

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Belgian rail workers in five-day national strike against government austerity course

Rail workers in Belgium began a five-day national strike Monday to protest against poor working conditions, government rail reforms and the raising of their pension age.

The strike has been called by five different unions in response to workers' demands for a fightback against the austerity measures of the right-wing "Arizona" coalition government, particularly cuts to public services such as railways.

The workers particularly oppose the implementation of a new bill designed to "modernise the management of railway personnel," i.e. cut jobs and wages while preparing for increased competition through privatisation.

## French bank workers strike against low pay and job cuts

Employees at 39 regional banks and several agencies of the Crédit Agricole bank in France held walkouts January 22 to protest over pay and planned restructure.

The strike was called by members of the CGT, Sneca, Unsa, Sud and Sniacam unions, comprising two thirds of the 78,000 workforce. They demand resumption of negotiations on a recent 0.5 percent pay offer and seek reassurances around planned "efficiencies," which could mean job cuts and branch closures.

Crédit Agricole reportedly made record profits of 3.2 billion euros in the first three quarters of 2025.

## Warehouse workers at major supermarket chain in Turkey strike over pay and conditions

Warehouse workers subcontracted from the Turkish supermarket chain Migros in Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Bursa and six other locations began an indefinite pay strike January 21.

The DGD-SEN union members reject an offered 28 percent wage rise, which is only one percent above minimum wage. They demand a 50 percent increase, with tax deductions to be paid by the employer. They

also want increased value shopping vouchers, larger and extra meal portions and better heating/cooling in rest areas.

## Workers for Vestas wind turbine makers in Italy strike against forced transfers

Around 40 warehouse, training and repair workers at Vestas Italia, multinational wind turbine manufacturers, in Taranto, Italy have been on indefinite strike since January 12. They are protesting the March 1 closure of their workplace and transfer to a new location, 180 kilometres away, at San Nicola di Melfi.

The Fiom and Uilm union members say there was no prior consultation. They say the transfers are de facto redundancies, since few will be able to relocate away from their established home areas.

The Vestas multinational company, which is projected to make pre-tax profits of 1.2 billion euros in 2025, says it will save 15 percent in operating costs by transferring operations to Melfi.

## Construction crane operators across UK hold 24-hour walkout over pay

More than 90 crane operators at construction sites across the UK began a 24-hour strike Tuesday. They are employed by the German Swiss crane rental company, Wolffkran, which is one of the world's largest crane rental companies.

The Unite union members are protesting not having had a pay rise over the last three years, as well as the company's plans to cut certain benefits, including standby payments. The action will impact major UK construction sites including the demolishing of Grenfell Tower, the Cambridge Science Park and the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts in Berkshire.

Following Tuesday's stoppage, walkouts will take place every fortnight. Unite say that, "Exact days will be determined by the members at each site based on what will cause the most disruption."

## Phlebotomists at hospital trust in Gloucestershire, England pass 300-day mark of strike over pay

Around 35 phlebotomists (blood takers) working for Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have now been on strike for over 300

days.

The Unison union members based at the Gloucestershire Royal and Cheltenham General hospitals have been on strike since March last year. The union has designated it the longest-running stoppage in National Health Service (NHS) history.

The phlebotomists are currently on pay band 2. They say that because of the skill sets needed to take blood they should be paid on the higher band 3, or an extra £1.09 an hour. According to Unison, this would cost the trust around £60,000 a year, about a quarter of the trust's chief executive's annual pay.

Earlier this month they voted by 95 percent to continue their walkout.

### **Further walkout by hospital theatre staff in Leeds, England**

Hospital operating theatre assistants at three hospitals run by the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust began a five-day strike at 8a.m. on Thursday. The hospitals involved are Leeds General Infirmary (LGI), St James's University Hospital and Chapel Allerton Hospital.

The Unison union members have been in dispute for over a year about their pay grade. They argue that for performing such duties as inserting cannulas, collecting samples and sterilising equipment they should be paid at a higher rate. The NHS Trust agreed, but will only backdate the award a year. The theatre assistants are demanding back pay to April 2021. They previously held a 48-hour stoppage in December over the issue.

Similar staff at other NHS Trusts have been awarded back payments to April 2021. Last year, staff working for Calderdale and Huddersfield Trust were awarded a five-year back pay deal.

Picket lines were planned for January 30 at St James's, and February 2 and 4 at LGI.

### **Academic staff at Dundee University, Scotland hold further walkout over job cuts**

Academic staff at Dundee University walked out for the day on Wednesday. It was their 26th day of action since university management announced 18 months ago its intention to cut staff numbers to address financial problems.

The University and College Union (UCU) members picketed the university. A delegation went to the Scottish parliament in Holyrood, where Members of the Scottish Parliament were due to discuss the financing of higher education in Scotland, including at Dundee.

The UCU is calling for a clear management plan to address the financial crisis, with its usual proviso of no compulsory redundancies while accepting the loss of jobs via voluntary schemes.

### **Special Education Needs (SEND) support staff at three Essex, UK schools strike over allowance payments**

Teaching assistants, pastoral support workers and other support staff at three schools run by the Lift Schools academy trust in Essex walked out Wednesday. The three schools are Columbus School and College in Chelmsford, Pioneer in Basildon and Lift Clacton's The Key.

The Unison union members are calling for the payment of an additional

allowance in recognition of the extra responsibilities and skills required for working with children special educational needs. Teachers at the three schools are paid an additional £5,500 extra a year in recognition of their additional responsibilities.

A week-long stoppage is planned to begin February 5.

### **Walkouts and protests by Iraqi university staff over cuts to allowances**

Monday marked the second day of walkouts and protests by university employees at Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan and Nineveh universities.

They were protesting the recent decision by the central government to restrict allowances paid to universities in an effort to tighten spending. A parliamentary session scheduled for Monday to review recent economic decisions by the caretaker government was adjourned after failing to reach a quorum.

### **Hunger strike by prisoners in Lebanese jail over "selective justice"**

Lebanese remand prisoners in the country's largest jail, Roumieh Central Prison, began an open-ended hunger strike Monday.

They are protesting that while the transfer of Syrian prisoners being held in Lebanon back to Syria is underway, Lebanese prisoners are being left to languish without their cases being processed.

They are also protesting the conditions in Lebanese jails. They note that 44 prisoners died in jail last year and at least six have died so far this year. They called on supporters to attend a sit-in at Riad al-Solh Square in Beirut on Friday.

Delayed trials, poor healthcare and overcrowding regularly lead to riots and hunger strikes in Lebanon's prisons.

### **Municipal workers' protest in Nelson Mandela Bay, Kariega highlights poverty in South Africa**

A protest by municipal workers in Nelson Mandela Bay in Kariega has highlighted the poverty in South Africa and the crimes of desperation arising from it.

Dozens of workers blocked a busy street with burning tyres and rubble, demanding extra security at their depots. This is necessary, they say, to prevent the theft of tools, car batteries and equipment.

At least five municipal trucks were stripped of batteries and cables last October. One senior municipal worker has estimated the cost of damage at around R5million (\$317,000).

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members say they cannot repair water leaks and other sewerage problems. They have had no toilet facilities since the plumbing was stolen. The municipality claims that lack of funding prevents them from replacing stolen equipment or securing existing facilities.

Nearly two-thirds of South Africa's population, 40.8 million people, live in absolute poverty. Official unemployment figures have hit 31.9 percent; for those aged 15-24 it is 58.5 percent, an indictment of decades of rule by the African National Congress.

## **Striking Nigerian electricity workers picket company headquarters, demand pension arrears**

Striking Nigerian electricity workers in Kano State walked off the job on January 21, barricading the entrance gate to the headquarters of the Kano Electricity Distribution Plc (KEDCO). The strike is already causing problems with electricity supply, and could cause a complete shutdown.

Those joining the picket carried placards with slogans including “Remit our 92 months pension deductions to our PFAs [pension funds],” “Inadequate staff welfare and poor motivation,” and “Lack of basic working tools and PPE [personal protective equipment].”

Those taking part in the action were members of the Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies (SSAEAC) and the National Union of Electricity Employees.

Addressing the assembled workers, the Deputy President General (North) of SSAEAC, Rilwanu Shehu, said more than 90 months of pension remittances remain unpaid. Many workers labour in poor and dilapidated environments without adequate tools and personal protective equipment, which was impacting on productivity and staff morale.

“We are not asking for new agreements. We are only demanding compliance with existing ones.”

Shehu told journalists “We are here to lock down activities because they failed to comply with so many agreements. Since 2014, we have struggled with issues ranging from non-remittance of pensions to settlement of death benefits and [a] poor working environment.”

## **Teachers in Nigerian capital join ongoing strike by state-employed workers as court declares strike illegal**

All primary and secondary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) around Abuja, Nigeria joined the strike by other state-employed workers on January 26.

A communiqué from the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), FCT Wing directed “Teachers within the city centre and surrounding areas... to converge at the National Industrial Court (NIC) on Gimbiya Street, Area 11, Abuja by 7 a.m. on Monday. The gathering is intended to show solidarity during the hearing of a court case instituted against JUAC [the Joint Union Action Committee].”

The unresolved issues behind the JUAC strike 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.

Sitting in Abuja on January 27, the NIC ordered JUAC to suspend the workers’ strike across the FCT. The attempt to make the strike illegal follows a state government propaganda exercise claiming that most of the strikers’ grievances have already been met.

The court decision was met with anger and derision by those on strike. Due to the angry mood of its members, the Nigerian Labour Congress—which has repeatedly sabotaged previous strikes—instructed its strikers to ignore the court order.





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