

Students and workers in Serbia continue protests after rail building collapse kills 15; protests by oil, gas and petrochemical casual workers in Iran over pay and conditions; doctors in hospitals around Nigeria's capital city walk out over pay arrears

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.

Thousands of Serbian students and workers in anti-government protests cause prime minister to resign

Students in Serbia are continuing anti-government protests begun November 1 after the collapse of a renovated canopy at Novi Sad city railway station, which caused the death of 15 people. They accuse the government of corruption and negligence and suspect a cover-up.

The students called for a general strike January 23, and tens of thousands of workers responded by joining them in demonstrations despite them receiving no endorsement from the country's main unions. They are demanding the publication of all documents concerning the botched renovation of the railway station, the prosecution of those involved in attacking students and professors during the protests, a halt to the prosecution of students arrested during the protests and a 20 percent increase in higher education funding.

After a massive 24-hour blockade by thousands in Belgrade Monday and physical attacks on student demonstrators in Novi Sad by government supporters, the country's prime minister, Miloš Vučević, resigned Tuesday.

As protests continue, President Aleksandar Vučić promised a major government reshuffle and concessions to student demands to prevent further escalation and assuage public anger.

Tens of thousands strike and protest in Brussels against education cuts in Belgium

On Monday, 30,000 teachers protested in central Brussels, Belgium on the first day of a 48-hour strike, some throwing fireworks and eggs at the party headquarters of the Reformist Movement (MR). They also gathered outside the headquarters of Les Engagés, coalition partners in the French Community/Wallonia-Brussels federal government.

The teachers from French-speaking schools oppose educational reforms being implemented by the French Community regional government. These will mean pay cuts, job losses, an end to permanent contracts and a continuation of poor working conditions in the already underfunded schools.

Only two weeks ago, 25,000 Belgian workers, including teachers, demonstrated in Brussels and held a national strike against pension reforms.

There are three community governments in Belgium, based on the Flemish, French, and German-speaking communities, plus the federal government.

27,000 teachers across the Basque region, Spain strike for better pay and conditions

Thousands of teachers, kitchen staff, cleaners and other school staff demonstrated in Bilbao, Spain January 22, as part of a two-day strike by 27,000 teachers to improve pay and conditions in education. More strikes are planned for February.

The Steilas teachers' union, Basque Workers Solidarity union, LAB Basque Union and the Spanish COOO Workers' Commissions union members demand the Basque Autonomous Community government match pay to the cost of living, increase staff, reduce workloads and guarantee job security.

Thousands of technology and chemical workers in six-day strike for pay at 50 manufacturers in Finland

Over 13,000 chemical and technology workers employed by 50 companies at 97 different factories in Finland started a six-day strike Monday to force an improvement in their pay and conditions through a collective agreement.

The Industrial Union members have been supported by sympathy strikes from the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, Service Union

United, the Electrical Workers' Union and Construction Trades Union members. The workers demand a 10 percent rise in salaries as part of any agreement and have planned two more follow-up strikes in February.

Thousands of German DHL-employed postal workers strike for pay rise

Over 13,000 workers at DHL-owned Deutsche Post held a 24-hour warning strike Tuesday in the German cities of Bitburg, Wittlich, Mainz and Trier.

They walked out in support of their Verdi union contract negotiations, which include a 7 percent pay increase and more paid leave. Multinational logistics giant DHL employs 170,000 at Deutsche Post.

Currently, 2.5 million public sector employees, 180,000 railway workers, 100,000 Lufthansa ground workers and thousands of bus drivers are also involved in contract disputes throughout Germany. In Stuttgart and many cities in Baden-Württemberg, 9,000 bus drivers are on strike for a 9 percent pay rise.

Port and dock workers in Northern France strike against pension and retirement changes

Port workers at Le Havre and Calais, France held a four-hour stoppage January 23 to protest pension reforms. Freight and passenger transport was affected. Further extended walkouts are planned for January 27, 29-31 and February 3-4.

The General Confederation of Labour members want to pressure the government on new pension rules, particularly around early retirement, which they say should not apply to port workers due to the hard physical nature of their work and historic exposure to asbestos.

Strike at business support company at two UK sites over pay

Around 1,000 UK employees of multinational business support company, Capita, based in Manchester and Glasgow, walked out Wednesday for a week.

The Unite union members are protesting Capita's refusal to make a pay offer due April 2024. After failing to meet the April deadline, Capita said it would make an offer in October but again failed to do so. The staff involved at Capita's offices in Glasgow, Manchester and Plymouth work on accounts for investment and insurer giant Royal London.

The union members at the three offices were balloted and voted to strike. At the beginning of the week, however, Capita made an offer to its Plymouth staff and Unite cancelled their planned action. Picket lines were mounted at the Manchester and Glasgow sites.

Strike by housing maintenance workers in UK London borough over leave allowance

Around 160 housing and estate service workers employed in the London

borough of Southwark began a three-day walkout on Wednesday.

The Unite union members are pushing for additional leave. The maintenance workers are currently entitled to 27 days leave but those managing the service are entitled to an additional 12 days. The lowest-paid technicians get two days less than higher-paid colleagues.

Protests by casually employed oil workers in Iranian capital over pay and working conditions

Around 2,000 casually employed workers from oil, gas and petrochemical facilities across Iran protested outside the Islamic Republic presidential office in Tehran on January 24.

Among their demands were the complete removal of contractors, the right to unionise, reinstatement of sacked workers, payment of wages arrears, job security and better working conditions.

They were not intimidated by security forces, present in large numbers.

Tuesday saw protests by casual workers at the Fajr Jam Gas Company, who also raised demands against the exploitative role of contractors and low wages. On the same day, permanent employees at the Iranian Offshore Oil Company in the Lavan area held a further protest over demands including higher pay.

With inflation at 31.7 percent and the poverty rate around 30 percent, living standards will deteriorate further as the Trump administration intensifies its war plans against Iran.

Protests by teachers and public sector workers in Iraqi city of Sulaymaniyah over wage arrears

On Tuesday, teachers and public sector workers in the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdish area of Iraq marched to the United Nations office to protest unpaid wages. They have yet to receive December and January's pay.

On Saturday, teachers resumed their boycott of schools in their ongoing fight for wage arrears.

The wage arrears arise from ongoing tensions between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Ministry of Finance, with each blaming the other.

Hospitals in Nigerian capital city on go-slow due to doctors' stoppage

Doctors in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory around the city of Abuja walked out on January 20, disrupting health services. Some hospitals ran only skeleton services.

A patient at Nyanya General Hospital said, "There are no doctor services available. Only some nurses and the record department are on duty, but doctors are absent."

The doctors' main grievances include six months of unpaid salary arrears, delayed clothing allowances and unpaid hazard allowances.

Judicial workers in Abia, Nigeria on strike over pay

Judicial workers in Abia State, Nigeria are in the fourth week of a strike begun January 2 to demand implementation of the new minimum wage stipulated in the Consolidated Judicial Salary Structure.

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) members want a salary increase of 25-35 percent and the minimum N35,000 wage award agreed last year. Judicial workers in 12 states and the Federal Capital Territory throughout Nigeria are ready to strike over the same issues but are kept at work by JUSUN, awaiting the expiry of a 21-day ultimatum issued on January 20.

Ethiopian call centre workers strike to oppose low pay and mistreatment

Around 400 employees of the telecom company, Safaricom, in Ethiopia began strike action on January 20 to oppose their low pay and mistreatment. The company is reported to have illegally dismissed 80 employees in March.

The Ison Xperiences Trade Union accused the company of illegal wage discrimination and bias on the grounds of language and identity.

Safaricom Ethiopia is a subsidiary of the global telecom giant Safaricom. Its operations in Ethiopia began in June 2021.

Nurses strike at hospital in Gqeberha, South Africa, over unpaid overtime

Nurses and other health workers at Dora Nginza Hospital in Gqeberha, South Africa have been on strike since January 20.

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa and National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers members demand overtime pay, outstanding since October.

The workers set alight tyres outside the hospital in protest. They are forced to do overtime due to staff shortages, a situation across the health system in South Africa. Management promised payment would be honoured by February 10.

Unemployed doctors in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa stage sit-in to demand jobs

On Monday, doctors in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa staged a sit-in outside the provincial health department's headquarters in Pietermaritzburg.

Around 150 newly qualified doctors are unemployed, a situation occurring each year despite staff shortages. One doctor held a placard that declared: "Striking for a chance to save lives." Another demand was for improved healthcare in rural communities.

The government responded by advising the doctors to seek employment in the private sector or overseas.

Striking South African workers at Ray Nkonyeni Municipality continue stoppage until sacked colleagues are reinstated

Striking South African municipal workers at Ray Nkonyeni Municipality are determined to stay out until five suspended colleagues are reinstated.

Workers have refused to collect rubbish in a wildcat protest ongoing since the beginning of December. They are owed over six months back pay incurred due to salary upgrades. The South African Municipal Workers Union accepted three months' back pay.

Workers slammed the union for ignoring their demands and agreed at a meeting last week that before the union begins negotiations on grading and backpay issues, the sacked workers must get their jobs back.



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