

Hundreds of German postal workers walk out ahead of national pay negotiations; strikes and protests in Iran against falling living standards joined by Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane workers; bus workers' stoppage at Northwest Transport Investments in South Africa sabotaged by union

## 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.*

### **Hundreds of German postal workers strike ahead of national pay negotiations**

Over 300 postal workers at the DHL-owned Deutsche Post in Saxony-Anhalt and Lower Saxony states, Germany undertook a 24-hour strike Tuesday in support of their demands during the collective bargaining process.

The DPVKOM communications workers union members want an 8 percent salary increase and a holiday allowance payment. Wage negotiations for 170,000 employees began on Wednesday. Other demands include extra leave days to compensate for the harsh work conditions carrying heavy parcels and working in bad weather, leading to high rates of sickness.

Following privatisation and the takeover by DHL, mail delivery has been sidelined by more profitable parcel delivery and the price of postage increased.

### **Workers at cigar factory in Cantabria, Spain strike for improved conditions**

An indefinite strike by 135 factory workers at cigar-making company, Altadis, in Entrambasaguas, Cantabria, Spain began Tuesday.

The General Union of Workers and other union members are protesting their work conditions and understaffing. Thirty workers picketed the factory with banners saying "Stop overloading workers! Respect their work!"

### **Municipal workers in Izmir, Turkey strike over pay shortfall**

Workers at iZelman and iZenerji, two subsidiaries of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey stopped work indefinitely Tuesday over non-payment of their wages due to council budget cuts.

The Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey and the Public Services Employees Union members have had their pay reduced by a third and lost bonuses and other fringe benefits.

General practitioners, midwives and nurses in family health centres across Turkey also walked out from January 6 for five days, joined by all health workers January 8, over attacks on pay and conditions.

### **Strikes by food manufacturing workers at five UK sites**

Food manufacturing workers employed as line operatives and engineers at five Princes Foods sites in the UK are striking over pay.

Princes Foods manufactures well-known brands such as Branston and Crosse & Blackwell, as well as tinned fish. The strikes are at the Bradford, Cardiff, Glasgow, Long Sutton and Wisbech sites. Workers at the Cardiff site previously took action last year.

The Unite union members are protesting a 3 percent pay offer made by the employer. Princes Foods' previous owner Mitsubishi had made a 4 to 7 percent pay offer based on salary level. After Princes Foods was bought by the Newlat Group the offer was reduced to 3 percent.

Unite says Newlat Group, which makes 20 percent of its revenues in the UK, is expected to make sales of around £2.3 billion this year.

Unite's national officer for food, drink and agriculture Paul Travers noted, "Newlat borrowed huge sums of money to buy Princes and is now looking to cut corners and penny pinch to pay that money back."

The strike dates are: Bradford, January 6-8 and January 13-15; Wisbech, January 8-10 and January 16-18; Long Sutton, January 7, 9, 14 and 16; Cardiff, January 9-11. At the Glasgow site only, engineers are walking out January 6-8 and 13-15.

## **Refuse collection workers in Birmingham, UK walk out over pay cuts**

Around 350 UK waste collection workers employed by Birmingham City council walked out on Monday, the first of a planned 12 days of stoppages.

The Unite union members are opposing the council's plans to abolish the safety critical Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) posts. This will affect around 150 WRCOs who will lose around £8,000 a year as a result.

They also began an overtime ban on January 2. The programme of industrial action was put in place after talks between the union and the council broke down. The council refused to consider stopping or delaying the abolition of the WRCO role.

Further stoppages are planned for January 14, 22, 30, February 7, 10, 18, 26, March 6, 14, 25 and April 2.

## **Protests continue by Iranian workers into the New Year**

December 31 saw protests by casually employed oil workers in the Fajr Jam Gas Refinery and the Gachsaran Oil and Gas company. Among their demands were for contacting companies to be removed from the industry and for the right to unionise.

On Sunday, retirees from the Social Security Organisation, the civil service, telecommunication and educational sectors protested in Kermanshah. They were calling for increased pensions as living costs are exacerbated by soaring inflation.

The same day steelworkers in Ahvaz protested outside the governor's office. Their demands included payment of wage arrears and against mismanagement. Steelworkers also protested in Isfahan against wage arrears and for better working conditions.

Tuesday, customers who had been defrauded by the state-run Rezayet Khodro carmaker rallied outside the judiciary building in Qazvin. Having paid for cars that did not materialise, they were demanding the return of the monies they had paid out.

In the city of Bandar Abbas, residents of the state-backed Mehr Housing Company held a protest outside the governor's office. They were protesting a sudden sharp increase in loan instalment payments.

Tuesday marked the fifteenth day of a strike by workers at the Iran Ofogh Company, an oilfield services company. The protest in Khorramshahr by the workers employed in the Yadavaran oilfield was against low wages and poor working conditions.

Inflation in Iran stands at 31.7 percent and the poverty rate is around 30 percent, partly due to US sanctions. Living standards will deteriorate further as the incoming Trump Presidency continues Biden's war plans against Iran.

## **Strikes by sugarcane processing workers in Iran**

Sunday marked the sixth day of strikes by workers at the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane facility. They are protesting attempts to transfer ownership of the sugar manufacturing plant to the Khuzestan Sugarcane Development company.

The Haft-Tappeh sugarcane workers have a long record of militancy. In 2015 they undertook a series of stoppages to oppose the privatisation of the facility. In the intervening years they have carried out strikes and

protests in defence of jobs and working conditions.

On Sunday, workers marched to the governor's office to voice their opposition to the proposed takeover and called for job security. They also protested the deterioration of their living standards resulting from soaring inflation. Another demand was for the reinstatement of Esmail Bakhshi, a popular militant worker at the plant.

## **Strike by Israeli port workers ends after few hours**

Dockworkers at the state-owned Israeli Ashdod port walked out on Sunday to protest preferences for shifts being given to temporary workers at the expense of permanent staff.

The stoppage was ended after a few hours. The *Globes* news website reported that workers returned to work after intervention by the Ministries of Transport and Finance. According to *Globes*, ministry officials indicated additional quays at the port could be awarded to the port's privately owned competitors Haifa Bayport and South Port.

## **Transport union in South Africa sabotages strike at Northwest Investments bus company**

Around 1,300 bus drivers at state-owned bus company Northwest Transport Investments (NTI) in South Africa, who walked out in the middle of December, are being urged by their union to return to work.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) members have not been paid for up to four months, while others received only 50 percent of what they are due.

SATAWU secretary Muneiswa Mugwena, discussing "the situation in our company," urged workers "not to engage in illegal strikes and [to] continue to work for the betterment of the company." He said workers should return to work and wait for their salaries in 10 days.

NTI has depots in Hammanskraal, Temba and Mabopane. The dispute affected passengers in the Pretoria and Midrand areas.

In 2022, NTI was put under a business rescue plan by the North West provincial government, due to financial problems.

## **Unemployed medics in Eastern Cape, South Africa protest**

Unemployed medical practitioners, including doctors and dentists, have been protesting outside the Premier's office in Bhisho in the Eastern Cape, South Africa since Monday.

Around 150 SA Medical Association members were dismissed on December 31 due to lack of funding. The doctor:patient ration is 1:1,000, according to one medic reported in the *South African Labour News*, and waiting times average 16 hours.

According to the union, 1,800 newly qualified doctors are unemployed in South Africa.

## **Municipal workers continue wildcat strike in Ray Nkonyeni Municipality, South Africa over pay**

Workers are still refusing to collect rubbish in Ray Nkonyeni Municipality, South Africa in a wildcat protest ongoing since the beginning of December. They are owed over six months' unpaid backpay due to salary upgrades.

The SA Municipal Workers Union accepted three months' backpay.

### **Academic and non-academic tertiary staff launch indefinite strike in Bauchi State, Nigeria**

All academic and non-academic staff at state-run polytechnics and tertiary colleges in Bauchi State, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on January 2 over non-implementation of salary structures agreed with the state government.

The latest strike follows the end of a two-week warning strike called by the Joint Action Committee of Academics and Non-Academic Staff Unions (JAC) December 16-30 over the non-implementation of the new Consolidated Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Academic Staff Salary Structure and Consolidated Tertiary Educational Institutions Salary Structure.

The JAC Chairman Abubakar Ahmed accused the state government representatives of "fostering threats to intimidate the leadership of JAC."

### **Tunisian teachers begin open-ended strike over pay and conditions**

Thousands of Tunisian teachers began an open-ended strike January 6 to demand improvements in recruitment, retention, salary and other issues. The teachers say they are determined to stay out until their demands are addressed.

Malek Al-Ayari, national coordinator of substitute teachers, said "We have started a teaching strike today due to the failure to settle our affairs and the ministry's procrastination, being content with saying that a settlement will be reached soon, but no serious measures were taken."



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