

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## **Thousands demonstrate in Brussels, Belgium to defend free quality public education**

Between 6,500 and 8,000 people, from teachers and students to parents' associations, youth movements and a number of trade unions, marched through Brussels, Belgium January 25. They were protesting austerity measures which limit the extent and quality of public education.

They demanded greater investment in education, improved working conditions for teachers and lecturers and reduced fees for higher education. They also object to reductions in the core curriculum and the range of options available to students. Further demonstrations are planned.

## **Belgian transport workers in Wallonia on indefinite strike against attacks on working conditions**

Bus drivers for the TEC public bus and tram service in Wallonia, Belgium began an indefinite strike January 26. They are protesting a new Walloon government public service contract designed to make savings of 20 million euros by 2029.

The Belgian Union of Transport Workers and other unions' members fear that many current jobs will be handed over to the private sector as part of the cost-cutting and working conditions will worsen significantly.

## **Workers fight back with strikes and protests against job losses in Spain**

Hundreds of workers at the multinational pulp and paper

manufacturer, Ence, in Navia, Spain went on indefinite strike January 27 to protest a proposed 96 redundancies out of 368 professionals at the company. On Sunday, a demonstration of workers and concerned townspeople was held in Navia centre.

Also Sunday, hundreds of Spanish employees of UK-based automotive engineering company GKN Driveline protested in Vigo, Spain against 75 layoffs, 10 percent of the workforce.

Both employers are restructuring in the name of efficiency, as industrial layoffs accelerate across Spain and Europe. While labour costs are slashed, a tiny financial oligarchy becomes vastly enriched.

## **ICT workers at local authorities in Ireland strike for improved pay and conditions**

Over 500 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) workers at local authorities across the Republic of Ireland began a work-to-rule January 28. The ICT employees manage digital services used by local councils in delivering public services nationwide.

The Fórsa union members demand reasonable workloads, increased staff, a review of ICT grades and pay, and a formal national framework for out-of-hours work.

## **Strike by defence workers in Lancashire, UK over pay**

Around 1,000 workers employed by British multinational aerospace company, BAE Systems plc began a three-week stoppage on Monday. The sites affected are Warton and Samlesbury in Lancashire.

The Unite union members are striking against an imposed pay offer of 3.5 percent for 2025. Sections of BAE workers at the two sites held previous stoppages between November and January. The strikes were suspended to allow further negotiations, which failed to reach resolution. The walkout was swelled by around 550 workers who voted overwhelmingly to

join the current action.

BAE Systems is highly profitable, recording profits of over £3 billion in 2024 and reportedly paying out £1.5 billion in dividends last year.

### **Staff at hospital in UK capital walk out over terms and conditions**

Staff working in pathology and clinical engineering at the Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust in London began a three-day stoppage Wednesday. Clinical engineers are responsible for checking and maintaining medical equipment.

The Unite union members are taking the action to defend their terms and conditions.

For the pathology staff the main issues are imposed shift changes that will cut pay and reduce pay protection. They also charge the trust with failing to pay expenses and address the bullying of staff.

The clinical engineers are protesting proposals to outsource their role to a private company, Siemens Healthineers. They say the move would undermine jobs and erode terms and conditions.

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

Around 50 UK workers employed by manufacturer WSP Textiles in Stroud and Dursley in Gloucestershire began a six-day stoppage Monday. WSP makes sports textile material to cover snooker tables and tennis balls.

The Unite union members held several days of strikes in January, the first ever walkout by WSP workers. They rejected a 2.35 percent pay offer from the company. 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.

A further walkout is scheduled for February 11-13. In 2024, WSP made profits of £1.4 million on a turnover of £23 million.

### **Five thousand workers from four Kenyan sugar factories strike over unpaid wages**

Five thousand workers from four Kenyan sugar factories walked out on January 29, after the government refused to settle unpaid salaries and benefits amounting to Ksh.10.8 billion.

Workers held protests at the Nzoia Sugar Factory on January 29, blocking the Webuye-Eldoret Highway, despite intimidation.

During the leasing process, the government committed to pay Ksh.10.8 billion to workers in the sugar sector. However, the Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers members at Nzoia, Chemelil, Muhoroni and Sony sugar factories say they have yet to receive any payment.

Union Secretary General Francis Wangara appealed to the government to intervene, saying, "These companies are not entirely private, they are still under [the] government."

### **Public sector strike in Nigerian capital over pay and conditions which defied court order sabotaged by union bureaucracy**

Union umbrella body the Joint Union Action Committee (JUAC) has called off the strike by public sector workers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria.

Publicly run schools and health centres in the Federal Capital Territory FCT had been at a standstill. JUAC members demanded resolution of issues including 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.

FCT minister, Nyesom Wike, threatened the strikers for refusing to follow the court order and return to work. A January 29 notice issued by the court at Wike's bidding stated, "You will be guilty of contempt of court and will be liable to be committed to prison."

Winding down the dispute, the JUAC told members to continue the strike until all demands were met. At the same time JUAC Secretary told workers to stay at home and "pray" for success and wait for the result of their legal appeal. The appeal had already been dismissed by Wike and the "Labour Court" as irrelevant.

The JUAC called off the stoppage after meeting Wike on February 3. It is not clear what agreement was made, other than a vague promise that the strikers would not be victimised.



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