

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 November 2025

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

## Belgian workers in fourth general strike this year to protest government austerity cuts

Tens of thousands of workers in Belgium took part in a three-day national strike beginning Monday. Transport, health, education and public services workers stopped work on the first two days, with Wednesday a general strike day including private sector workers.

Demonstrations took place in major cities with workers protesting the federal coalition government's austerity measures of spending cuts to public services, attacks on pensions and retirement age and the slashing of other social benefits and healthcare funding.

## Italian metalworkers strike and demonstrate against major job losses as government seeks buyer for main steel producing company

Thousands of metalworkers and office staff employed by Ilva, Italy's partly state-owned major steel producer went on strike November 19, holding demonstrations at the Genoa and Taranto plants.

The Fim, Fiom, Uilm and Usb and other union members marched, burned tyres and blocked main roads to protest the threat of 6,000 job losses at the company, under government administration since February 2024.

Ilva was briefly owned by global giant Arcelor Mittal Group, who were accused of buying the company to deliberately run it down and eliminate it as a competitor. The government are looking to attract new investors, but workers are concerned about their uncertain job future and health and safety risks at the currently under-resourced plants.

## Thousands of public service workers in Portugal strike against proposed anti-worker legislation

Public servants in Portugal, held a 24-hour strike November 21 against proposed reforms in labour law which are detrimental to their working conditions. The stoppage affected hospitals, schools, social services and courts and is a precursor to a nationwide general strike on December 11.

The mostly National Federation of Independent Public Administration Trade Unions members say the new legislation will make sackings easier,

increase outsourcing, and affect leave and other benefits.

## Primary health and care workers in Galicia, Spain strike and protest for improved pay and conditions

Primary health workers employed by the regional government of Galicia, Spain began a three-day strike Wednesday and marched to the Ministry of Health in Santiago de Compostela to demand better pay and working conditions.

Care sector workers in early years education, residential nursing homes and day care centres also marched through the city centre on November 22. The Galician Unions Confederacy members object to poor salaries, long hours and insecure employment.

## Public broadcast television workers in Kosovo strike after weeks without pay

Staff at RTK, the public service broadcaster of Kosovo, have been engaged in two-hour work stoppages each day since Monday to protest non-payment of salaries for over a month. They threaten to boycott coverage of December's elections if the problems continue.

The RTK Workers' Union and Independent Trade Union of RTK members demand immediate parliamentary approval to release the necessary budgetary finances and blame inter-party disputes for the delay.

## Tate gallery staff in UK strike over inadequate pay offer

Around 150 workers at the UK Tate-run galleries began a week-long stoppage on Wednesday.

Tate runs the Tate Britain and Tate Modern galleries in London as well as galleries at St Ives in Cornwall and in Liverpool. Tate's main financial sponsor is the government's Department for Culture Media and Sport. Staff at Tate stores are also taking part in the action.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members voted by a 98 percent majority to strike, opposing real-terms pay cuts with offers of between 2 and 3 percent, while the more accurate measurement of inflation RPI currently stands at 4.3 percent. It follows a below-inflation offer last year. The offer has been accepted by two other unions representing Tate staff.

Over the last five years Tate workers have seen an attack on their jobs

and conditions. In 2020, Tate galleries cut 120 posts. In 2021, Tate closed the Civil Service Pension Scheme for new starters. This year Tate carried out a restructure including redundancies and the closure of staff canteens and removed subsidised lunches for staff.

In a separate dispute, around 300 PCS members working in the UK's parliament security department walked out Wednesday. The stoppage coincided with the Labour government's budget day announcement. They are protesting attacks which include loss of six leave days and extension of shifts from eight to twelve hours with no consultation. They previously took action in September.

### **Hospitality workers in Glasgow, Scotland set to begin five-week stoppage over pay and conditions**

Dozens of hospitality workers employed at the Village Hotel in Glasgow, Scotland are set to walk out on Friday until January 2.

The period covers the busy Christmas and New Year holidays. It will include those working in the Pub and Grill restaurant as well as the franchised Starbucks outlet.

The Unite union members voted 100 percent for the stoppage. Among their demands is to be paid the Real Living Wage (RLW). The RLW is a voluntary, independently calculated figure based on the actual cost of living and is currently set at £13.45 an hour. Other demands include union recognition and taxi fares for workers on late or unsociable hours.

The Unite union members represent around 12 percent of the workforce at the site. They held a three-week strike in August this year over staff under 21 being paid at a lower rate than their older colleagues. Village Hotel staff at its Edinburgh site are paid the same rate as older staff.

The Village Group was bought by trillion-dollar global equity giant Blackstone in 2024. It owns 34 hotels in the UK employing around 4,000 workers.

### **Further strikes by Transport for Greater Manchester, UK workers over pay**

Around 600 Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) workers began a four-day stoppage on Tuesday. They work on the bus and tram network across Greater Manchester as route planners, engineers, IT staff, administrative staff and in information services and other roles.

The 400 Unison and 200 Unite members rejected a below inflation 3.2 percent pay offer. They previously walked out for several days in October, and November.

TfGM management cancelled talks with the unions planned for Monday.

In another dispute involving TfGM workers around 320 tram drivers at Metrolink—operated by a private joint venture KeolisAmey—have voted to strike against fatigue. The members of Unite are set to walk out on December 5 to 7. They say the current shift patterns of working 450 hours over a twelve-week period is leaving them exhausted and posing a direct risk to passenger safety. The current shift pattern means some drivers working a 50-hour week but only have two days off before having to start another 50-hour week.

### **Protests continue across Iran over deteriorating living standards and social conditions**

Sunday saw protests by agency and contract workers at the Gachsaran Oil and Gas Company, Iran. Accompanied by family members, they gathered outside the governor's office to press their demands. These include the elimination of contractors and improved working conditions. The same day saw protests by permanent oil workers at the Iranian Offshore Oil Company facilities at Kharg and Siri.

The previous day permanent oil workers at 11 of the South Pars refineries demonstrated—part of a nationwide campaign by oil workers demanding the removal of salary caps and an end to the limit of years of service counting towards pensions.

Protests in the previous week included those by retirees in Isfahan, Kermanshah, Rasht and Shush against high prices and inflation eating away at their inadequate pensions.

Last week also saw protests by residents in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province against dams being constructed, which they say affect the environment and their livelihoods. Residents in Ben and Saman counties protested the denial of water rights which are affecting agriculture and orchards.

Also, victims of a car purchase scam held protests. Hundreds of families ordered and paid for cars from the state-backed Ramak Khodro car company, but after eight years they have yet to receive them or a refund as they await a court decision.

Workers and retirees across Iran are continuing to protest worsening living conditions. The collapse in the economy is exacerbated by US and NATO sanctions. The destabilisation of Iran and the region is part of preparations by the US and NATO for trade and military war against China.

### **Tunisian doctors walk out over declining health system**

Thousands of young doctors in Tunisia began a national strike on November 19 to demand better pay and to protest the decline in healthcare.

Doctors gathered near the Tunisian parliament with placards reading, "Dignity for doctors" and "Save our hospitals." A nurse supporting the stoppage said, "We are exhausted, underpaid and working in a system that is breaking down. If nothing changes, more doctors will leave and the crisis will only deepen."

The strikers complained of outdated equipment and a lack of essential medical supplies, which are exacerbating an outflow of professional health workers to Europe and the Gulf states.

### **Nigerian doctors continue strike despite government misinformation**

Resident doctors in Nigeria are continuing their strike, begun November 1, defying government claims their grievances have been resolved.

The doctors are angry about unpaid salary arrears, poor working conditions, inadequate staffing, intolerable workloads, and the lack of the medical infrastructure essential for saving lives.

Patients who can afford it are going to private hospitals, which are becoming overloaded as a result.

Bakaka Lamin from Borno State, whose wife is pregnant and about to give birth, said they were left with no option but to go private. "My wife was asked [to pay] charges of N87,000. Many pregnant women like her are returned home because they couldn't afford it. The first private clinic I went to was outrageous—normal delivery is N125,000, and N235,000 if

she needs to be induced,” he told the press.

### **Unpaid Nigerian security guards hold protest over unpaid salaries, bringing hospitals to a halt in Abuja**

Hospitals in the Federal Capital Territory around Abuja, Nigeria were brought to a standstill on November 26 as security guards held a protest to demand payment of four months’ salary arrears, which followed similar action three weeks ago.

The protests stopped all health care at Nyanya, Zuba, and Kubwa general hospitals. Patients were kept outside along with medical personnel denied entry by the guards.

The guards—employed by private security contractors—blocked entrances while singing protest songs. They declared their determination to remain on strike until their arrears are paid in full. “We can no longer work without pay. Our families are going through hardship,” said one guard.

### **Health workers in Gauteng, South Africa march to demand funding for collapsing healthcare system**

Hundreds of health workers marched to the Premier’s office in Gauteng province, South Africa on November 19, handing in a memorandum of demands.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (Nupsaw), including doctors, nurses, interns and other staff accuse the Gauteng Department of Health of years of underfunding leading to staff shortages. The workforce is exhausted with overwork and underpaid.

Nupsaw handed in a memorandum of demands to the premier. Workers taken on during the pandemic are still on temporary contracts, renewed annually, and are demanding permanent jobs. Last year, more than 1,200 posts were unfilled. Hospital buildings lack facilities and are in dire need of maintenance.

Over similar issues, striking National Education Health and Allied Workers members closed pathology labs at two hospitals in Mpumalanga November 17. Because of staff shortages, workers are expected to dissect bodies without the training. Also, there is a lack of essential equipment.



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