

Iceland: indefinite public sector strike in Reykjavik; Air France pilots' conduct stoppage; transport workers join South African museum strikers to petition parliament

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 February 2020

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

Icelandic capital municipal city workers on indefinite strike

The strike by 1,850 municipal workers employed by the city of Reykjavik, Iceland begun on February 17 is continuing. Strikers include school staff, welfare and refuse collection workers. The Efling union members are demanding an increase in basic pay.

A further 500 workers in the same union at five additional smaller municipalities are currently being balloted for strike action. If the ballot is in favour, an indefinite strike will begin March 9.

Over 15,000 public sector workers, including hospital workers, school staff, recreational centre workers and social services staff, are to walk out on March 9. The BSRB public sector union members voted by a more than 85 percent majority for action. They are demanding a new work contract, as their previous contract ran out in April. They have been working without a contract since then.

The union, however, is in talks to avert the strike.

Strike by French airline pilots

Pilots working for the Air France budget airline arm Hop walked out on Monday until Thursday. The pilots will then strike each Friday until April 30.

Hop employs 2,500 staff including 750 pilots. The Syndicat National des Pilotes de Ligne (SNPL) union members want pay and working conditions in line with Air France pilots. They put in a claim for a six percent rise against Hop's offer of three percent.

Overtime ban by baggage handlers at Finnish airport

Baggage handlers at Helsinki-Vantaa airport held an overtime ban on

the weekend of February 21-23. The Finnish Aviation Labour Union members are demanding a new contract agreement. The previous contract expired mid-January.

Finland has been hit by strikes, strike threats and other forms of industrial action over the last few months. In December, following his mishandling of a widespread postal strike, Prime Minister Antti Rinne was forced to resign, to be replaced by Sanna Marin.

UK: Further action by rail guards at South Western Railway

Train guards employed by the South Western Railway company are to hold a 24-hour strike from 10am on March 9 and again on March 12. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposing the extension of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

It is the sixth set of strike actions taken by RMT members at South Western Railway, which operates out of London and serves southwest England. Their last tranche of action was 27 days of strikes in December.

The strike is part of a long-running dispute over the use of DOO trains, which threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guard jobs. Action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at several private train operating companies. The RMT has isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

Strike by Georgian miners

Miners at the Dzidziguri mine in Tkibuli, western central Georgia went on strike this week over working conditions. Their main complaint is having to walk six kilometres to the coalface, as the train which normally carries them is not running due to damage.

Some of the workers at the mine went on strike in September last year over wages arrears.

Italian airline union calls off strike, citing Coronavirus

The Italian airline union FIT CISL called off a planned strike on Tuesday citing the impact of Coronavirus. A union spokeswoman told press the union did not want to cause further disruption.

The proposed 24-hour national strike would have involved air traffic control and other aviation workers. Among the issues air traffic controllers sought to highlight was staff shortages, causing safety concerns.

The FIT CISL was informed of plans by Alitalia to shut some routes and cut fleet numbers as the airline seeks to address financial problems. The announcement came as plans for a consortium of investors to take over Alitalia fell through. The airline remains in extraordinary administration.

Strike threat by Cypriot bus workers

Drivers working for the Zenon bus company in the Cypriot coastal city of Larnaca have threatened to hold an indefinite strike from March 4. The Peo, Sek and Deok union members are demanding that deductions from their wages are paid into their target funds. Deductions have been made for saving funds, union dues, medical insurance and welfare provision but the money has not been passed on.

The workers say they will strike unless the money is paid to the relevant funds. A threatened strike in January over non-payment of December wages was called off after the Cypriot transport minister intervened to secure the payment of the arrears.

Rehab staff in northwest England towns to strike

Around 30 workers at the charity Addaction in Leigh and Wigan, northwest England, were to strike Thursday until March 4. The Unison union members offer support to drug- and alcohol-dependent clients. They are seeking parity in pay and conditions, with staff directly employed by the National Health Service (NHS) carrying out similar roles.

The support workers acted over the same issue last year and as a result Addaction promised them parity with NHS staff. However, the charity reneged on the promise and in January the staff voted by a 100 percent majority for the current action.

Staff are angry that the charity is saying it cannot afford to give them pay parity and yet has spent money on a costly rebrand of the service.

Strike vote by UK animal charity workers

Staff at the UK animal charity, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) have voted by a 73 percent majority to strike. The Unite union members are opposed to the RSPCA trying to implement a new contract based on performance pay, which could lead to a pay cut of between £2,000 and £4,000 a year for an experienced inspector.

The union also accuses the RSPCA of employing bullying tactics to impose the new contract before the 31 March deadline. Unite represents less than half of the 1,700 RSPCA workforce. Unite has yet to name dates for any proposed strike days and has made clear to RSPCA it is open to further negotiations.

Refuse workers in London borough to strike

Around 250 refuse workers employed by the outsource company Veolia for the London borough of Tower Hamlets are to begin a week-long stoppage at 3pm on March 9. The Unite union members voted by more than 95 percent on a 70 percent turnout for the action.

The refuse workers are demanding holiday pay arrears, owed to around 150 of them, of up to £9,000. Rather than just reimburse their workers, Unite accuses the company of making them go through a complicated legal process to retrieve the money.

Veolia's contract with Tower Hamlets is to end in April, when the service will be taken back in-house.

Striking South African museum and transport workers petition parliament

Hundreds of striking workers from the Iziko Museum dispute demonstrated February 20 alongside transport workers and handed a petition to parliament. Joining them were workers from the Robben Island museum, whose pay strike was recently suspended by the union.

The transport workers are demanding changes in the Passenger Rail Services of South Africa's Metrorail. They are concerned over attacks on railway staff and passengers and want 12 security guards on each station.

The Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) threatened an occupation of the Metrorail organiser's office in 14 days if the demands are not met.

National Education Health and Allied Trade Union (NEHAWU) members at Iziko museum are demanding a 12 percent pay increase, equality of working conditions and the integration of casual workers. Negotiations between South African museums management and the unions have broken down.

The NEHAWU representative at Iziko, a curator, complained that a university graduate who becomes a curator is on the same pay as their counterparts with ten years' experience.

South African public sector workers demonstrate over wage cut threat

Public sector workers demonstrated Wednesday across South Africa against wage cuts. NEHAWU members are threatening to shut down the African National Congress (ANC) government if it introduces wage cutting in its budget.

NEHAWU is one of the largest unions in the government-affiliated trade union federation, COSATU.

The government wants to review a three-year wage agreement struck in 2018 to look for reductions in public expenditure and avoid an expected pay rise on April 1.

Other cost-cutting proposals includes the loss of 30,000 jobs in the public sector. The job massacre is extended to bankrupt South African airlines and the power utility company Eskom.

Unions affiliated to the South African Federation of Trade Unions are planning to support the demonstration to protest the unions not being consulted over the job losses and wage cutting programmes.

South Africa health workers threaten to strike over suspended hospital refurbishment

Health workers at the Laetitia Bam Day Hospital in KwaNobuhle, Uitenhage, South Africa have threatened to strike after refurbishment work was suspended.

Four of the contractors carrying out the R3.9 billion refurbishment of patient facilities have withdrawn because the municipal authorities have run out of money and not paid them.

The NEHAWU members are threatening to withdraw their labour because the air-cooling and ventilation systems are out of action—important for reducing the spread of diseases. Staff areas are used for treating patients. Doctors use the switchboard room for consultations and nurses take breaks outside the building.

Nurses in Limpopo, South Africa campaign for the removal of “incompetent” health minister

Nurses are calling for the removal of the Minister for Health in Limpopo, South Africa for incompetence.

The Young Nurses Indaba Trade Union (YNITU) members say there is a crisis in the Limpopo health system, citing shortage of nurses and midwives, dangerous working conditions, and the need to end casual labour. Clinics on the main roads are renovated, whereas the ones in the poor rural areas are severely neglected.

The Limpopo health department withdrew bursaries last June from 540 doctors, nurses, pharmacist and other health professionals, even though there is a 50 percent shortage of trained employees.

South African firefighters demonstrate in overtime dispute

South African firefighters continued their dispute on Monday over unpaid overtime, demonstrating at the Cape Town Good Wood fire station.

The demonstration was organised to coincide with a court hearing opening Wednesday to deliberate the case, with the likelihood it will continue for several months.

The firefighters’ overtime ban was suspended by the South African Municipal Workers Union in October, leaving the court to resolve the dispute.

Workers from the Robben Island Museum suspended pay dispute were also present on the demonstration. They were initially demanding a 12 percent pay increase and referred to their present pay as apartheid-type wages.

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions continues to oppose workers’ demand for general strike

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) is stalling on calling a general strike despite workers’ demands for an all-out stoppage. Public sector workers, including doctors, have taken months of strike action to demand their wages are paid in US dollars to offset runaway inflation of

600 percent.

The attempt by the ZCTU to negotiate a minimum wage paid in Zimbabwe dollars or the Zimbabwe currency tied to the South African rand—in defiance of workers’ demands—was rejected by the government and employers.

ZCTU general secretary Japhet Moyo said, “As we report back to workers, we have no doubt that the only mandate we will be given is to call for a general strike.”

The government agreed to increase transport subsidies as workers on starvation wages cannot afford to travel to work.

Kenyan maternity hospital contract nurses strike over unpaid dues

Nurses walked out at the Pumwani Maternity Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya over unpaid remittances.

Sixty-five contract nurses braved threats that they would lose their jobs if they took strike action. They are demanding dues unpaid since October are paid to the relevant claimants. Management reneged on a promise to carry out the nurses’ demand.

The hospital is recruiting a scab labour force while the strikers picket the hospital and the hospital appeals to strikers to return to work, again promising the payments.

Health workers strike and threatened strike in two Kenyan counties

Kenyan health workers in Kisumu County are continuing their week-long stoppage to demand unpaid wages. Around one in ten medical staff have been paid while others are still waiting, as the County health authority is looking for ghost workers (workers on the books who do not exist) under the prospect of cutting the wage bill.

A strike notice was issued this week by doctors in Nyamira County over the implementation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement. The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union members have not been paid and have given the health authority 14 days to respond or a strike will ensue. Workers are demanding the 2017 Collective Bargaining Agreement be fully implemented, including conditions for earned promotions.

Ghanaian doctors threaten strike to demand government honours agreed contract

Ghanaian doctors have threatened strike action unless the government honours its part of a Conditions of Service contract. The General Medical Association says if the government does not meet its side of the deal, signed January 1, by February 29 they will call a stoppage.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact