

# 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.*

## Thousands of motorway and road infrastructure workers in Germany strike for pay increases

Several thousand employees at the federal Autobahn company and other state road construction and maintenance administrations in Germany went on strike Tuesday, holding marches and rallies across the country.

Workplace stoppages at maintenance depots, tunnel and traffic control centres caused multiple traffic problems as bridges, tunnels and roads were closed in Hamburg, Bremen, Rosenheim, Karlsruhe, North Rhine-Westphalia state and other areas.

The Verdi union members demand a 7 percent pay increase, to include at least a €300 monthly rise for the lowest grades. They also want more investment in staff recruitment.

According to *Global Highways* magazine, “Germany has a massive problem with its road infrastructure following years of neglect and insufficient maintenance.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, German section of the Trotskyist movement reported last year, “While the number of billionaires is constantly increasing, the rail system, roads, bridges, the entire public infrastructure, as well as the environment, education, housing and science are being left to decay.”

## Public teachers strike against subsidies for private education in Aragon, Spain

Hundreds of teachers, non-teaching staff and students in the autonomous community of Aragon, Spain began a three-day strike Tuesday with a demonstration outside the government headquarters in Zaragoza.

The General Confederation of Labour members are protesting government funding for private schools to recruit students for study to graduate level, when there are already 2,300 unoccupied places in public education centres. They also want an end to subsidies for private day nurseries.

The teachers say the Department of Education is at the same time alleging that there is no money available to improve working conditions, recruit staff or maintain buildings in public education.

## taxis to be fully electric

Taxi drivers in Athens, Greece held their latest in a rolling series of two-day strikes Tuesday and Wednesday, protesting a newly effected government law and their working conditions. The 12-13,000 distinctive yellow taxis are a key part of the city’s transport infrastructure.

The Attica Taxi Drivers Union members are against the implementation from January 1 of a law requiring newly registered taxi vehicles in greater Athens and Thessaloniki to have zero emissions. Apart from the initial costs, they say valuable working time throughout the day will be lost due to recharging.

The drivers demand the change be postponed until 2035, when prices will have dropped and charging infrastructure and technology improved. They also want fairer taxation, limitations on e-hailing firms and the use of dedicated bus lanes in congested areas.

## Week-long strike by hospital ancillary staff at Airedale hospital, England over pension inequality

Around 200 UK hospital ancillary staff at Airedale hospital in West Yorkshire began a week-long stoppage on Tuesday. They work as porters, domestic and catering staff, security personnel and in other frontline roles.

The GMB union members are employed by AGH Solutions (AGHS), which operates as a subsidiary company but is wholly owned by the Airedale NHS Foundation Trust. They walked out demanding access to the NHS pension scheme that is available to staff directly employed by the NHS.

AGHS was set up in 2018, and only a minority of the staff are in the NHS pension scheme. The NHS Domestic pension scheme is a Defined Benefit Scheme, with employees contributing 6.5 percent while the employer contributes 23.78 percent. The AGHS Domestic scheme is an inferior Defined Contribution Scheme, where employees contribute 4 percent while the employer contributes 3 percent.

The ancillary staff previously took action in September and October last year, calling for parity in pay, conditions and pensions with staff directly employed by the NHS. GMB settled the dispute in November, claiming “significant steps forward” on full alignment of weekend enhancements, annual leave, maternity/paternity leave and death-in-service benefits. Pensions were not included, and sick pay would be subject to a series of staged improvements and a promise of discussions on further improvements to begin in 2027.

## Greek taxi drivers strike against requirements for newly registered

## Bus workers in Cambridge, UK to hold further stoppages over pay

Around 200 bus drivers and engineers working for Cambridge Stagecoach based at depots in Cambridge, Fenstanton and Peterborough plan to walk out on Saturday in a dispute over pay.

The Unite union members have held a series of stoppages since December last year. Living in one of the most expensive cities, they currently earn just £16.22 an hour. This compares unfavourably to Stagecoach drivers in Liverpool on £17.43 an hour and those in Manchester on £18 an hour.

Further stoppages are planned for January 26, 28 and 30, and February 9, 11 and 13. In the year to April 2024, Stagecoach made a profit of over £97 million on a turnover of £1.6 billion.

On previous walkouts, Stagecoach has brought in scabs from Scotland and Wales to run its services.

There have been a spate of bus strikes across Britain over pay and conditions, such as at Stagecoach and Metrolink in Greater Manchester, First West in Bristol and First Bus in Rochdale. Unite opposes a unified struggle of all transport workers, pushing through below-inflation pay deals on a company-by-company and depot-by-depot basis.

### **Walkout by sports textile workers in Gloucestershire, England over pay**

Around 50 workers employed by manufacturer WSP Textiles in Stroud and Dursley in Gloucestershire, England ended their stoppage begun January 12 on Tuesday. Further stoppages are planned for Thursday and Friday. WSP makes sports textile material to cover snooker tables and tennis balls.

The stoppage, the first ever by the Unite union members at WSP, is in response to a 2.35 percent pay offer which they rejected. According to Unite, most of the workers earn little more than the minimum wage and have not received an above-inflation pay rise in years, while WSP's highest-paid director takes home around £100,000 a year.

In 2024, WSP made profits of £1.4 million on a turnover of £23 million.

### **Further walkouts by special needs transport workers at Leeds city council, UK over safety fears**

Around 80 drivers working for Leeds City Council (LCC) in England transporting children with special needs and adults with learning difficulties are set to walk out Friday and Saturday. They have already held stoppages on January 9 and 16. They provide transport to schools, respite placements and community facilities.

The Unite union members are concerned about a deterioration in the service over the last 18 months, which they blame on lack of funding by LCC. They claim this has led to injuries to both staff and service users and to administrative mix-ups. They also blame a lack of vital equipment, inadequate first aid and absence of risk assessments.

Further stoppages are planned for January 29-30, then February 4-6, 11-13, 17-20 and 24-27.

### **Strike of mental health workers in south west England over pay**

Around 100 UK mental health workers employed by mental health

charity Second Step began a two-day stoppage Wednesday. They include central staff, recovery specialists and support workers. Their workplaces are based in Bristol, Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bath, Swindon and Wiltshire.

The Unison union members voted by nearly 80 percent to walk out after rejecting an imposed 2 percent pay offer. They also want union recognition. It follows two days of strikes last week. A mass picket of the Second Step headquarters in Bristol is planned for January 29.

### **State-employed workers in Nigerian capital begin indefinite strike**

State-employed workers in the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) around Abuja, Nigeria began an indefinite strike January 19 over unresolved welfare issues and the government's refusal to address their long-unmet demands. The strike led to the closure of all government administrative offices in the FCTA.

The unresolved issues include non-payment of outstanding promotion arrears, delays in making promotions and failure to pass on statutory deductions, such as pension contributions and National Housing Fund payments.

The strikers belong to an umbrella union, the Joint Union Action Congress (JUAC). The FCTA government claimed that 10 of the workers' 14 demands had already been met, but this claim was rejected. The JUAC responded that no demands had been addressed.

### **Unemployed teachers set up an encampment outside Department of Education in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa**

Unemployed teachers began a sit-down protest outside the Department of Education in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa on January 12.

Organised by the Unemployed Educators Movement, the 120 teachers are demanding permanent posts. Teacher Bhengu told *GroundUp* she had been unemployed for seven years since qualifying, and that the jobs vacancies section on the government website was invariably empty.

Despite camping outside the department for over a week, no government officials approached them and the workers have not been able to hand over a memorandum of demands to department officials.

Despite a teacher shortage, budget constraints mean posts go unfilled. According to *IOL*, there are at least 12,700 unemployed teachers in South Africa.

### **More than 90 nurse anaesthetists in Liberia begin strike**

Nurse anaesthetists across Liberia began a "go-slow" strike on January 15 to demand a sizeable salary increase. Nurse anaesthetists are highly skilled specialists who administer anaesthetics, monitor vital signs during operations, and manage recovery afterwards. They currently earn a base salary of US\$600 monthly or \$20 per day. After taxes, loan payments and other deductions, their take-home pay sinks to around US\$400.

Mehnpaine Saye Dolo, President of the Nurse Anaesthetists Association of Liberia, said, "We handle life-or-death responsibilities in operating rooms at facilities like the Jackson F. Doe Memorial Hospital here in

Nimba, Phebe Hospital... [and many others]. Our work demands precision under intense pressure, yet our pay barely covers basics like food, rent, and school fees for our children amid Liberia's rising inflation."



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