

Postal workers walk out in Belgium over increased workload and job losses; protests in Yemeni capital against desperate living conditions; workers march to protest deaths of Stilfontein miners in South Africa at hands of ANC government

## 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.*

### Workers at Belgian postal service, Bpost, strike over increased workload and job losses

Postal workers at Bpost distribution centres across Belgium, including Brussels, Liège, Charleroi and others, have been on strike since February 5. They are protesting new cost-cutting methods, which mean heavier workloads using fewer staff.

The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions members say management are removing certain delivery routes and then adding the work to remaining routes, increasing workloads. A worker told *rtbf.be*, “The work is becoming more and more painful, even inhuman for some. We love our job so we want to do it properly, decently and humanely.”

Postal and logistics workers across Europe and globally are facing similar attacks by state-owned and corporate carriers to slash jobs and boost profits.

### Hundreds of Lidl store workers across France strike over pay and conditions

Shop workers in various Lidl supermarkets throughout France began striking February 7 as part of an indefinite rolling strike campaign for increased wages and improved working conditions. Lidl has 1,600 stores in the country and employs 45,000 workers.

Members of the General Confederation of Labour, French Confederation of Christian Workers, Force Ouvrière and two other unions say their pay barely matches inflation. They also face increased workloads, including new mandatory Sunday working caused after the loss of 2,200 employees in cost-cutting measures.

### Thousands in Madrid, Spain protest housing shortage and property speculation

An estimated 15,000 people marched through central Madrid on Sunday, protesting the lack of housing and unaffordable rents due to financial speculation.

Organised by the Habitat 24 movement, a group of housing, human rights, environmental, political, social and union bodies, the demonstrators demanded a ceiling on rental prices, increases in public housing, tighter regulation on evictions and limits on numbers of properties bought for investment or tourist use.

### Car parts workers in Gebze, Turkey strike for pay increase

Over 300 workers at CT Automotive (Chinatool) plastics factory in Gebze, Turkey went on indefinite strike Monday to demand a 25 percent pay rise. Annual inflation is 44 percent.

The United Metal Workers Union members were offered a 20 percent increase by the profitable company, whose factories worldwide produce moulded trim for major car manufacturers.

### Train managers at UK train operating company resume series of strikes over rest-day payments

Around 400 UK train managers at the Avanti West Coast train operating company resumed their series of Sunday strikes on February 2 in a dispute over payments for working rest days.

The managers traditionally performed the role of conductors/guards but now also manage the team of staff on a train service.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members began its Sunday stoppages January 12, but suspended walkouts planned for the following two Sundays for talks which failed to reach resolution.

They previously held stoppages either side of the New Year's Day bank

holiday. Planned walkouts on December 22, 23 and 29 were suspended after Avanti put forward a new proposal to settle the dispute. The increased offer, however, was rejected by an 83 percent majority.

The managers originally voted by nearly 93 percent to reject Avanti's pay proposals for working rest days. They normally work a 41-hour week but due to staff shortages are also being asked to work rest days.

The train managers want enhanced pay for working rest days, in line with senior managers, who are paid up to £500 for working designated rest days.

Avanti runs services covering the west coast, including between London Euston and Glasgow in Scotland. Due to the walkouts, Avanti is running a reduced service and within limited hours.

The train managers plan to walk out each Sunday until May 25.

### Civil servants in Newcastle, UK to extend strike over victimisation

Around 250 UK workers at His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) based at Benton Park View near Newcastle are to extend their stoppage.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members walked out December 23. They were protesting the dismissal of three union representatives, Gordon Askew, Rachel Farmer and Joel Hamilton.

Their current action is due to end Friday but they will walk out again from February 17 until March 14. They work in the HMRC's Employer Services helpline, and their action has led to long telephone call queues and a backlog of callbacks.

A UK parliament early day motion on the union representatives' dismissal was tabled last July. It noted that, "HMRC has rejected appeals against their dismissal, despite evidence being brought to the attention of the investigator that two managers on the site had clearly doctored evidence prior to submission to the investigations, leading to two of the dismissals."

### Domestic abuse advisors in London set to begin indefinite strike over job cuts

Domestic abuse advisors working for Solace Women's Aid charity, in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, are due to begin an indefinite strike on Friday.

The United Voices of the World (UVW) union members are taking the action in protest at Solace's plans to cut the number of advisors by a third.

The UVW members voted by 100 percent on a more than 90 percent turnout for the walkout. Tower Hamlets has the second highest rate of domestic abuse in the capital.

UVW quoted one Solace worker saying, "Cutting one third of our team will result in further harm to victims of domestic abuse in Tower Hamlets. Our main priority with this strike is to highlight the importance of our service and the impact on the community if the team is reduced."

The Solace workers and supporters held a rally outside Tower Hamlets Town Hall on February 6. They called on the council who provide funding to Solace to intervene to prevent the job cuts.

### Protests in Yemeni capital over desperate living conditions

Protests broke out in several districts of the Yemeni capital Aden on February 6. The protestors blocked roads and burnt tyres.

They were driven by deteriorating living conditions and the lack of basic necessities. Two days previously, the Aden Electricity Corporation announced a total shutdown of the electricity network after running out of fuel for its power generation stations.

The imperialist-stoked civil war has worsened the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Some 17 million experience food insecurity and 3.5 million severe malnutrition, while 18 million are without access to sanitation or safe drinking water.

### Ongoing protests across Iran over living conditions

Among recent protests in Iran was Saturday's demonstration by contract workers at the Negin Makran Petrochemical site. They were demanding the reinstatement of workers sacked following a strike on January 22. That strike was in response to wage arrears for the last three months.

Sunday saw protests by pensioners of the Social Security Organisation in Tehran, Ahvaz and Shush. Retired teachers joined the protest in Tehran, braving a snow storm. They demanded higher pensions and improved living conditions.

The same day saw protests by retirees of the Steel and Mining Fund in the city of Isfahan against their deteriorating economic position.

Tuesday saw protests in the city of Kohgiluyeh in southwest Iran for the third night in a row. Protestors driven by food price hikes and power outages chanted anti-government slogans. That evening protestors took to the streets of Tehran after power outages led to the closure of schools and government offices. The outages are blamed on fuel shortages for power generation.

Inflation is 31.7 percent and the poverty rate around 30 percent, in part due to US sanctions. Living standards will worsen as the Trump administration escalates its war plans against Iran, as part of its widening war in the Middle East and China.

### Protests against deaths of Stilfontein miners in South Africa entombed in abandoned mine

Over 100 workers marched and protested outside the Department of Mineral Resources in Pretoria, South Africa on February 5.

They are demanding accountability for the deaths of unemployed miners who worked the abandoned gold mine in Stilfontein, the resignation of mining minister, Gwede Mankishe, and a police inquiry.

Among the more than 78 dead were migrant workers. The ANC government led by former National Union of Miners president Cyril Ramaphosa ordered soldiers and police to block all supplies to the miners underground, who suffered dehydration and starvation.

Unemployment in South Africa is 32.1 percent and the poverty rate 63 percent.

### South African workers picket Durban hospital over sanitation

Workers at the Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital near Durban, South Africa have been picketing outside over lack of water, reported

SABCNEWS.

The Public Servants Association Members have been without water for two weeks. Patients complain of toilets that smell, and a shortage of doctors and nurses.

The cuts to US aid being implemented by the Trump regime will have a devastating effect in South Africa, threatening 15,000 health workers jobs.

### **Unions instruct electricity workers striking against job losses in Kaduna, Nigeria to return to work**

Striking electricity workers in Kaduna were told to return to work following a meeting of their unions with State Governor Uba Sani January 7.

After the meeting, the union leaders praised Sani for his intervention. Leaders of the National Union of Electricity Employees and the Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies took part.

The strike was in response to a management decision to sack 444 workers. There are no reports of the sackings being rescinded, only a vague call for “a give-and-take on the side of both the Management and Labour in order to find an amicable settlement.” The union leaders also claimed that “Management is operating under stringent conditions, given the prevailing economic situation in the country but [they] promised to help it to succeed.”

As workers in Kaduna were being sent back to work, electricity workers in Ibadan, Oyo State held protests against unfair labour practices by the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company, demonstrating February 6 and 7 outside the company’s headquarters in Ibadan, the state capital.

### **Magistrates walk out in Gabon to protest low pay and poor conditions**

Courts in Gabon in West Africa stopped their operations due to a strike by magistrates. The magistrates walked out to oppose poor working conditions and low pay. The strike, begun January 13, was continuing as of February 11.

The president of Gabon’s National Trade Union of Magistrates, Landry Abaga Essono, said the union began the protests because the government refused to improve magistrates’ conditions and had refused its call for talks.



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