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.

Teachers' and students' demonstration over funding in Brussels, Belgium face attacks from riot police

Thousands of students, teachers and trade union members demonstrated in Brussels, Belgium on Wednesday, International Students' Day, against rising fees, education cuts and deteriorating study conditions. Police estimated the turnout at 3,200 while organisers put it at 15,000.

Protesters opposed austerity measures and education reforms, including increased tuition fees in French-speaking higher education from €835 to €1,194 annually. They also denounced deteriorating university facilities and the rising costs of accommodation, transport and food.

After the march, thousands blocked Brussels' inner ring road. Riot police attacked demonstrators with water cannon and tear gas, making several arrests. Witnesses reported seeing young people taken away with injuries. Student organisers said protests would continue, with further demonstrations planned for November 23.

Thousands of teachers in Lithuania strike for pay increase

Teachers across Lithuania began an indefinite nationwide strike Monday, after negotiations with the government over pay increases broke down. Around 4,000 teachers from 222 educational institutions joined the first day, with some kindergarten staff also participating.

The Lithuanian Education Employees' Trade Union members demand a 10 percent increase in teachers' basic salary for 2027 and say a proposed 7.56 percent rise is inadequate. They also want measures to fulfil an existing commitment that teachers' average salaries should be at least 30 percent above the national average wage.

The teachers say their pay is falling behind wider wage growth and that many of them work more than one full-time equivalent job to earn a decent living.

Hundreds of Slovakian railway workers protest for improved pay and working conditions

On November 12, several hundred workers from Slovakia's three state-owned railway companies staged a rally in the capital, Bratislava, marching from its main railway station to the transport ministry in protest at low wages and poor working conditions.

The members of the Railway Workers' Trade Union and 16 other unions demand a 10 percent wage increase from January and a one-off €200 payment, alongside a sector-wide collective agreement and future wages comparable with those in the neighbouring countries of Czechia, Hungary and Poland.

Workers also complain about their working conditions, demanding better legal protection, measures to address shortages of train drivers and other essential personnel and increased government spending on the chronically underfunded rail network.

Car parts workers in Ireland strike against job cuts

Workers at the multinational giant Kostal's car parts manufacturing plant in Abbeyfeale, County Limerick, Ireland began a strike Monday in a dispute over redundancy terms and management's refusal to negotiate. Further stoppages and an indefinite work-to-rule and overtime ban are planned.

Kostal intends to make 140 workers redundant by the end of March 2027, transferring production of onboard electric vehicle chargers to China. Workers overwhelmingly rejected the company's voluntary severance proposals.

The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union members demand improved compensation for those losing their jobs and guarantees concerning the future of those remaining.

Kostal reported a turnover of €3.5 billion in 2025 and employs 19-20,000 people worldwide.

Strike by staff at London hospital trust over pay

Around 300 staff working for Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals in London walked out for the day on Tuesday. The trust is one of the country's largest National Health Service (NHS) trusts. The staff are employed as cleaners, porters, store operatives, security staff and food service assistants.

The Unite union members are on the NHS band 2, earning just £15.89 an hour yet employed in central London, in a city ranked the third most expensive to live in the world, leaving them on poverty pay. They are demanding increased pay, improved facilities such as showers and changing rooms and better equipment for security staff.

Other issues include allegations of racism and bullying by facility management and the trust's reneging on an agreement to allow union

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meetings in work time. Instead, the trust allows only two union members from each department to attend meetings.

Workers' previous action over the issue included a three-day stoppage from October 19.

Bus drivers in Cornwall, England walk out over union recognition

Bus drivers working for Go Cornwall walked out on a 24-hour stoppage on Wednesday. Go Cornwall operates over 120 routes throughout Cornwall, in southwest England.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are protesting the company's refusal to recognise the union. They also demand improved pay and working conditions. Go Cornwall, part of the Go-Ahead group, took over the running of the company from First Bus when it pulled out of Cornwall in February.

Further 24-hour stoppages are planned each Wednesday in the run-up to the Christmas holiday.

Strike by staff at London-based health charity over pay

Around 80 staff working for the over 500-year-old charity Guy's and St Thomas's Foundation in London walked out on Wednesday.

The Unite union members are protesting a below inflation 2 percent pay offer, part of a "market benchmarking" exercise. The benchmarking means some workers would receive the 2 percent, some would receive less, and some would receive no rise at all. The foundation has refused to disclose the basis of the benchmarking, meaning staff have no way of knowing why they are receiving less than colleagues.

The foundation, custodian of an endowment of more than £1 billion, describes its mission as, "Our home in the heart of a global city is vibrant and diverse, but it is also a place with stark health inequity.

"Our commitment and work are backed by our endowment, which allows us to take a long-term view while addressing the real and urgent health issues of today. We focus on backing people and ideas to drive more equitable health."

A further stoppage is scheduled for November 24–26.

Ongoing protests in Iran as living conditions deteriorate

Waste truck drivers responsible for transporting waste to landfill in Tabriz, northwest Iran held a work stoppage November 12. They were protesting failure to be awarded an annual pay rise and the non-payment of social insurance cover. Elsewhere in the city, workers at the Tabriz Machine Building Company were on strike that week over irregular payment of their wages.

There were protests Tuesday in the western city of Abdanan over the deaths of 13 oil and gas workers employed by the Dehloran Petrorefining Company. The workers were killed in a road accident Saturday when their transport bus overturned. Initially demanding accountability for road safety, the protest became more general against poverty, corruption and rising prices. The protest was broken up by security forces using tear gas, with some protestors being detained.

The Iranian economy has suffered decades of US sanctions exacerbated by the recent naval blockade leading to its devastation. Following the midterm US elections, Iran is under threat of further military attacks.

Lebanese transport workers to strike over unregulated operators

The head of the Lebanese Land Transport Unions and Syndicates announced a strike on November 25. Its members operate public taxis, international transport vehicles, minibuses and trucks. The sector provides a living for around 54,000 families.

The drivers, who hold public licences to operate, say their livelihoods are being threatened by operators running illegal transport services. They accuse the Lebanese government of failing to act against the illegal operators.

South African police attack Astral Foods strikers as poultry giant refuses living wage demand

More than 1,000 workers are continuing a strike begun October 29 at Astral Foods, South Africa's largest poultry producer, according to the Simunye Workers Forum (SWF) and the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO).

The company, which has operations across south Africa, supplies chicken to KFC, Nando's, Spur and Hungry Lion. The strikers, who include factory workers, chicken catchers and hatchers in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, demand a living wage of R13,500 a month, up from take-home pay of between R5,400 and R7,300, as well as permanent contracts for labour-broker workers, medical aid and better protective gear.

The strike followed a wage deadlock at the CCMA. On November 10, COSATU in Gauteng voiced support, saying employers "must stop using casual employment as a permanent business model." That comes from a federation whose affiliates have a long record of enforcing such arrangements.

The strike was met with violence from the first day, with police firing tear gas and rubber bullets at workers outside the Olifantsfontein plant. The CWAO says officers shot "at close range," hitting several people in the head and one in the throat, even though the protest was peaceful.

Lawyers for Human Rights said 11 people were hospitalised and that police told workers they were engaged in an "unlawful strike," although the strike was protected and the authorities were notified in advance. The SWF says three workers were arrested, not the one admitted by police.

Astral then obtained a court interdict barring strikers from gathering within ten metres of the plant entrance. The Labour Court has barred the company from disciplining or dismissing strikers, but Astral filed a counterapplication and a judgment is pending.

CEO Gary Arnold dismissed the wage demand as unaffordable and denied allegations of unhygienic conditions, such as workers sharing unwashed uniforms. He also sought to delegitimise the strike by noting that the SWF is not a recognised union and that Astral bargains only with SAEWA and AFADWU, neither of which is involved in the dispute. The strikers were forced to act outside the recognised bargaining structures, which the company insists on treating as the sole legitimate channel. Safety concerns are underscored by a further incident on November 11, when an ammonia leak at the Olifantsfontein factory hospitalised 24 workers.

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Kenyan Del Monte workers protest against violent attacks by organised gangs on plantations to steal pineapple harvest which disrupts production and threatens jobs

Hundreds of workers at Del Monte Kenya's pineapple plantation in Thika demonstrated on November 13 over widespread theft, attacks on employees and threats to their jobs. Organised by the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU), workers marched along the Thika–Kenol Highway before attempting to enter the Thika–Nairobi Highway, where anti-riot police intervened. Some reports said workers downed tools in protest.

Workers accused organised gangs of entering plantations with vans and pickup trucks to steal large quantities of pineapples, sometimes attacking employees during harvesting operations. They said the theft resulted in cancelled shifts for casual labourers, raising fears of redundancies and reduced production. Employees also reported the destruction and theft of irrigation equipment, fertilisers and other agricultural materials, increasing costs and disrupting operations.

The protest took place despite the establishment of a specialised police unit earlier this year to protect the plantation. Union official Francis Mwangangi Kilyungi warned that continuing losses threatened workers' livelihoods and demanded stronger protection.

The dispute comes amid longstanding tensions between Del Monte and surrounding communities over land ownership and access, alongside serious allegations of violence and killings involving company security personnel and suspected thieves.

Zimbabwe: Adventist school teachers strike over five months of unpaid wages

Teachers at the Queen Elizabeth Adventist Primary School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe walked out after working for five months without pay. The 13 teachers at the private school, operated by the South Zimbabwe Conference (SZC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, are reportedly owed US$3,000 in salary arrears. The school offered to pay just US$50 every fortnight towards the outstanding wages.

The teachers first raised their grievances with SZC president Bongani Ndlovu on October 23, but received no response. They sought assistance from the Zimbabwe Educational, Health, Scientific, Social and Cultural Workers Union. Regional union coordinator Jerry Mathema condemned the conditions as oppressive and unlawful, highlighting the financial hardship suffered by teachers and their families. One teacher said they could no longer provide unpaid labour while struggling to feed their families.

The dispute comes amid a wider crisis over teachers' pay and working conditions in Zimbabwe. In September, public school teachers announced plans to work just three days a week, using the remaining two days to earn additional income because their salaries were insufficient to meet basic living costs.

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