

National rail strike in Belgium against attacks on jobs, conditions and privatisation; strikes and protests continue in Kurdistan Regional Government area of Iraq over unpaid wages; general strike in mining town in Tunisia after road accident kills six

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Belgian rail workers in nine-day countrywide strike against government attacks on national railways

Train drivers, shunters and other rail workers in Belgium began a nine-day nationwide strike February 21, protesting government cuts in the rail system and the raising of their retirement age. One in four local trains and two in five intercity trains were affected, bringing chaos to the country's transport system.

The Railway Workers Union, Union of Train Drivers and VSOA-Rail union members also objects to the dismemberment of the state-owned rail operator NMBS, the privatisation of employer HR-Rail, increased productivity measures and changes to working times.

Nationwide transport strike in Italy over pay

A 24-hour transport strike in major cities across Italy took place Monday in support of a new collective bargaining agreement.

The Unione Sindacale di Base and other union members stopped work on trains, buses, trams and subways in cities as far apart as Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, Bologna, Perugia and Genoa.

Garbage collection operatives in Nancy, France strike over working conditions

Refuse collection workers employed by French multinational Veolia, and contracted out to the Greater Nancy municipality in France began an indefinite strike February 18. They are protesting reduced collections, reorganisation of routes and a consequent deterioration in working

conditions.

The Workers' Force union members also say management are harassing them into the changes and fear it could lead to redundancies.

Academic staff at University of Dundee, Scotland begin three-week stoppage over redundancy threat

Around 450 academic staff at Dundee University began a three-week strike on Monday.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted for the action by a 74 percent majority on a 64 percent turnout. They did so in response to an announcement in November that the University was considering job cuts to cover a £30 million deficit. Management stated compulsory job losses could not be ruled out.

The strikers marked the beginning of their action with a rally in City Square.

Professional services staff members of the Unison union at the university are also to ballot for industrial action over the threatened job cuts.

Coordinated strike by teachers in London over performance-related pay

Teachers across 10 schools in four London boroughs are to hold coordinated strikes beginning this week.

National Educational Union (NEU) members at Forismere, Gladesmore, and Highgate Wood schools and Hornsey School for Girls in Haringey will walk out on Thursday, and again March 5-6 and 11-13. Among the issues are increasing class sizes and excessive workloads.

NEU members at Lammas, Leytonstone and Willowfield schools in Waltham Forest will walk out Thursday, then March 4-5 and 11-13, over performance-related pay.

NEU members at Bsix sixth form College and St Dominic's Primary school in Hackney are due to walk out Wednesday to Friday, and again

March 4-7 and 10-14 over school closures and pay.

In Lambeth, NEU members at the Vanguard secondary school will strike Thursday and then March 5-6 and 11-13. They are striking over performance pay and excessive workloads.

On Thursday, the striking teachers at all 10 schools will head to central London for a rally outside the Department of Education.

Strike by workers at UK's First Bus Hampshire over pay as company attempts to impose pay offer

Around 140 UK drivers and supervisors working for First Bus Hampshire and Dorset, who first took strike action in December, walked out from Tuesday to Thursday this week.

The Unite union members rejected a 4 percent pay offer from First Bus, which the company is now trying to impose. The workers are based at the Hoeford depot, which runs bus services to Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth and Southampton.

Further stoppages are planned for March 3-7 and 10-11.

In 2023, First Hampshire and Dorset had a near £37 million turnover, yet pays its workers barely above the minimum wage.

Iraqi public employees in KRG-controlled area continue protest over unpaid wages

Teachers and public employees in the Al-Sulaymaniyahh sector of the Kurdistan Regional Government area in Iraq are continuing their protests and strikes over wage arrears and non-payment of December's salaries.

Many primary and secondary schools in Sulaimani and Halabja remained closed. A two-week hunger strike by teachers ended on February 11. However, the teachers and public employees began a new tactic to press their demands. On Sunday, a group of protesters set up camp on a main road near the Bashmakh border. They held up oil tankers heading into Iran while letting other traffic through.

The blocking of oil tankers continued Monday, leading to clashes between tanker drivers and protesters. One protester and several journalists covering the event were arrested but later released. On Tuesday, the KRG sent security force reinforcements to take control of the situation.

Continuing protests in Iran as cost-of-living crisis escalates

Protests in Iran continue in the face of an increasing cost-of-living crisis. The High Council of Labour recently proposed 23.4 million tomans (198GBP) as a figure for a living wage, while the real cost of living would require 29 million tomans (245GBP). The government is proposing 14 million tomans (118GBP) as the national minimum wage, far below the poverty line.

According to the *Hamshahri Online* news service, food inflation rose by over 35 percent for January alone, while state media report long queues for bread in major cities. An Iranian government economist warned medical treatment costs could increase ninefold. These developments are fuelling ongoing protests.

Sunday saw pensioners from steel and mining industries march in the

city of Isfahan protesting their inadequate pensions. In Ahvaz, Social Security retirees held a rally to protest unpaid pensions, while in Shush demonstrators protested against rising inflation, chanting that it was breaking people's backs.

The same day saw protests in the capital Tehran by protesters who had invested in Farda Motor company under promise of a car that did not materialise.

Protests continue by students at the University of Tehran after a student was killed February 11 by robbers. They are protesting the inadequate security for students.

The high levels of inflation and increases in the cost of living are fuelling the ongoing protests. This is exacerbated by US sanctions and war plans against the regime.

General strike in Tunisian mining town to demand better roads after fatal accident

A general strike shut down the major Tunisian mining town of Om Laarayer on February 20. The strike followed a major road accident on February 18, when a bus collided with a truck in the town, killing six and injuring nine.

Regional Labour Union secretary-general Mohamed Sghaier Miraoui said, "All schools, shops and local institutions have shut down in protest against the deteriorating state of infrastructure... Such incidents are frequent because we still lack basic infrastructure."

Despite having rich natural resources and a population of around 40,000 people, the town is woefully underdeveloped.

Strike against steel jobs massacre at ArcelorMittal, South Africa

On February 21, around 100 workers picketed the Industrial Development Corporation in Johannesburg, South Africa against 3,500 job losses.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members face the closure of ArcelorMittal's (AMSA) Newcastle plant and Vereeniging Works and rail subsidiary Amras. Also at risk are about 100,000 jobs in the supply chain. Former workers from SA Steel Mills, which laid off 100 a year ago, joined the picket.

Mbuso Ngubane, NUMSA deputy general-secretary, appealed to the government's national interests to intervene: "AMSA has demanded relevant import tariffs and import-licensing to minimise low-cost imports of steel products into the South African market... especially when imports come from heavily subsidised producers."

"Our capacity to locally produce railway steel products rests entirely on AMSA's operations. The threat of AMSA closing down will undermine the Department of Transport's integrated developmental transport policies that aim to facilitate the movement of goods from road to rail in connection with broadening South Africa's industrial base."

An indefinite strike at ArcelorMittal against job losses at the Newcastle plant ended November 14, when NUMSA agreed to voluntary redundancies and accepted company promises that workers could apply for employment at any of its other plants. The current redundancies were announced in January.

A strike and protest were also planned for February 26 in the Western Cape by the Confederation of South African Trade Unions against unemployment and poor living standards. The Steel and Engineering

Industries Federation of Southern Africa are telling workers if they join the stoppage they will lose their pay, including overtime pay for the week.

Angolan teachers at Portuguese school on five-day strike over equal pay

Teachers at a Portuguese school in Luanda, Angola are on a five-day strike to demand the same pay and conditions as their counterparts in Portugal. On the first day of the strike, February 24, all the teachers came out.

The teachers protested in the school yard with placards demanding “Fairness,” “Justice” and “Same Functions, Equal Conditions.”

Sandra Feliciano, a teacher at the Escola Portuguesa de Luanda for 17 years, explained the strike was due to the silence of the Portuguese Ministry of Education, which had not addressed the situation since last school year.

“We think we have the right to have our work recognised like other colleagues, that we all do the same job. Portuguese law states that any worker who does the same job as another should have the same kind of compensation, and that’s not happening here.”

Strike by tanker drivers in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria

An indefinite strike by tanker drivers in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria, begun February 23, resulted in the suspension of all truck loading and transportation in both states.

The Petroleum Tanker Drivers branch of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers members are protesting the continual harassment of tanker drivers by police officers in Lagos State.

Telecom operations have also been affected at numerous sites in Lagos and Ogun states due to them being critically low on diesel.



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