

Dockers and port workers in France strike over pension reforms; protests continue across Iran over falling living standards; doctors in Nairobi, Kenya resume strike action over pay and conditions

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.

Port and dock workers in France strike over conditions and pension reforms

French port and dock workers in Le Havre, Rouen, Nantes, Saint-Nazaire, Marseilles, Calais, Bayonne and other ports held a 24-hour strike February 27, as part of a series of one-day strikes over pension changes and leave entitlements.

The General Confederation of Labour members demand the government lifts new pension rules, particularly around early retirement, which they say should not apply to port workers due to the hard physical nature of their work and historic exposure to asbestos. They also demand extra days paid leave.

Hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets against President Macron's pension cuts, which increases the state retirement age to 64 and minimum pay-in period to 43 years. Strikes and protests were called by the CGT, CFDT and FO bureaucracies to avert a social explosion against the attacks they themselves negotiated with the government.

Thousands of teachers and school staff across the Basque region, Spain strike for better pay and conditions

Over 20,000 teachers, kitchen workers, cleaners and other school staff went on strike and demonstrated in Bilbao and other cities and towns across the Basque region, Spain February 26 in a campaign for improved pay and conditions. This builds on a two-day strike on January 22.

The Steilas teachers' union, Basque Workers' Solidarity union, LAB Basque Union and the Spanish COOO Workers' Commissions union members demand the Basque Autonomous Community government match pay to inflation over the last 13 years. They also want increased staff recruitment, less paperwork, reduced workloads and guarantees for public sector job security.

German airport staff strike over pay and conditions

Airport workers held a two-day strike February 27 at Munich Airport, Germany's second largest, and a 24-hour stoppage February 24 at Dusseldorf and Cologne-Bonn airports in support of negotiations for improved pay and working conditions.

The Verdi union members demand an 8 percent pay rise, higher bonuses and three days extra paid leave.

Refuse collection workers in Birmingham, UK escalate action over pay cuts

Around 350 UK waste collection workers employed by Birmingham City Council are to step up their action over pay, with an all-out indefinite stoppage.

The Unite union members are opposing the council's plans to abolish the safety-critical Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) posts. This will affect around 150 WRCOs, who will lose around £8,000 a year as a result.

They have been holding intermittent stoppages since January, and walked out Monday, Tuesday and Thursday this week. A further stoppage is planned for March 10, with an indefinite all-out stoppage due to begin from Tuesday March 11.

The escalation is in response to Birmingham Council's use of its employment agency, Jobs&Talent to supply temporary labour to undermine the industrial action.

The workers are also currently balloting to renew their strike mandate, which could see the dispute extending into the summer months. This would result in a rapid build-up of uncollected domestic waste.

Following a huge funding shortfall, Labour Party-run Birmingham council is to impose £150 million in cuts this year as well as a 7.5 percent rise in council tax. Job and service cuts, including of refuse services, are on the cards. A lobby of the council took place on Tuesday in opposition to the cuts.

Academic staff at UK university in Newcastle walk out over

threatened job cuts

Tuesday marked the start of a three-day stoppage by academic staff at Newcastle University, England over threatened job cuts. They held a rally in the city centre.

Around 1,000 University and College Union (UCU) members were balloted in January. This followed an announcement by Newcastle University management that it would impose a £20 million cut in its salary bill as part of its response to a £35 million shortfall in its finances. The cut equates to around 300 jobs.

Further stoppages are scheduled for March 10-12, 17-20 and 24-28, a total of 14 days.

Around 450 UCU members at Dundee University are in the second week of a three-week strike over job cuts. UCU members at Brunel University in London are in the middle of a programme of 16 days of walkouts scheduled to last until April over a planned 423 job cuts, of which 282 would be compulsory.

Ballots of UCU members are taking place at Durham University and Sheffield University over planned job cuts. According to the UCU, 1,000 jobs are at risk at Sheffield.

UCU have stated that around 5,000 university jobs are scheduled to go, with another 5,000 at risk as a result of universities needing to plug financial holes.

Further strike at business support company at two UK sites over pay

UK employees of multinational business support company, Capita, based in Manchester and Glasgow, who began their current walkout on February 26, are on strike until Friday.

The Unite union members are protesting Capita's refusal to make a pay offer due April 2024. After failing to meet the April deadline Capita said it would make an offer in October, but again failed to do so. The staff involved work on accounts for investment and insurer giant Royal London.

They previously held a five-day stoppage beginning January 29.

Continuing protests in Iran over social and economic conditions

Sunday saw protests by Social Security Organisation retirees in the cities of Ahvaz, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Shush and Tehran. The protested the skyrocketing cost of living, inadequate pensions and government inaction.

Isfahan also witnessed protests by steel and mining pensioners demanding increased pensions and access to basic services.

Ahvaz also saw a second day of protests by nurses and medical staff from the Arya hospital. They were demanding increased pay and improved working conditions.

A recent report in the state-aligned *Farhikhtegan* newspaper highlighted a two trillion toman budget deficit for student meals, leaving many students in food insecurity.

Iran is embroiled by ongoing rising inflation which is fuelling unrest. Sanctions imposed by the US and its plans to draw the country into war are exacerbating the situation.

Protest by census workers in Kurdistan Regional Government-controlled Iraq over wage delays

Census enumerators held a protest in Al-Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Regional Government area of Iraq on February 27. They were demanding the payment of arrears of wages owed to them.

The protest was held outside an Iraqi Parliament office. The enumerators were hired by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning for two months with a salary of \$170 a month. They had received November's wages but not December's.

Doctors in Nairobi, Kenya resume strike action over pay and conditions

Doctors in Nairobi, Kenya have renewed their strike to demand an end to delayed salary payments, unfulfilled promotions and illegal dismissals, among other grievances. Some of the doctors have still not been paid for November and December 2024.

To end the strike last year, the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, and Dentists Union signed a return-to-work formula, leaving many issues unaddressed.

Doctors in Kilifi are also preparing for strike action over similar issues. Clinical officers are on strike in Migori County as of March 1 over inadequate insurance, lack of promotions and understaffing.

South African drivers on go-slow at Gautrain buses sacked

About 300 South African bus drivers at Gautrain in Midrand, refusing to drive buses which are not roadworthy, have been given dismissal notices.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members are fined R2,500 for driving vehicles without permits, which they have to pay out of their own pockets. The buses have been without licences since 2022, according to *Sunday World*.

BL Premium reported the union were to challenge the sackings on Monday in the Labour Court.

University academics at Sokoto State University, Nigeria begin indefinite strike over pay arrears

Staff at Sokoto State University, Nigeria began an indefinite strike February 26 over numerous issues of unpaid salary increases and pay arrears.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities members cite the failure of management to implement 25 and 35 percent salary increases and pay arrears dating back to January 2024. Payments of earned academic allowance (EAA) are outstanding for seven academic sessions, and the workers are demanding full implementation of EAA.

Tertiary college academic staff hold seven-day strike in Plateau State, Nigeria

Academic staff at state-owned tertiary institutions in Plateau State, Nigeria walked out on March 4 for a seven-day “warning” strike over issues unresolved for more than two years.

The Joint Union of Academic Staff of Plateau State Owned Tertiary Institutions (JUASPTI) has been involved in talks with the Plateau State government throughout that time, while its members’ welfare has been ignored.

The institutions are understaffed after nine years without recruitment of new academic staff to replace retirees, deceased members or others leaving due to the poor working conditions.

In February 2024, the state government announced the removal of four heads of tertiary institutions without following normal rules and procedures, and the appointment of temporary replacements. The affected institutions were the Plateau State Polytechnic, the College of Education, the College of Health in Zawan, and the College in Pankshin. One year on, the temporary heads are still in place.



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