

Rail workers in Belgium stage stoppage over pension reforms; strikes and protests continue across Iran over collapsing cost of living and police murders; national park workers in Mpumalanga province, South Africa, walk out to demand permanent employment

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.

Rail workers in Belgium strike against government pension reforms

A week-long strike by Belgian rail workers in defence of their federal government pensions began Sunday evening, affecting services throughout the country.

The METISP-Protect public transport union members are opposing planned pension reforms, which curtail many existing pension benefits and increase the retirement age. Pension payments are also to be based on career average salary rather than the last four years' income.

Last month, train drivers, shunters and other rail workers in Belgium held a nine-day nationwide strike to protest government cuts to the rail system and the raising of their retirement age.

Municipal workers in Greece strike for intern permanent positions

Municipal workers across Greece began a 24-hour strike March 21. They held a protest rally and march in Athens, with demonstrations at the Ministry of Cohesion and Family and the Ministry of the Interior.

The Greek Municipal Workers' Union and the Civil Servants Confederation members say that employees on internships via the European Student Placement Agency can end up working for many years without being given a permanent contract and the accompanying job security and labour rights.

Italian Ikea workers strike over working conditions

Thousands of Ikea workers throughout Italy held a 24-hour strike March 15, in support of their demands for improved pay and conditions. Ikea

employs 7,500 workers across the country in 40 stores, two distribution centres and its headquarters.

The Italian Federation of Commerce, Hotel and Service Workers and other union members say new appointees should receive the same wage as existing workers. They also want the choice not to work on public holidays, for sick pay in line with the national norm and for part-time workers to be offered full-time contracts.

Mine workers and residents from Chiatura, Georgia, protest closure of local manganese mines

Hundreds of manganese miners and residents from Chiatura, Georgia rallied outside government buildings in the capital, Tbilisi March 24, to protest local mine closures, which have devastated the local economy.

Around 3,500 workers were laid off temporarily in November by owners Georgian Manganese, and were offered partial wages for four months. Operations were shut down completely March 7.

The mine workers and local people demand that the government nationalise the mining industry, taking control away from Georgian Manganese throughout the region. They also want lost wages to be paid, insurance and income support for the miners and compensation to residents for environment damage.

Academic disputes in England and Wales over job cuts and pay awards

Academic staff at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in England walked out for the day on Wednesday over plans to cut the academic workforce by a sixth.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted by an 82 percent majority to strike in response to UEA's plans to cut nearly 200 jobs to make savings of around £11 million. Around 50 jobs in the medicine and health faculty, 25 in the science faculty, 22 in the arts and humanities faculty and 90 from the professional services department are

slated to go.

UEA cut around 400 jobs in 2023 to make £40 million in savings.

UCU members at Cardiff University in Wales have also voted by an 83 percent majority to strike in response to the University's plans to cut 400 jobs because of financial pressures.

Academic staff at Sheffield Hallam University, England, went on strike Monday and Tuesday, holding picket lines each day.

The UCU members are protesting the university's refusal to implement the 2024/25 pay award in full. Hallam management refused to implement the 2.7 percent pay rise awarded from the employers' body the Universities and Colleges Employers Association from August 1, 2024.

Following the strike vote, Hallam management began paying the agreed award from this month but not backdating it. This has left the average lecturer at Hallam with a loss of around £800.

Infectious disease control workers at London hospital hold further stoppage over working conditions

The 40 members of the Rapid Response Team at Guys and St Thomas' hospital in London walked out on March 17 until Friday.

The Unite union members are responsible for preventing the spread of infectious diseases. They are demanding improved working conditions, including provision of welfare facilities such as showers, changing areas and dedicated toilets.

They previously took five days of strikes over the same issue at the end of February.

Ongoing cost-of-living protests at beginning of Iranian new year

Protests continue across Iran as it enters the Persian new year, Nowruz. Tuesday saw farmers hold a protest in Isfahan in front of the provincial water department. They were demanding access to irrigation water from the Zayandeh Rud River. This followed an early morning protest by farmers with their tractors on Sunday, demanding irrigation water be released by March 25.

Tuesday saw protests by workers in Khatunabad over unpaid wages and deteriorating working conditions that are impacting their standard of living.

Many Iranians used the celebration of Nowruz to demonstrate at cemeteries in cities across Iran against the killing of family members in previous protests. Workers in cities including Boukan, Ezech, Kermanshah, Islamshahr and Tehran took part.

There is no let up to strikes and protests taking place across Iran, as economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate. Iran is the target of US government sanctions designed to undermine the regime and war plans.

National park workers in Mpumalanga province, South Africa, walk out to demand permanent jobs

Workers at Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency walked out in wildcat action March 22 to demand permanent jobs. Their temporary contracts expire at the end of the month.

The government organisation is responsible for the upkeep of wilderness areas and public nature reserves in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, popular with tourists.

The Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development and Tourism pleaded poverty and condemned the stoppage by the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union members, notifying the police.

Nigerian refinery workers in Kaduna State protest over lack of rights

Workers employed by Daewoo Construction Limited at the Kaduna Refinery in Kaduna State, Nigeria, held a protest on March 23.

They are demanding the right to organise and have contracts honoured with proper employment benefits. The trigger for the protest was the unjustified sacking of 30 employees.

Unlike the Daewoo workers in Bonny and Port Harcourt, who have collective bargaining agreements, those in Kaduna lack agreed conditions of service. Most of the workers there do not even have employment letters and are treated as casuals.

Teachers in Abuja, Nigeria, strike to demand pay increases in line with minimum wage

Primary school teachers in the Nigerian capital, Abuja walked out on indefinite strike to demand implementation of the minimum wage negotiated by the Nigeria Labour Congress. The minimum wage is N70,000.

The Nigerian Union of Teachers issued a statement saying, "The payment of February Salary by the Councils without recourse to the Union and the New Minimum Wage is disturbing, disheartening, and lacking in sympathy."

Teachers at school in Monrovia, Liberia begin indefinite go-slow

Teachers at the Monrovia Demonstration School in Liberia began an indefinite go-slow on March 21. They are demanding promotions, salary increases and the transitioning of volunteer teachers to full-time employment.

President of the Monrovia Consolidated School System Teachers Association complained that nothing had been achieved despite their continued negotiations with the government, forcing them into taking action.

Teachers are demanding their monthly salaries reflect their experience and academic qualifications.



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