

French hospital practitioners strike against regrading; protests by Iranian farmers, workers and pensioners

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 March 2021

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

Strike by engineers servicing fighter planes in northern England continues

Discontinuous strike action by UK engineers servicing fighter planes at RAF Leeming in North Yorkshire continues. They are employed by Babcock International.

The Unite union members are protesting a disparity in overtime pay with colleagues carrying out similar duties at RAF Valley in Wales. The Leeming workers say they are around £5,000 a year worse off than their Welsh counterparts. The action, begun January 20, was stepped up to three days a week from March 2, to last until March 26. Workers are maintaining socially distanced picket lines.

Strike by civilian staff at UK nuclear bases

Around 1,000 workers at the Coulport and Faslane naval bases on the Clyde in Scotland are to strike today. The bases service the UK nuclear submarine deterrent force.

The Unite union members voted for industrial action by a 95 percent majority on a 65 percent turnout. They work for Babcock Industrial, Babcock Non-Industrial and ISS Facility Services at the bases. They are seeking an improved pay offer, having rejected a 1.1 percent pay increase for 2020, imposed on the workforce without consultation. They are also seeking bargaining rights. The strike comes after a ban on overtime and a refusal to respond to callouts.

Unite has also raised concerns that the outsourcing company Capita, which operates the emergency fire service cover at the bases, is planning to cut eight posts.

Further strike by porters at hospital in Birmingham, UK over new work rotas

Around 140 porters at the Heartlands hospital in Birmingham, walked out on Monday and Tuesday this week. A further two-day strike is planned for March 24. They have taken over 20 days of strike action since last autumn.

The Unison union members are protesting the imposition of a new flexible rota with several different start times by University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust. The porters previously worked fixed rotas and could fit in caring and childcare around them. They began their action before the imposition of the new contract. However, under the threat of dismissal they signed up to the new rotas but continued the dispute. The Hospital Trust is chaired by former Labour government Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.

Walkout by health staff at London hospital over underpaid wages

UK cleaning staff and porters working for the Epsom & St Helier NHS Trust in London walked out on March 5 over underpayment of wages. In 2018, the workers were outsourced to the contractor, Mitie. After the walkout the GMB members held a short protest outside the hospital.

Strike by IT staff at London tenant referencing service

Around 20 UK staff working for Goodlord in London began a discontinuous stoppage on February 22, that escalated to an indefinite strike from March 1. Goodlord provides checks on potential tenants for estate agents.

The Unite union members employed by the company on rolling fixed term contracts took action after the company cut their pay by 20 percent. Unite called for Goodlord to lose its Living Wage Foundation accreditation as the pay cut would mean it no longer qualifies.

Staff at University of Central Lancashire vote to strike over job cuts

University academic staff at the University of Central Lancashire have voted for industrial action over job cuts. The University and College

Union (UCU) members voted by an 88 percent majority for action short of a strike—refusing to do unpaid overtime—and by a 79 percent majority to strike. They are opposed to plans to cut six posts in the Faculty of Culture and Creative Industries. College management want to cut 67 posts altogether.

The university blames budget deficits for the job cuts, yet sits on £100 million of reserves. These proposed cuts come on top of the loss of 200 posts through voluntary redundancy.

The UCU's major complaint is that the cuts would be on a compulsory basis and not "voluntary". UCU general secretary Jo Grady was quoted saying, "The university needs to halt these cuts. It has already cut hundreds of staff over the past 18 months whilst seeing an increase in student numbers... We now have a clear mandate for action, and we hope the university halts the compulsory redundancies to prevent any further damage to its reputation."

Strike vote at two UK courts over COVID-19 fears

UK staff at Liverpool's Law Courts and London's Snaresbrook Crown Court voted in favour of strike action over COVID-19 concerns.

The Public and Commercial Services union members accuse the court authorities of not taking workplace safety seriously. They are calling for safety marshals to maintain COVID-19 security measures, and for routine lateral flow tests to be carried out in all court buildings.

Lecturers at Scottish college ballot for industrial action

Lecturers at West Lothian College in Scotland are balloting for industrial action. They previously voted twice in favour of balloting for industrial action in consultative ballots. The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) members oppose college management's plans to replace lecturer posts with lower-paid instructor roles. Similar attacks are taking place at colleges across Scotland.

EIS Further Education Lecturers Association (FELA) general secretary Larry Flanagan told the *Union News* website, "The EIS FELA would prefer not to be taking industrial action and is calling for the college to reverse its position and commit to the centrality of lecturers to deliver high quality college education to students."

UK parking wardens at London council in strike ballot

Around 40 UK traffic enforcement staff in the London borough of Ealing will begin balloting for strike action on March 12. The Unite union members, who work for the outsourcing company Serco, accuse the company of attempting to carry out a restructuring of the workforce, cutting posts which target elected union representatives and activists. The ballot closes April 6.

French hospital staff continue one day a week strikes over regrading

French hospital practitioners including anaesthetists, psychologists, paediatricians, surgeons and cardiologists are continuing to strike one day a week against regrading. They began the strikes January 11. The SNPHAR-E union describe the regrading as "divide and conquer" to offset health workers longstanding opposition to low pay.

Practitioners at CH Eure-Seine hospital wrote in a letter that those with 24 years of seniority have been given new opportunities for progression, and progression is faster for those hired after November 2020. Those early in their career have lost out, particularly young practitioners with up to four years of seniority (grades 1-4) who have been reclassified as grade 1, losing up to four years of progression.

The reclassification was announced in October last year, following the "Ségur" public health system consultation, with faster progression for new hospital practitioners touted as a way to fill the 30 percent of posts vacant across France.

In a union survey released December 8, 80 percent of surveyed practitioners registered opposition to the regrading. The union reported that in CH Annecy Genevois alone, between 35 and 65 percent of the approximately 240 practitioners have taken part in the weekly strikes.

French bus drivers strike at three garages in Strasbourg

Around 70 bus drivers at three garages in Strasbourg, France are continuing a strike ongoing since February to demand holiday pay and pay for time spent at work but not driving, in line with a similar pay rise given to administrative staff.

The CFDT union members are employed by the Striebig Autocars subsidiary of the multinational transport company Keolis, which employs over 68,500 employees in 15 countries.

A union representative told local news site *Rue 89 Strasbourg* they had tried to make their demands during 2019 negotiations with the company, and attributed the situation to "exorbitant rents and costs paid by the Striebig Autocars subsidiary to the Keolis group."

Stoppage by German call centre workers at DB Direkt, Frankfurt

German workers at the call centre subsidiary of Deutsche Bank, DB Direkt in Frankfurt, have taken a fifth week of strike action to demand a rise in pay described by a DBV union official as "barely above the minimum wage." The strikes occurred amidst talks between Deutsche Bank and the two unions Verdi and DBV, who are calling for a six percent pay increase for the 650 employees.

Deutsche Bank's offer falls short of even this modest claim. Deutsche Bank has provoked anger from the workers by expanding its bonus pool to over 1.8 billion euros, over a third of which goes to the investment bankers who already have an average salary of €230,500. Higher-earning staff are expected to see up to 20 percent increases in their 2020 bonuses. One DB Direkt employee ridiculed the company's claim that the minor raises for call centre workers are a "fair and sustainable offer," writing "There's enough money for investment bankers but not for us."

Union calls off doctors' strike in Madrid, Spain after one day

A strike of over 5,000 Spanish primary care doctors in Madrid begun Wednesday, March 10, was called off by the Amys union after one day. The union cited the announcement of early regional elections in Madrid as “leaving the doctors without any interlocutor in the face of a possible negotiation,” according to *Europa Press*.

The strike was part of a long-running dispute over issues including staffing levels in primary care. According to *ABC*, there are more than 650 unfilled vacancies for family doctors in the city, and only 40 percent of positions for paediatricians are filled. Amys points out that only half of family doctors and paediatricians who finished their residencies in May stayed in Madrid, after the Community of Madrid offered them “garbage contracts.”

The union called off previous strikes on the basis of signed promises to hire more staff and reduce bureaucratic duties, which the Ministry of Health reneged on. Rather than mobilising the thousands of doctors prepared to fight for decent working conditions and a functioning healthcare system, Amys has sown illusions that healthcare workers can rely on bourgeois politicians to enact reforms, saying “Now is the turn of electoral campaigns and of political confrontation,” and “Public representatives must provide a solution and rescue primary care.”

Coca-Cola workers to strike in Spain

Three days of strikes have been called in response to a restructuring plan at Coca-Cola Iberian Partners, leading to 360 job losses in Spain. The CSIF union announced its members and those of other unions in the affected Coca-Cola centres would take two days of strike action next week, and one day the week after.

CSIF accepts the company’s claim that restructuring is necessary, complaining only that the plan is disproportionate, and calling for the job losses to be “converted into voluntary redundancies and redeployments.”

Hard hit by falling sales during the pandemic, Coca-Cola announced 4,000 voluntary redundancies at its US plants in August.

Suspension of two Italian construction workers for not wearing masks provokes two-hour walkout

Around 40 Sardinian construction workers walked out March 2, to protest the suspension of two colleagues. On February 18, the two workers were given a nine-day suspension by the metals company Portovesme for allegedly failing to wear their masks correctly.

The secretary of the Fillea Cgil union condemned the suspensions, saying “another procedure should have been followed, giving workers the opportunity to justify their conduct.”

Irish workers’ strike ballot against three redundancies at Cork Airport

A strike ballot is underway at Ireland’s Cork Airport over plans to make three further redundancies by the international facilities management company OCS. Before the pandemic, twenty workers were employed to assist wheelchair users by OCS, which reported over one billion euros in global turnover in 2018. The workforce has already been reduced to six.

Aviation officer for the SIPTU union, Tony Carroll, called on the company to accept either reducing hours or temporarily laying off staff until passenger numbers return to normal.

SIPTU represents the majority of workers at the airport but balloted only workers employed by OCS for strike action, claiming the airport would be unable to operate as nobody would cross the picket line. Last May, the state-owned Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) which runs Cork Airport announced up to 1,000 “voluntary” redundancies. Rather than calling for joint action between employees of OCS and DAA against job losses, the union appealed for the government to provide financial support, and for the companies to attend the Workplace Relations Commission.

Unions call off postal strike at Bpost Liège-Rive Gauche, Belgium

Around 100 workers employed by Bpost Liège-Rive Gauche, in Liège, Belgium have returned to work. The postal workers, who ensured service continued throughout the pandemic, walked out in protest at plans to transfer 17 jobs from the Grivegnée office to the main sorting centre in Awans, while the volume of post handled at Grivegnée remains the same.

The unions called off the action after Bpost limited the number of jobs transferred to 12—still a large portion of the approximately 150 workers employed at Bpost Liège-Rive Gauche, which serves the entire city.

Thierry Tasset, general secretary of the CGSP said workers were angry at being kept on the job while it is unsafe, and are not even prioritised for vaccination despite being in contact with large numbers of people.

Greek student protests in Athens and Thessaloniki

Thousands of Greek students wearing masks demonstrated in Athens and Thessaloniki Wednesday against education reforms and lack of safety measures against coronavirus in schools.

In Athens, secondary school and higher education students marched to the parliament. They are demanding a reduction in classroom numbers, more teachers and support staff and resources for hygiene.

In Thessaloniki, students protested the new education law, which allows special police to enter campuses. Police was banned in 1982, in response to the 1973 murder of student protestors at the Athens Polytechnic by the US-backed junta (1967-1974).

Protests by Iranian farmers, workers and pensioners

On Sunday, farmers in Hashtbandi in the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan went on strike. They were protesting the low prices for their onion crops. The say at the same time the prices they pay for fertiliser and pesticides are rising.

On Monday, petrochemical workers in the southwestern city of Mahshahr rallied in front of the city governor’s office. They were protesting delays in being paid their wages and other issues.

The same day, railway workers in the southwestern city of Nourabad, Arak held a strike and protest over non-payment of wages.

On Sunday, Iranian pensioners held their seventh nationwide protest this year. It was the fifth consecutive Sunday protest. Rallies were held in many cities, including Haft Tappeh, Shush, Tabriz and Tehran. They were

protesting the failure of the Iranian government to adjust pensions, eroded by devaluation of the rial and rising inflation rates.

In Tehran, the rally by pensioners in front of the Social Security Organisation offices was broken up by security forces.

South African municipal workers strike over alleged local government corruption

Municipal workers in Ndwedwe, near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa went on strike Tuesday to protest alleged corruption in the local municipality.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members say their manager is corrupt and has not followed proper procedure in tendering or staff recruitment. They are demanding his removal before they return to work.

Bus drivers in South Africa protest for COVID-19 payment

Over 100 bus drivers from the Algoa Bus Company, Port Elizabeth, South Africa stopped work and marched to the Department of Labour offices Tuesday, to demand money owed to them from the government's COVID-19 Temporary Employee Relief Scheme.

The workers—on short time since March—want to know how much was paid to the company and how much withheld. A Department of Labour official said a response will be given within 14 days.

South Africa has recorded 1,524,174 coronavirus cases and 51,015 deaths.

South African healthcare workers strike suspended by trade unions

A strike scheduled for Monday by healthcare workers including nurses and paramedics, in Limpopo province, South Africa, was suspended by the unions after workers refused to accept changes in working hours.

The members of seven unions, including the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, the National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union, the Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa, and the Public Servants Association say the decision to alter hours is a cost-saving exercise and would put extra pressure on them.

Workers were under pressure from management saying the strike is prohibited because the health sector is as an essential service, and the COVID-19 vaccine could be withheld from strikers.

They threaten to resume strike action in two weeks if the provincial health department does not concede.

Zambian mineworkers protest against delayed redundancy payments

On March 4, hundreds of mineworkers from the Konkola Copper Mine (KCM) demonstrated in Chingola in Zambia's Copperbelt against the delay of redundancy payments by majority owner, Vedanta Resources Limited.

The company says payment has been delayed by legal action to prevent the company's liquidation.

The government invited bids from mining companies based in Australia, Canada, China, Russia and Turkey, amongst others, to buy KCM. It accused the Indian-based company of violating the terms of its mining licence and not paying taxes but has taken no action against them other than court proceedings, ongoing for two years.

The Mineworkers Union of Zambia—affiliated to the IndustriALL Global Union—limited opposition to job losses solely to the issue of redundancy payments and supports the efforts of the government to sell the mine.

Ugandan street cleaners demonstrate to demand salary payments

Street cleaners in Lugazi, Uganda, overran their employers' offices to demand payment of four months salaries unpaid while they have been stopped from working due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the cleaners said, "It is now four months without pay, we work in very poor conditions because they do not give us gear. We have now decided to put down our tools until our salary is paid in full. We are really tired of the empty promises." The workers are also demanding provision of personal protective equipment.

The workers agreed to return to work based on promises to pay their salaries.

Uganda has recorded 40,520 coronavirus cases and 334 fatalities.

Nigerian Labour Congress reneges on strike threat

On March 4, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) threatened a strike by its members in Ekiti State over the dismissal of 21 workers, to begin March 10. The NLC said the strike would go ahead unless the Ekiti Assembly reinstated the dismissed workers.

The day after the strike was planned, there were no reports of action. It appeared that the NLC turned the strike into a protest over the minimum wage and a three-hour shutdown of the Ekiti State House of Assembly. The minimum wage is currently under threat.

The Speaker of the House gave his blessing to the protest and announced that a committee would investigate the dismissals.

The NLC lost a lot of credibility in 2020 when it claimed to be preparing for strike action and a nationwide demonstration against a government hike in the price of fuel, only to pull the plug at the last minute.

Malawi teachers told by union to accept paltry rise and end strike

Teachers in Malawi went on strike on March 8, but the Teachers Union of Malawi ordered a return to work the following day without their demands being achieved. The strikers want a monthly COVID-19 risk allowance of K35,000 each.

A promise was made to pay an allowance of K10,000. Many members defied the return to work, with primary schools in Geisha, Kazando and Nambod remaining closed. The Malawi government is paying K70,000 to some individuals, but it is not clear what criteria are used to determine who gets the payment.

Malawi has had 32,614 coronavirus cases with 1,077 deaths.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact