

Tens of thousands of civil servants demonstrate across Spain against plans to privatise state health insurance; Iran continues to be shaken by cost-of-living protests; South African police fire rubber bullets at Johannesburg protest

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 December 2024

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

### **Tens of thousands of Spanish civil servants demonstrate against government health insurance changes**

An estimated 35,000 civil servants from across Spain demonstrated in Madrid Saturday outside the offices of Muface, the state's health insurance system for public workers and their dependents.

The CSIF civil servants' union members are protesting the increased privatisation of the system, which will raise their contributions and jeopardise their long-term health security, especially for those with chronic conditions. They have threatened possible one-day strike action in future.

### **Thousands of Belgian workers march against government austerity measures**

Approximately 10,000 workers marched to the Palais de Justice law courts in Brussels, Belgium December 13 to speak out against government spending cuts.

The joint protest by the General Labour Federation of Belgium, Confederation of Christian Trade Unions and the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium members opposed government austerity plans, the destruction of public services, deteriorating working conditions and the end of extra pay for evening and weekend work.

### **Thousands of Italian workers in one-day strike against austerity, inequality and authoritarian rule**

Thousands took part in a national strike across Italy and Sicily

December 13, as transport workers brought bus, underground and train networks to a halt. Industrial, logistics, public sector, ports, road and other workers also stopped work to protest low wages, the housing crisis, military spending and authoritarian rule under the fascistic Meloni government.

The strike and demonstrations in major cities were organised by the Basic Trade Union under pressure from below to defuse growing anger and opposition to austerity and inequality in the country.

### **Doctors in Lower Saxony, Germany strike for better pay and conditions**

Doctors and other medical staff at seven public clinics and 40 hospitals in Hannover and the Lower Saxony region, Germany took part in a one-day strike December 13 to emphasise their pay demands in negotiations with municipal employers.

The 5,400 Marburger Federation members want an 8.5 percent wage rise, improved payments for being on call and stand-by, and amendments to the shift systems.

### **Bakkavor food processing workers in Spalding, UK vote to continue pay strike**

Around 700 UK food processing workers employed by Bakkavor at their Spalding site in Lincolnshire voted overwhelmingly to continue their walkout over pay. Bakkavor produces items such as ready meals, pizzas and deserts for major supermarkets, including Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Waitrose.

Announcing the revote, Unite the union noted, "The workers have seen their pay decrease by 10.6 per cent in real terms over the last three years. Unite members are demanding a pay rise of 81 pence an hour on average. This amounts to just two per cent of Bakkavor's profits."

## **Staff at London luxury department store to walk out over pay and bonus payments**

Around 175 workers employed by London's Harrods luxury department store are set to walk out. They are employed as shop floor staff, cleaners and in the store's restaurant.

The United Voice of the World (UVW) union members voted by a 95 percent margin to walk out on December 21, 22 and 26. Harrods does not recognise the UVW.

The workers are demanding an above-inflation pay rise and a Christmas bonus of £500, starting this year. They currently receive a £50 voucher to be spent in the store. Their other demands include ending the practice of making part-time cleaners work nine days in a row without a break.

## **Unions suspend strikes by bus staff workers in Manchester, UK to consider new pay offer**

Around 500 UK workers employed by Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM) Bee Network walked out December 12-13.

The 300 Unison and 200 Unite union members had rejected a 3.1 percent pay offer from the employer. The staff involved are office-based, working at interchanges, information and ticket offices. The dispute does not involve bus or tram drivers.

Further strikes were due on Sunday and Monday, but these have been suspended following the intervention of Greater Manchester Labour Mayor, Andy Burnham.

Manchester public transport is undergoing restructuring. On January 5, TFGM will take over half the region's buses to become the Bee Network. For the first time since the 1980s, bus routes in Greater Manchester run by private companies will be coordinated by the local authority.

Ahead of the strike, Burnham expressed concern at its timing, saying, "We just ask colleagues now, this is a big moment for Greater Manchester, we've all been working at this for years... is this really the right time to do this?"

The unions suspended the action after a new pay offer, reportedly worth between 7.33 and 8.9 percent for the lowest-paid TFGM workers.

The workers are being balloted on the new offer, with the result to be announced Monday. The unions are not making any recommendation to accept or reject the offer. Should it be rejected, the unions will impose a work-to-rule and overtime ban from Christmas Eve.

## **Housing support staff at UK Northwest Housing Association continue strike action over pay**

Hundreds of UK staff, including call centre workers, maintenance and repair workers employed by Knowsley-based Livv Housing Association are continuing their series of stoppages begun October. They are on strike Wednesday to Friday this week, and Monday and Tuesday of next.

The Unite and Unison union members rejected a 5 percent pay offer after many years of below-inflation pay rises. Livv Housing has around 13,000 properties in the Merseyside region. It reported reserves of over £110 million in March this year and its CEO, Leanne Hearne is paid around £250,000 a year.

On December 3, Hearne sent a company-wide email saying staff who can confirm they are non-union members will receive a 5 percent pay rise

before Christmas.

## **Tax revenue staff in Newcastle, UK plan walkout over sacking of union representatives**

Workers employed by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in the PT Ops employer services section are to begin a discontinuous strike December 23, lasting until February 14.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members based at the Benton Park View site are protesting the sacking of three PCS representatives at the site. The PCS members voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out.

## **Protest called to support striking bus servicing workers in Sheffield, UK**

A UK protest has been called for December 20 at 6pm outside the First Bus depot in Olive Grove Road, Sheffield, by Better Buses South Yorkshire and Unite Community members in support of striking Bidvest Noonan workers.

Bidvest Noonan is contracted to service buses at the depot. In April, First Bus signed up to be an accredited real living wage employer paying the rate set by the Real Living Wage Foundation. First agreed the rate would apply to third-party contractors used by the company, but Bidvest Noonan told its employees they will not get the real living wage rate until November 2026.

According to Unite, First Bus is using staff to move buses within the depot, a role usually carried out by Bidvest employees, undermining their industrial action.

## **Ongoing protests in Iran over dire economic and social conditions**

The latest ongoing demonstrations in Iran Sunday included municipality workers in Ilam, who rallied outside the provincial governor's office to protest non-payment of wages for six months.

In the southern city of Bushehr, oil workers at the Iranian Offshore Oil held further protests to demand higher pay, improved working conditions and the banning of outsourcers.

In Isfahan, steel industry pensioners protested the low level of their pensions and demanded the government increase them in line with rising costs, which is a legal requirement.

Monday saw separate protests in the capital Tehran, including residents from the cities of Arvin, Golgoon and Saba, who blocked the Tehran-Saveh highway with burning tyres. They were protesting continuing power outages.

Also in Tehran, workers from its oil refinery protesting wage arrears going back four months. Social Security Organisation pensioners rallied to oppose the low value of their pensions and poor living conditions.

Telecommunications Company of Iran retirees held protests in Shiraz and Borujerd. They, too, demanded the government address their plight and increase pensions.

Iran's inflation is at 31.7 percent and the poverty rate around 30 percent. Living standards, badly hit by US sanctions, will further deteriorate as

NATO war preparations against the country escalate alongside the planned carve-up of Syria by the US, Israel and Turkey.

### **South African police use rubber bullets against public sector protest in Johannesburg**

Police fired rubber bullets at public sector workers protesting for a pay rise in Johannesburg, South Africa on December 12. Several workers were injured.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members blocked several roads, including the M1 highway in Braamfontein, complaining that councillors had awarded themselves a pay increase. Similar protests took place in August.

### **Kenyan doctors demonstrate in run-up to strike**

Kenyan doctors, dentists and pharmacists held a demonstration in Nairobi on December 16, demanding implementation of agreements made between the union and the government in May to bring about a return to work after a long strike.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) have called a nationwide strike from December 22.

The agreement was supposed to address numerous grievances, including poor working conditions, delayed salaries and cuts in pay. The strike highlighted the conditions of medical interns, on whose exploitation the health system in Kenya is based. The union ended the strike without addressing the misuse of interns, who suffer a high rate of suicide due to work pressures and low pay.

The KMPDU asked for police to provide security and ensure a peaceful demonstration.

### **Water workers strike in Kano State, Nigeria as revenue workers protest in Ondo, over minimum wage, but unions call off strike in Nasarawa**

A strike by workers at the Kano State Water Board, Nigeria began December 13 to demand payment of the new minimum monthly wage of N70,000.

The workers shut down the Challawa Water Treatment Plant, while the Tamburawa plant is undergoing major repairs. The strike could lead to severe water shortages.

Workers employed by the Ondo State Internal Revenue Service in Ondo State held a demonstration to demand implementation of the minimum wage in line with other state-employed workers, who were paid the minimum wage in November.

The Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress (TUC) in Nasarawa State called on their members to end the strike action over the minimum wage begun December 1, after negotiations and promises made by the state government. TUC chairman Mohammed Doma claimed it will be paid with agreed adjustments from December 1.

### **Lecturers strike in Bauchi State, Nigeria over minimum wage**

Lecturers at polytechnics, colleges, and monotechnics in Bauchi State, Nigeria, walked out on a two-week stoppage November 29, demanding payment of the minimum wage. The Joint Action Committee of Academic and Non-Academic Staff members went on strike after the expiry of a 21-day ultimatum on November 19.

Meanwhile, an indefinite strike by lecturers at Sa'adu Zungur University, also in Bauchi State, was "suspended" December 14. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the university administration after "productive discussions" between the leadership of the union and the State Governor, Bala Mohammed.



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