stoppages prior to the current stoppage, recently renewed their strike mandate with a more than 98 percent vote on a 76 percent turnout.

Staff transferred to the outsourcing company will have Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) rights to have current terms and conditions maintained. However, new staff will be employed on inferior conditions on pay, holiday and sick leave. TUPE rights can additionally be eroded.

A Unison press release announcing the outsourcing decision quoted a study in *The Lancet* journal earlier in the year, which concluded outsourcing "can reduce costs, but seems to do so at the expense of

quality of care."

Further strikes by mental health staff in Manchester UK over staff shortages

Around 40 UK mental health workers employed in the Manchester Early Intervention Psychosis teams began a three-day walkout Tuesday.

The Unison and Unite union members, who have held previous stoppages, include nurses, social workers, welfare rights supporters and therapists. They are protesting lack of funding, support and staff shortages which they say are leaving vulnerable people without the support they need.

Ongoing protests by workers in Iran against deteriorating social conditions

Around 5,000 casual workers from all the refineries making up the South Pars Complex in Iran protested on Tuesday. Their demands included fair wages, the removal of contractors, union recognition and access to welfare and holiday benefits. The workers were joined by their families. Attempts by security forces of the Pars Special Economic Zone to prevent family members joining the workers failed because of the sheer numbers involved.

Among protests Monday were those of social security retirees who held rallies in Ahvaz, Kermanshah and Shush to protest the inadequate level of their pensions.

In Isfahan, steel industry retirees rallied to protest the low level of their pensions, with telecommunication retirees protesting over the same issue in Kermanshah.

The capital Tehran saw students at Azad university protest a sharp increase in tuition fees, while students at Beheshti university held a sit-in after a carbon monoxide leak in a dormitory led to the poisoning of 44 students.

Unemployment in Iran was almost 10 percent in 2023, with inflation at 31.7 percent this year. Living standards have been badly hit by US sanctions and are set to deteriorate further as US and Israel war preparations against the country escalate in the wake of the collapse of the Syrian regime.

Health workers in Lagos, Nigeria on three-day strike over broken promises over pay

Health workers in Lagos, Nigeria began a three-day strike December 11 to demand implementation of promised adjustments to the Consolidated Health Salary Structure. The strike follows the expiration of an ultimatum issued by the unions.

A meeting between the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria, the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, Nigeria Union of Allied Health Professionals, the Joint Health Sector Unions and state government officials on December 9 ended in deadlock.

The strike stopped the normal functioning of all the Lagos state-run health facilities, including Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, general hospitals, and primary health centres.

Academic and non-academic staff at Lagos State University begin indefinite strike

Both academic and non-academic staff at Lagos State University (LASU) began an indefinite strike on December 9, demanding a salary increase and resolution of salary disparities between LASU and the other universities in the state.

The strikers are also demanding the 20 percent salary increase promised by the state governor during his election campaign.

Lecturers at Taraba State University, Nigeria on indefinite strike over pay and conditions[subhead]

Tertiary education workers in Katsina State, Nigeria began a 14-day “warning” strike on December 9 against disparities in pay and for salaries to be brought into line with agreed salary structures.

The Joint Consultative Forum Institutions members work in the Colleges of Health Sciences and Nursing, Isah Kaita College of Education, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Hassan Usman Katsina Polytechnic, Yusuf Bala Usman College of Education, and KSITM.

Union at Sea Harvest in Cape Town, South Africa pushes through substandard company pay offer

Dozens of workers at Sea Harvest’s south arm and airport depot in Cape Town, South Africa walked out on Monday for two days to demand improved pay and conditions. This followed a strike two weeks ago at the fishing company.

The Independent Commercial Hospitality and Allied Workers Union members demanded an 8 percent rise, against the company’s offer of 6.5 percent. The union had originally asked for 10 percent but ended the stoppage accepting the company’s 6.5 percent.

The truck drivers, welders, forklift drivers, pipe fitters and unskilled labourers were also demanding a cold room allowance and food allowance for the night shift. Conditions are harsh. A forklift driver told *Workers World* he is exposed to the cold on a nine-hour shift, as the fridges are set at -18 degrees. Workers are only entitled to two leave days a month and lose a bonus if they take three.

In May, one of the company’s ships capsized, with the loss of 11 lives. In October a fire broke out at another, highlighting the need for regular safety inspections.



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