

24-hour general strike in Greece over pay and conditions; further strikes across Iran as workers protest collapse in living standards; sugar cane workers in Cameroon striking over pay face police violence

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 February 2025

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

Workers across Greece strike and demonstrate over poor pay and working conditions

A 24-hour general strike and demonstrations by journalists, health workers and other public sector workers took place in Greece Tuesday, demanding improved pay and conditions. Taxi drivers in Athens held a similar stoppage Wednesday.

The Confederation of Greek Civil Servants (ADEDY) held a 24-hour strike on February 18 of workers in special healthcare programs. The members of the Panhellenic Federation of Hospital Employees demand permanent contracts with fairer pay. Panhellenic Federation of Journalists' Unions members were also out to demand payment of their unpaid wages. Members of the Athens taxi drivers' union SATA protested working conditions which make a living wage impossible.

Throughout Greece, discontent is rising over austerity, growing inequality and attacks on democratic rights. The end of January saw further mass demonstrations against the Tempi train crash and government cover-up.

A general strike of all ADEDY members and of the GSEE private sector body takes place on February 28 as the working class marks the second anniversary of the Tempi crash.

Thousands of workers and students in Belgium strike against austerity

Thousands of workers and students took part in national strikes and protests across Belgium February 13. In the capital, Brussels, 60,000 demonstrated against the newly formed government's austerity policies.

The demonstrations were convened by the six main unions, in response to growing pressure from below and workers' growing anger against cuts in public spending, attacks on benefit claimants and pension reforms.

Similar attacks on workers' social conditions to fund corporate profits and military spending are taking place across Europe and globally.

Thousands of shop and distribution workers throughout Finland walk out for pay rise

Thousands of retail and distribution workers in Finland began a week-long strike Monday as part of negotiations with the employers' body.

Over 70,000 Service United Union members at 3,000 locations are demanding a 10 percent salary increase.

Auto workers at UK plant walk out over pay

A section of UK workers at the BMW auto engine Hams Hall plant in Coleshill, Warwickshire walked out for one day on Tuesday.

The Unite union members are in dispute over pay, with no acceptable offer for 2024, following below-inflation pay rises for 2022 and 2023. BMW made an offer but then rescinded it. The offer was half that made to BMW workers at their Oxford plant. BMW recorded net profits of 12 billion euros in 2023.

Unite represents around 90 percent of the Hams Hall plant workforce. Further stoppages are planned for February 23 and 25, March 4-6, 25 and 28, and then April 1, 2, 8, 9, 15 and 27. Different departments will be taking action on different dates.

Food production workers in Wrexham, Wales continue long-running dispute over "fire and rehire"

Around 550 workers employed by Oscar Mayer at their Wrexham site in Wales have been striking since September last year. The factory produces ready meals for companies such as ASDA, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

The Unite union members walked out after the company planned to fire and rehire the workforce on inferior contracts, leaving workers up to £3,000 a year worse off.

The action is due to last until March. Several workers were dismissed after they penned letters to the company stating they would be working under duress if employed on the new contracts. In opposition to the dismissals, the workers are currently being balloted to extend the action until the summer. The re-ballot closes Thursday.

Oscar Mayer is 85 percent owned by London-based Pemberton Asset Management company which manages around £17 billion of investments in around 100 companies worldwide.

Social work support staff in Lancashire, UK in further round of strikes over regrading

Social Care Support Officers (SCSOs) employed by Lancashire County council in northwest England are currently in their seventh round of stoppages over a regrading claim.

The role of the Unison union members changed and they have taken on increasingly complex tasks. Two years ago, they submitted a regrading claim but were not given a grade increase.

The SCSOs have twice voted by 90 percent plus majorities for strike action and since July last year took six tranches of strike action. The current round of stoppages, begun February 10, is due to end March 2.

Ongoing strikes and protests in Iran in response to deteriorating economic conditions

Over the last few days, strikes have been ongoing in Iran. These include contract workers at the Fajr Jam Gas refinery. Workers are demanding permanent employment, improved wages and job security.

In Shiraz, Iran Telecommunications Manufacturing Company workers held a protest over five months of unpaid wages. In Mahshahr, Bandar Imam Petrochemical Holding employees walked out over poor wages and deteriorating living conditions. In Tehran, workers at petrochemical contractor Petro Niroo Saba held a stoppage after not being paid for three months, while Negin Makran Petrochemical workers in Chabahar walked out over four months of wages arrears.

Textile workers in Borujerd continued their strike begun Saturday over wage arrears. Railway maintenance workers in Azerbaijan province protested unpaid insurance and benefits.

Students at Tehran University have been holding protests following the fatal robbery of a 19-year-old student on the campus on February 12. The students accuse university officials of failing to keep students safe.

Last week saw several nights of protests in the city of Dehdasht, which began with young people protesting deteriorating social conditions. It led to heavy interventions by security forces and an internet blackout. One factor sparking the protests was that, despite 11 dams built in the area, water is piped away leaving locals short of water. Some protestors were detained.

Inflation is 31.7 percent and the poverty rate around 30 percent, partly due to US sanctions. Iran is in the crosshairs of US war plans to redivide the world in its own interests.

Teachers in Kurdistan region of Iraq continue strike over wage arrears

Teachers in the provinces of Sulaimani and Halabja in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area of Iraq are continuing their strike.

Most schools in the area have been closed as the result of the stoppages for more than 50 school days. The teachers are demanding payment of their December wages. This is on top of missed payments over the last 10 years.

The KRG and Iraqi central government have had ongoing disputes over finance payments.

Sugar cane workers in Cameroon on strike over pay face police violence

A strike by sugar cane workers at Cameroon's largest sugar company, begun January 26, led to confrontations with police and burnt crops in Nkoteng and Mbandjock.

Workers at the Cameroon Sugar Corporation, owned by French agro-giant Somdia Group, were protesting delays in their payments. Reports say the workers won increased wages and allowances on February 8 after the action, which cost the company at least CFA 3 billion.

The police used water cannon against the strikers and fired about 20 tear gas shells. Police shot one seasonal worker in the chest at close range, killing him. Other reports claim there were more deaths. Angry local residents occupied the streets with the workers to confront the police. In the following violent clashes, at least 11 were injured, including some police officers.

The police previously pressured workers to stop union activity or protests with local residents. Residents have suffered for years from contamination of land and water due to the company spraying pesticide from the air and discharging waste into rivers.

A November 2023 report by the Seasonal Workers Union of the Sugar Cane Sector highlighted that 90 percent of the 8,000 temporary or seasonal workers are not provided with adequate protective gear and are not properly compensated in case of accidents. If workers suffer serious injuries leaving them unable to work, they are fired from their jobs without any allowances.

On February 9, the Voice of Nigeria reported that Nkoteng "is now heavily militarised."

National protest in South Africa against ANC government's austerity measures

Workers in South Africa joined a national protest Wednesday against austerity measures. Organised by the South African Federation of Trade Unions, workers are demanding an end to budget cuts, higher taxes on wealth and a Basic Income Grant.

Protesters marched to parliament ahead of government of national unity Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana's first budget speech. Godongwana has suggested that raising VAT could be required. COSATU Provincial Secretary Malvern de Bruyn said this would be "a war against the working class."

In 2024, 63 percent of the population—some 40 million people—were classed as living in poverty. South Africa is one of the most unequal

countries in the world.

Workers protest unpaid salaries and demand manager is sacked at state transport company in Pretoria, South Africa

South African workers at North West Transport Investment protested outside the North Gauteng High Court, Pretoria on February 12, at an appeal case against Business Rescue Practitioner Thomas Samsons.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union members, who have not been paid for more than nine months, demand Samsons' dismissal. He is charged with maladministration and corruption.

Samsons was previously found guilty but won the right to appeal. The workers have been impoverished, their houses and cars repossessed, and left unable to pay school fees.

Last year, 26 of a total of 84 strikes concerned unpaid wages or benefits, and many were wildcats, according to the Casual Workers Advice Office.

Education workers remain on strike in Nigerian capital despite union sabotage

The strike for a minimum wage by Nigerian education workers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), resumed on February 13, is continuing, despite the willingness of the unions to come to an agreement with the state government.

The strike began in December 2024 but was suspended after a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Nigeria Union of Teachers and the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees with the FCT government, which failed to honour it.

Hundreds of Madagascan sugar factory workers hold protest over attacks on conditions

Over 200 workers at the Tana Beles sugar factory in Madagascar are protesting against the imposition of a new organisational structure last month that caused them to be demoted.

One employee, who had worked at the factory for 13 years, complained he had previously had a Level 4 position with a monthly salary of 5,000 birr, but under the new structure, his income could drop catastrophically. "Now, the maximum I could earn per month might only be 2,500 birr... I am the breadwinner for my family. I have two children and also support my siblings and parents."

Another worker explained, "A total of 236 workers have been downgraded to manual labour roles despite serving the factory for up to 11 years as permanent employees."



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