

UK bus drivers' 24-hour strike at London United while French drivers at same company walk out; strikes in Belgium by childcare workers, prison officers and social workers; resident doctors across Nigeria strike over salary 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.

Europe

UK bus drivers' strike at London United against attacks on pay and conditions

London bus drivers at RATP-owned subsidiary London United held a 24-hour strike Wednesday at five depots, the eighth strike during the dispute. The Unite union members are opposed to proposed changes in their contracts including remote signing on, which will leave them around £2,000 a year worse off.

The strike hit 52 routes across south and west London. A further strike is planned for April 15. Drivers at Stamford Brook and Hounslow Heath depots voted to join the action from April 15, meaning all seven London United depots will be involved in the dispute.

Drivers at two other London RATP subsidiaries, London Sovereign and Quality Line, were also involved in strikes over pay and conditions, but Unite called off action after pushing through rotten pay deals. Strikes at London United were also suspended for talks but these broke down and strike action resumed.

Drivers for RATP in France also walked out on April 2 for a pay rise and against privatisation.

Strike by aerospace workers at UK plant continues against "fire and rehire"

Around 200 workers at the UK aircraft parts manufacturer SPS Technologies in Leicester are continuing a stoppage begun March 29, due to last until June 3. They previously held one-day strikes beginning in March.

The Unite union members oppose company plans to "fire and rehire,"

imposing a new contract which will mean an annual wage loss of between £2,500 and £3,000. SPS Technologies is a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, an American conglomerate owned by billionaire Warren Buffett.

Last year 60 workers were made redundant. Many of the workers involved in the dispute have decades of service with the company.

Further strike by train conductors at ScotRail, Scotland against attacks on overtime pay

Several hundred train conductors working for Scottish rail transport company ScotRail held a further one-day strike Sunday, following a one-day strike on March 28. They are also working to rule. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members are protesting being paid a lower rate of overtime than train drivers. Further strikes are planned for April 11, 18 and 25.

Strike by teachers at school in Poole, England against attacks on pay and conditions

Teachers at the Victoria Education Centre in Poole on the English south coast held a one-day strike on March 24, followed by a two-day strike on March 30. The school is run by Livability (disability charity) and caters for children with physical disabilities or complex neurological conditions.

They took action after Livability brought in new, inferior contracts which were not in line with nationally agreed conditions. Sick and maternity pay were downgraded. National Education Union members took action on the three days and were joined by National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers members on March 30 and 31. A three-day strike is planned for April 20 to 22.

Pay strike by water workers in southwest England

UK workers at Bristol Water held a one-day strike Tuesday, following one the previous week. They are protesting a derisory 1.5 percent pay rise following a pay freeze. The GMB members voted by 75 percent to take action.

The company's CEO received a £300,000 bonus last financial year on top of his £240,000 a year salary.

Strike by IT staff at London tenant referencing service against pay cuts

Around 20 UK staff working for Goodlord in London are continuing their indefinite strike, begun March 1. On February 22, they began discontinuous strikes, before escalating on March 1. Goodlord provides checks on potential tenants for estate agents.

The Unite union members, employed by the company on rolling fixed-term contracts, walked out after the company cut pay by 20 percent, a form of fire and rehire. Under the new contract they would see salary cuts of up to £6,000 leaving staff on annual pay of around £18,000, less than the current London Living wage of £21,157. Unite called for Goodlord to lose its Living Wage Foundation accreditation, as the pay cut would mean it no longer qualifies.

The strikers planned a picket outside Goodlord headquarters on Thursday and Friday.

Naval civilian workers in southwest England to strike over new rosters

Around 40 tugboat crew workers at the Devonport naval dockyard plan to walk out Friday and Saturday. They work for outsourcing company Serco Marine. The Unite union members are in opposition to new three weeks on/three weeks off rosters which began in December, that workers say affect their health and present safety risks.

Planned strikes over Christmas were suspended for government mediation service Acas-sponsored talks, but they broke down.

Staff at Thurrock council in England facing pay cuts announce strike dates

Workers providing refuse, highway maintenance and street cleaning at Thurrock council, Essex are to take continuous strike action beginning April 13 until May 7 (excluding May 3 bank holiday). The Unite union members are opposing plans by the council to cut salaries by £2,000 to £3,500 a year. Unite says it is committed to further discussions with the council to avoid industrial action.

Unite union calls off strike at UK's London Heathrow airport

The Unite union has called off a planned series of 41 targeted strikes over 24 days due to begin April 2, at London Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL).

The airside operations, baggage handling, engineering and security staff have already taken nine strike days in opposition to plans to cut pay up to 25 percent, with some workers set to lose around £8,000. HAL threatened to fire and rehire workers to enforce acceptance of the deal.

HAL put forward a new deal including a five percent pay rise over two years, dependent on inflation and what air traffic the airport is able to register following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. Unite is putting the deal to its membership, and a result is expected at the end of April.

UK court security staff set dates for pay strike

UK court security staff working for contractor OCS across England and Wales plan a three-day strike beginning April 13, followed by one beginning April 20. The 400 Public and Commercial Services union members voted by over 90 percent to strike. They have rejected a pay increase of 13p an hour.

Academic staff at English midlands university ballot for industrial action against redundancies

UK academics at Leicester University are to be balloted for industrial action. A consultative ballot on a majority turnout voted two-thirds in favour of taking action. The University and College Union (UCU) members are opposed to plans announced by management to push through 145 compulsory redundancies.

Since the announcement, the number reduced slightly as some staff took voluntary redundancy. Management denies the cuts are being driven by financial difficulties, but the university had to borrow money last financial year.

Vote to strike by engineers at plant in Telford, England

Around 250 engineers at GKN Wheels and Structures in Telford, England which makes wheels for the agriculture, mining and construction sectors, have voted to strike. This follows an indicative consultative vote.

The GMB members are opposed to the company's plans to cut future redundancy payments.

Stena line shipping line workers at UK ports to be balloted for industrial action in defence of sick pay

Workers on the UK ships and ports of Swedish shipping company Stena Line will take part in a consultative ballot on whether they are prepared to take industrial action. The RMT union members are opposed to the scrapping of the company's sick pay scheme at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving workers relying solely on statutory sick pay if they became ill.

Environmental workers in east England to ballot for strike action over pay and conditions

Around 170 UK environmental workers in Norwich are being balloted for industrial action. This follows consultative votes in favour of being balloted for action. Unite union members voted by 85 percent on an 89 percent majority, and Unison members voted unanimously on a 100 percent turnout.

The dispute revolves around plans to transfer the workers from their current company Norse, owned by Norfolk County Council, to a newly set up company NCSL, owned by Norwich City Council. Originally the Labour Party-controlled city council promised the transfer would be on identical terms and conditions. Now, Norwich City Council is saying there is no money to guarantee a switch on equivalent terms, and the council will apply market terms and conditions.

RATP bus drivers in France strike for pay rise and against privatisation

Workers at the French state-owned public transport company RATP took a day of strike action April 2, to demand a higher pay rise than the 0.99 percent offered by the company. The CGT union members also oppose the future opening of bus services to competition from 2025, reports *Le Figaro*.

A protest also took place against RATP's threat to dismiss a CGT official accused of blocking a bus depot in the 2019-20 pension reform strikes.

French bus drivers strike against digital management system

Bus drivers in the French city of Rennes were on strike Saturday against the introduction of an "all-digital" system which would monitor and manage all the workers' activities. The CGT, CFDT and UNSA unions have demanded a consultation about the new system as well as financial compensation, reports *Ouest France*.

Supermarket and warehouse workers at Carrefour strike across France

Workers at supermarkets across France run by Carrefour went on strike April 3, following strikes across Carrefour warehouses the previous week. The strike was called by the CFDT and CGT unions after the largest union in Carrefour, Force Ouvrière, agreed to a mere 0.9 percent pay increase and a flat bonus of 200 euros, reports *Le Parisien*.

The CGT said the company gave all employees a 1,000 euro bonus the previous year. With even better results this year workers are demanding a 300 euro salary increase. More strikes are planned for April 8.

Childcare workers in Belgium one-day strike to denounce lack of Covid protection and government neglect

Workers in childcare centres across Wallonia and Brussels, Belgium walked out on April 1 in response to continual neglect by the regional Wallonia-Brussels Federation government, both in protection from Covid-19 and in implementing planned reforms. The strikers pointed to the lack of a Covid bonus, despite having worked throughout the pandemic, and that they have not been prioritised for vaccination.

According to *RTL*, under a reform currently being implemented, childcare workers are supposed to be hired as salaried employees by 2024, but many who do not have such a contract lost a lot of their income during the pandemic and have had to obtain their own PPE. The action was supported by the employers' body for childcare centres, issuing a joint statement with the unions criticising budget cuts for the sector which undermined the reforms.

Strike of prison officers in Brussels, Belgium over staffing levels

Prison officers across three prisons in the Brussels region of Belgium took 24 hours of strike action beginning on Thursday evening, to protest low staffing levels. A CGSP union official told *RTBF* that many officers had retired, resigned or were in quarantine due to the coronavirus pandemic, and that recruitment problems had left existing staff exhausted.

Belgian social workers end strike over workload

Social workers in the Belgian region of Schaerbeek ended a two-day strike on March 31. *RTBF* reports that 100-150 workers were involved. The strike was called in response to unmanageable workloads, demanding the current average 150-240 cases per social worker be reduced to around 100. The deal signed by the CGSP union included an agreement to pay twice the arrears for remote working in 2020 and set up a "working group" to "find solutions" to the high workloads.

Indefinite airport strike begins in Balearic Islands

On April 9, workers at Palma airport in the Balearic Islands, off the coast of Spain are to begin a stoppage which will continue for three days each week indefinitely.

The SITEIB union members are taking action after the company which has just taken over operations at the airport refused to lift temporary suspensions of its employees, put in place during the pandemic, despite an increase in passenger numbers. Quoted in *Europa Press*, the union says that this leaves an insufficient number of workers to deal with the increased traffic.

Cleaners at Spanish prison strike over unpaid wages

Cleaning workers at the Campos del Río prison in Spain began a week-long strike on Monday over unpaid wages, reports *Europa Press*. ADIMUL, the company which hires the cleaners, has not paid any wages since November, owing many workers over 5,000 euros.

The CCOO union has called on the government to pressure the company to pass the contract for the prison to another operator which will pay the wages.

Several strikes in Italy after workers killed in accidents

Construction workers in the Basilicate region of southern Italy took eight hours of strike action on March 31, to demand better training and safety measures after a colleague, Antonio Cavallucci, was killed the previous day. Cavallucci lost control of his vehicle on a temporary road created at the job site, reports *il Quotidiano del Sud*.

The following evening workers at the Silmet metal works in Lombardy in the north began a strike after another fatal accident. According to the *Corriere della Sera*, Marco Tucca was struck by a heavy beam at work on the evening of April 1, and died in hospital the next day. Over 150 workers at the plant stopped work after the accident, and the strike continued the next day. The CGIL union reported that safety rules in the Silmet plant were disregarded several times and demanded further measures to protect workers. They raised the case of another construction worker, Luigi Colleone, who died the morning of April 1, after an accident at a house under construction.

Supermarket workers in Sicily close stores on Easter weekend

A strike called by three unions representing supermarket workers in Sicily closed supermarkets on April 4/5, across the island. The strike was called after the unions had asked the regional president to close supermarkets over the Easter holiday, citing the exposure of workers to the risk of coronavirus infection while they had not been vaccinated, but were ignored, reports *Ansa*.

Portuguese firefighters begin strike over overtime wages

Thirty-two firefighters in Santarém, Portugal, began a strike on April 1, refusing to carry out non-emergency duties until May 1, to demand the “restoration of legality” of overtime wages. The National Union of Sapper-Firefighters in a statement to *Lusa* claimed firefighters are owed between 150 and 400 euros each, and that workers had “no choice but to strike” after negotiations with the city council failed to deliver results.

Portuguese radiologists strike to demand job security and better wages

Radiologists at the Alto Minho Local Health Unit in Portugal took two days of strike action starting March 30 after the company which operates the radiology service, LifeForce, sent dismissal letters as its current service contract expired, despite the fact that it was awarded the contract to continue running the service in future.

According to *Radio Alto Minho*, the 27 affected technicians began protests on March 23, demonstrating with slogans such as “my Covid

bonus was to get sacked,” and demanding wages equivalent to those paid by the hospital. The STSS union has said that LifeForce’s concessions after the protests were not enough, and that the hospital should not be outsourcing the service, but did not advance this demand, claiming “internalisation is not immediately possible.”

German hospital workers protest to denounce pay cuts

Workers at the hospitals run by the multinational Helios in Krefeld and Hüls, Germany, protested during their lunch break on March 30. The Verdi union members denounce the halving of the care allowance and real-terms pay cuts.

The union demanded a 5.5 percent pay rise, according to the *Rheinische Post*, and threatened to call a strike if the demonstration of around 350 workers was ignored. The *Märkische Oderzeitung* reports that a warning strike of around 100 nurses took place on the same day at the Helios clinic in Bad Saarow.

Protests by miners at Romanian energy company

More than 100 Romanian miners protested outside the headquarters of Complexul Energetic Oltenia on March 29, to demand clarity on the future of the coal and energy company, which has received a loan from the government to finance a restructuring plan, reported *Radio România*. Other CE Oltenia employees protested, for the eighth week, in front of Gori county prefecture to demand the retirement age be reduced in recognition of their difficult working conditions.

Serbian hospital workers protest in support of social distancing measures

Hospital workers in the Serbian city of Kraljevo stopped work for a protest on April 2, to draw attention to their working conditions and appeal for adherence to measures in place to halt the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Nova reports the Nezavisnost union called the 20-minute demonstration because the number of patients in hospitals was increasing and putting pressure on the health care service.

Hunger strike of workers in Montenegro over terminated contracts

Six workers at the Protection and Rescue Service in Nikšić, Montenegro began a hunger strike April 2, after the local administration terminated their contracts. *Tanjug* reports that three contracts, signed in December, had expired while three more were due to last until April 28.

A lawyer giving legal advice to the workers explained that the contract ignored legal norms, and workers were misled.

Middle East

Strike by Tunisian oil workers over pay and conditions

Oil workers at coastal town of Tazarka in Tunisia held a three-day strike beginning March 31. The workers are employed by the Italian Eni multinational oil and gas company. Among their demands are paid leave and enhanced promotion opportunities.

Africa

Nigerian resident doctors' strike demands payment of salary arrears

Resident doctors in Nigeria have been on strike over pay and allowances since April 1. The Nigerian Association of Medical Doctors members are demanding payment of all salary arrears, an increase in hazard allowance to 50 percent of basic salary for all health workers, and payment of outstanding COVID-19 allowances that remain largely unpaid in state-owned tertiary hospitals.

Resident (learning while providing healthcare) doctors comprise a large proportion of all doctors in the Nigerian tertiary (specialist) hospitals.

The Nigerian government threatened to impose the “no work, no pay” rule on the strikers. In Nigeria, workers in unions that are on strike are entitled to full salaries. The government can overrule this if the strike is deemed illegal or unjustified. Minister of Labour, Chris Ngige, described this as one of his “weapons in the labour laws” that he will invoke if the doctors become “recalcitrant.”

Nigeria has 163,498 reported cases of COVID-19 and 2,058 deaths.

Nigerian Supreme Court workers on indefinite strike

Judiciary workers at the Supreme Court in Abuja, Nigeria walked out on indefinite strike to demand the financial autonomy of the judicial arm of government. The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria members say this will make them less susceptible to government pressure.

The action is likely to be followed by workers in other courts around Nigeria.

Shoprite workers shut down stores in Nigeria

Retail workers have taken strike action, shutting down Shoprite stores across Nigeria since April 2, to demand the current owners pay them what they are owed before selling the company.

The Shoprite human resources manager denounced those on strike, saying they face being sacked unless they return to work.

On March 2, the National Union of Shop and Distributive Employees warned there would be a strike unless the company paid money owed to the workers. The union limited demands to this issue, supporting the sale of the company to Nigerian owners and failing to link up with Shoprite workers in other African countries. Shoprite is based in South Africa.

Shoprite workers in Namibia walked out in January over low pay and money owed. The strike was ended by the union with a pay increase less than half that originally demanded.

Teachers in Malawi resume strike after government reneges on COVID promises

Teachers in Malawi resumed their strike action on April 6, after the government failed to keep a promise to pay them COVID-19 risk allowance. The Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) gave the government a seven day ultimatum, but the government claimed it had no money to pay them.

The teachers were on strike previously in March, but the strike was ended by TUM without any of the teachers' demands being met. Teachers in a number of schools refused to follow the union order to return to work.

Malawi has 33,718 reported cases of COVID-19 and 1,125 deaths.

Firefighters demonstrate at mass disciplinary hearings in Cape Town, South Africa

Around 500 South African Fire and Rescue workers protested outside the civic hall in Cape Town March 30 as disciplinary hearings into their participation in an “illegal” strike two years ago began.

All 525 South African Municipal Workers Union members could face dismissal over their involvement in a strike against contracts stipulating a 56-hour working week. The grievance was not resolved and firefighters threaten further stoppages, saying “The charges are nothing but an attempt to instil fear among the workers and to dissuade them from demanding better working conditions.”

Staff and students at South African university continue protests to demand free education

Lecturers at Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa demonstrated April 1, in solidarity with students who are financially excluded from a university education.

The Academic Staff Association members say that employees, students and Wits itself, the highest ranked university in Africa, are victims of a funding crisis caused by the government. The students have protested for several weeks, demanding to be allowed to register for university even without the required fees. On March 10, a bystander was killed by police when they used stun guns and rubber bullets to disperse an earlier demonstration.

South African health workers demand permanent contracts at Johannesburg health centre

Health workers, employed as part of South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), picketed a community health centre in Johannesburg March 30, to demand permanent contracts.

The Independent Liberation and Allied Workers Union members had fixed-term contracts for the last 10 years. They lost out on benefits given to permanent employees, such as a COVID-19 allowance and compensation for death in service.

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector but without the salary or benefits afforded to direct employees.



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