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**Belgium**

# **“Country at a standstill”**

- News from around the world -

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**The mainstream media, such as the BBC, are headlining the scope of the nationwide strike in Belgium on 15 December which “has brought air, rail and road transport to a standstill and forced many businesses to close”.**

The 24-hour strike is the largest to have taken place in Belgium for many years. It has forced government offices and schools to close, and the country's ports have been blockaded.

This is the latest in a series of strikes protesting against the new centre-right coalition's austerity policies by which it plans to save €11bn (Â£8.7bn) in the next five years. Unions are opposing a decision by Charles Michel - Belgium's new leader - to scrap a cost-of-living wage rise next year. Belgian law currently mandates that wages rise at the same pace as inflation. They are also protesting against public sector cutbacks and plans to increase the retirement age.

The movement started on 6 November with a massive demonstration [1] and has continued in the intervening period with local and provincial strikes every Monday.

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[1] See previous article [120,000 demonstrators against Michel 1!](#).