

Spanish steelworkers at Tubacex in Alva province continue strike against redundancies; UK bus strikes continue at Go North West in Manchester and London United; Italian students at high school in Naples boycott classes over lack of Covid safety; delivery gig workers' strike in Nantes, France

## 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.*

### Striking steelworkers at Tubacex in Alva, Spain protest job cuts

Around 800 Spanish workers at multinational steel tube producer Tubacex in Alva province are continuing their strike begun February against an "ERE" redundancy scheme. On April 15, 129 job losses became effective. The following day a group of workers staged a protest in front of the Basque Parliament in Vitoria, to demand the government intervene.

The works council leading the dispute frequently appealed to the regional parliament, and the company itself has been happy to place the fate of its employees in the hands of capitalist politicians, having written to multiple Basque officials to justify the layoffs and ask for their support, reports *Europa Press*.

Demonstrations in support of the workers attracted thousands of supporters, with *EFE* reporting one recent demonstration in Bilbao of over 2,000 people. The unions however are isolating the Tubacex struggle from that of workers across Spain. Over 21,000 workers face redundancy under ERE schemes. The unions usually negotiate "voluntary" redundancy settlements, in which they can earn a commission for each job lost.

### Walkouts planned at Airbus in Spain against job losses

Spanish employees of multinational aeroplane manufacturer Airbus began a campaign of strikes this week against plans to close its plant in Puerto Real and to use an ERE to cut 600 jobs across the country. A day's walkout was announced by the Airbus-Illescas works council for Friday, and two more for April 27 and 29, reports *Europa Press*. This follows protests and mass meetings last week at Airbus factories across Spain

called in response to the company's restructuring plan.

### Workers at Defontaine in Spain to strike against closure

The 37 workers at the Viana factory of Defontaine Ibérica, the Spanish branch of the multinational aeronautic and auto parts manufacturer Defontaine, will begin an indefinite strike on April 26 after the company announced it would cease operations in Spain.

The ELA union called the stoppage after company lawyers said the entire workforce would be laid off, and called on the Navarra regional government to intervene, according to *Navarra.com*. The company employs around 1,500 workers internationally.

### National strike for pay and career progression at EDP Group in Portugal

Workers at the Portuguese energy company, EDP Group walked out on April 20 in a national one-day strike to demand a pay increase above the 0.5 percent offered by the company, and to call for improved career progression. The Fiequimetal inter-union federation also arranged a protest at the company headquarters in Lisbon, reports *Publico*.

The unions initially demanded a 90 euro increase for all the over 12,000 workers at EDP but after the company's insulting offer said this was "open to negotiation." The company made 801 million euros profit in 2020.

### Students at high school in Naples, Italy protest Covid unsafe return to classroom

This week, students in the Liceo Severi school in Castellammare Di Stabia, Naples, Italy refused to participate in lessons from Monday to Friday, either in-person or online. They are demanding distance learning is used for the rest of the school year, rather than the planned return of all students to classrooms on April 26. *Roma* reports that most students participated in the protest, with only two or three students remaining in each class.

Students of the Liceo Classico “Plinio Seniore” also protested the planned return to in-person teaching, with 50 percent of students supposed to attend in-person classes logging in to the distance learning platform instead.

Italy reported 3,904,899 coronavirus cases and 117,997 deaths.

### **Road blockage and strike against redundancies at Elica plant in Fabriano, Italy**

Around 300 workers in the town of Fabriano, Italy stopped work and staged a sit-down protest in the road on April 20 after the management of Elica announced a restructuring plan which would cut 409 of the 560 jobs at its Fabriano site.

According to *ANSA*, the company, which employs around 4,800 internationally, also announced plans to close its plant in Cerreto D’Esi and move production away from three of its Italian sites. The unions at Elica announced workers across the entire group would take action.

### **Strikes continue at ArcelorMittal Taranto, Italy after victimisation**

Stoppages continued this week at the Taranto plant of ArcelorMittal in Italy in support of worker Riccardo Cristello, fired for a post on his Facebook page recommending a recent drama. *Wake up my love* is based on a true story of health damage caused to residents near a steel mill.

From April 15 there has been a permanent sit-in by Cristello and a delegation from the USB union in front of the management offices. *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* reports that USB announced another day’s walkout and protest for April 22, and three other unions at the Taranto plant plan a one-day strike on April 24.

### **French delivery riders in Nantes strike for improved pay**

Nearly 300 delivery riders working for Uber Eats and Deliveroo in the city of Nantes, France, stopped work between the evenings of April 16 to 18, reports *France Bleu*. The riders organised the strike through a WhatsApp group to demand a minimum payment of 4.50 euros for each order, which can be as low as 95 cents, and campaigned for restaurant owners to support them by blocking orders for the weekend.

A previous protest of around 100 riders in Rennes led to a meeting with Uber Eats, denounced as a “false hearing” by one striker after the company announced a package of measures, which did not include a pay rise, and abolished the bonus payment for rainy conditions.

### **Workers at Fiat Plastic in Kragujevac, Serbia continue strikes against**

### **wage cuts and job uncertainty**

A demonstration is scheduled this Saturday in the Serbian city of Kragujevac in support of workers at the local Fiat Plastic factory, who have been stopping work for one hour each day since January 12 to demand the reversal of a 300 euros annual pay cut, reports *O21*.

The union at Fiat Plastic announced the strike will be escalated, and the protest will also denounce uncertainty over the future of production at the plant as Fiat introduces a new car model.

### **Stoppage at Kharkiv Aviation plant in Ukraine over wage arrears**

Workers at the Kharkiv Aviation plant in Ukraine walked out on April 15 and attended a rally of around 300 people to demand the repayment of wage arrears, unpaid since 800 hryvnias (around 24 euros) were paid in February 2020, reports *Unian*.

Across the whole company, unpaid salaries total approximately 400 million Hryvnia, around 12 million euros.

### **Dutch Teijin Aramid workers escalate pay strike**

Following a 12-hour strike on April 14, a vote of hundreds of workers at two Dutch factories of Japanese multinational Teijin Aramid rejected the employers’ pay offer, and an indefinite strike began Tuesday. The FNV union also called on logistical and office staff at the Emmen and Delfzijl factories to join the walkout.

### **Croatian social workers protest understaffing**

Social workers across Croatia took part in protests in front of local Social Welfare Centres called by the Social Welfare Union to oppose continued problems of low staffing levels and poor working conditions.

*Glas Istre* reports union comments that 1,700 additional skilled workers are needed in Croatia to provide adequate support. One Croatian social worker typically has a hundred families on their caseload, compared with 20 in other parts of Europe.

### **Strike at Spiro construction company in Russia over unpaid salaries**

On the morning of April 21, several dozen workers at the Spiro construction company in the North Kuril region of Russia stopped work and marched to the management offices, reports *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The stoppage followed three months delay in paying salaries, as well as problems with the quality of company housing and food, as well as work clothes.

The local prosecutor’s office is assessing whether the labour rights of the Spiro employees were breached.

## **Norwegian trade union federation calls off private sector strike, accepts below-inflation wage deal**

On April 11, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) announced a wage deal across the private sector, calling off a planned strike of 28,000 workers, reports *Reuters*.

The LO demanded an average pay increase of 2.8 percent when the annual inflation rate for 2021 so far is around three percent. The unions accepted the 2.7 percent increase offered by the employers' representatives, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise.

## **Strike by Go North West bus drivers in Manchester, England continues**

The strike, begun February 28 by nearly 500 bus drivers in Manchester, England at Go North West, part of the Go Ahead group, is continuing. Drivers are opposed to company plans to "fire and rehire" them by May 8, unless they accept an inferior contract leaving them worse off by £2,500 a year as well as less sick pay.

Attempting to break the strike, Go North West hired fleets of buses and coaches, along with drivers from several companies. The Go Ahead strike supporters' Facebook page listed 32 companies involved in the scabbing operation.

In the face of the strikebreaking operation, Unite is not appealing to Go Ahead workers at other garages across Britain or drivers from other companies to walkout in solidarity but is isolating the dispute.

The union is appealing to management, shareholders, potential investors, Tories like Jacob Rees Mogg and pro-business local politicians, including the Labour mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham. A Unite banner with a picture of Burnham proclaims, "companies that execute fire and rehire should not be awarded new bus contracts."

The union launched a petition calling on Burnham not to award contracts to companies promoting fire and rehire. The Labour authority, however, which has regulatory powers over local bus services, allowed Go North West to subcontract its routes to scab operators unhindered. Unite has also called on Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London to ban "fire and rehire" practices.

Unite offered Go North West £1.3 million in cost-cutting savings aimed at returning the company to "a healthy profit-making position." The profitable Newcastle upon Tyne-based Go Ahead group employs over 28,000 workers and has operations in Ireland, Norway, Singapore and Germany.

## **Further strikes by bus drivers at London United**

Bus drivers at all seven depots of RATP-owned subsidiary London United in the UK capital are due to walk out on Friday, with stoppages also planned for April 26 and May 7. They have taken 10 strike days, including the last on April 15.

The Unite union members are opposed to proposed contract changes including remote signing on, which will leave them around £2,000 a year worse off. The strike hit routes across south and west London.

Drivers at two other London RATP subsidiaries, London Sovereign and Quality Line, were also involved in strikes over pay and conditions, called off by Unite after pushing through rotten pay deals. Strikes at London

United were suspended for talks, but these broke down and strikes resumed.

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

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

Several hundred train conductors working for Scottish rail transport company ScotRail are to hold a one-day strike Sunday. It will be the fifth consecutive walkout on Sunday. The conductors are working to rule. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are protesting being paid a lower rate of overtime than train drivers.

An RMT press release did not mention further strike dates. Instead, it announced its plans to call on the Scottish Trades Union Congress to promote the ScotRail issue as part of a workplace justice campaign aimed at putting pressure on political parties taking part in the Scottish Assembly election.

The RMT recently betrayed the struggle against driver only operated trains (DOO) at South Western Railway, removing door safety operations from train guards. Over the past five years, the RMT isolated and dissipated the struggle by 6,000 guards and thousands of drivers at eight private rail franchises throughout the UK against DOO—threatening conductors' jobs and passenger safety as drivers take over the operation of train doors.

## **Further walkouts by Scottish lecturers over downgrading their roles**

Lecturers at Further Education colleges in Scotland walked out Tuesday and Wednesday this week. Their first strike was on March 25.

The Education Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association members are in an ongoing dispute over plans to downgrade their roles to instructors/assessors. The new role would come with lower pay and worse conditions such as less preparation time.

## **British Telecom specialist engineers continue stoppages to defend pay and conditions**

Around 170 British Telecom (BT) Openreach Repayment Project Engineers (RPEs) began a five-day strike Monday. They have walked out for 10 days in their ongoing dispute.

The Communication Workers Union members voted by an 86 percent majority on a 94 percent turnout to defend terms and conditions as a result of regrading.

BT want to regrade the workers by imposing a management grade. Current workers would keep their existing conditions, but new workers would be on the new grade losing overtime payments. RPEs perform a specialist role by working out the best re-routing of cables when major projects are undertaken.

## **Further strikes by teachers at school in Poole, England against**

## **attacks on pay and conditions**

Teachers at the Victoria Education Centre in Poole, England, who have already walked out for three days against attacks on pay and conditions, began a three-day strike Tuesday. A further 13 days of stoppage are planned. The school is run by Livability (disability charity) and caters for children with physical disabilities or complex neurological conditions.

The National Education Union (NEU) members are opposing new, inferior contracts that are not in line with nationally agreed conditions. Sick and maternity pay are downgraded. National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) members also held strikes coinciding with some of the NEU strike days.

The unions are to meet with management on April 28 for talks.

## **Three-day strike by teachers at school in Wolverhampton, England over work conditions**

Around 45 teachers at St Peter's Collegiate school in Wolverhampton, England began a three-day strike Tuesday. The NASUWT members voted to walk out over concerns over health and safety, workloads and lack of consultation by school management.

## **Strike by teachers over pensions at private boarding school in England sold out by union**

On April 15, teachers at Stonyhurst College near Clitheroe, England, a prestigious Catholic boarding school, held a one-day strike and mounted picket lines. The National Education Union (NEU) members opposed plans to make teachers pay a bigger contribution to the Teachers' Pension Scheme, of which they are members.

A further planned two-day strike this week and a three-day strike next week, however, were called off after negotiations between the college and the NEU. Under the deal agreed teachers will pay increased contributions or forgo a pay rise.

## **Indefinite strike by housing maintenance workers at London-based charity against bullying and victimisation**

Twelve maintenance workers employed by the property services of housing charity St Mungo's in London were to begin an all-out stoppage on Thursday. The charity runs 3,200 accommodation units in Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, London, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Reading.

The Unite union members accuse the maintenance section managers of bullying tactics by using inappropriate disciplinary measures against union members. Currently, the planned strike is restricted to the maintenance department, but the union warns it could widen.

The charity suspended a union representative on a charge of gross misconduct for raising a grievance about management bullying. One of the grounds cited was management "distress" at suggestions of bullying.

In March last year, several hundred St Mungo's workers walked out for three days. The Unite members were opposed to changes in sickness

policy and the falling number of more experienced senior employees. They were concerned the changes were aimed at creating a lower-paid workforce with inferior conditions.

## **Staff at Leicester University, England vote to strike against redundancies**

Academic staff at the University of Leicester, England voted by around 70 percent to strike and by 84 percent to take action short of strikes. Staff could refuse to mark exam papers or do assessments.

The University and College Union (UCU) members oppose plans by the university authorities to make 145 posts redundant. This number was reduced when some staff opted to take voluntary redundancy.

The UCU has not named dates for walkouts and is looking to university management to offer negotiations, including for voluntary redundancies or other cost-cutting measures to avoid compulsory job losses.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady commented, "The vice-chancellor must halt these compulsory redundancies to protect teaching and research at Leicester and prevent any further damage to its reputation."

## **Unite union agrees to pay cut to end "fire and rehire" dispute at UK aerospace plant**

The strike by around 200 workers at the UK aircraft parts manufacturer SPS Technologies in Leicester has ended after the Unite union agreed to a sellout deal. Workers began their walkout at the end of March over "fire and rehire," to impose a new contract which would mean an annual wage loss of between £2,500 and £3,000.

Unite agreed to a deal with SPS in which the planned pay cuts will be about half the figure the company wanted. Unite balloted on the new proposal which was accepted by a 90 percent majority.

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 who had been involved in the dispute have decades of service with the company.

## **Scottish whisky workers ballot for possible strike over pay freeze**

Around 1,600 workers employed by whisky manufacturer Chivas Brothers at several sites in Scotland in Strathclyde, Speyside, Clydebank and Ayrshire are currently balloting for possible strike action.

The Unite and GMB union members are protesting the imposition of a pay freeze by the company. The ballot runs until May 10.

## **Unison union calls off strike by hospital security staff at Blackburn and Burnley, England**

A planned 48-hour strike by hospital security staff due to begin April 17 at Burnley and Blackburn hospitals in England was called off after the Unison union reached an agreement with management.

The security staff work for the outsourcing firm, Engie Services Ltd. They are paid minimum wage rates and were seeking pay in line with security staff directly employed by the NHS. The wage difference amounted to around £6,000 a year.

The East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust agreed to take the security staff posts back in-house and set wages at NHS rates within the next three to six months. In the meantime, the NHS and Engie reached an agreement to pay the security staff in line with NHS conditions.

### **Planned journalists' strike at Tunisian state news agency called off after resignation of newly appointed CEO**

Journalists in Tunisia working for the Tunisian state news agency, TAP, held a further protest on Monday against the appointment of Kamel Ben Younes as the CEO. Younes has a record of opposition to a free press prior the Tunisian revolution of 2011.

Following the demonstration, Younes resigned as CEO. A planned strike called by the National Union of Tunisian Journalists and the Tunisian General Labour Union for Thursday was cancelled following his resignation.

### **Municipal water workers strike over pay and conditions in Gauteng, South Africa**

Water workers at Rand Water, a South African water utility supplying Gauteng province and other areas, walked out Wednesday after the company failed to pay performance-related bonuses.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members say Rand Water changed their conditions of service without consultation. Workers returned to the job after the Labour Court ordered the company to pay outstanding monies.

### **Mineworkers halt production at vanadium mine in Brits, South Africa over bonus dispute**

Mineworkers at the Bushveld Minerals owned Vametco Mine in Brits, South Africa went on a wildcat strike April 16 to protest a performance-related bonus scheme worked out between the company and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union.

Management is holding urgent meetings with union representatives to resolve the dispute and get the miners back to work.

### **Drivers refuse to operate bus service over work conditions in Tshwane, South Africa**

Bus drivers employed by the Tshwane Bus Service in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa, stopped work on April 14 to protest working conditions.

The Samwu members demand to be allowed to use the dedicated lanes used for the municipality's rapid transport system and complain about

malfunctions in the cashless fare system—issues causing work stress.

Tshwane municipal management threatens to discipline drivers who do not return to work.

### **South African transport sector unions accept sellout pay offer to avert national bus strike**

Two unions representing South African bus drivers called off a threatened strike and accepted a four percent salary increase, dropping workers' demands for a six percent raise.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa made the agreement at the employer-led negotiating body, the South African Road Passenger Bargaining Council. A Satawu official said, "To be honest, the workers have not won in this round of wage negotiations".

### **Nigerian court workers continue indefinite stoppage**

Nigerian court workers are continuing their stoppage started April 6, bringing the judicial system to a halt. They are demanding financial autonomy for the judiciary from the government, to make judges less susceptible to government pressure.

A meeting of the Labour minister with leaders of the Nigerian Bar Association and the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) is planned after a last-minute postponement of a previous meeting. JUSUN is trying to rescue Nigeria's judicial system from its blatant corruption. State governors regularly bribe judges with public funds, buying them sports utility vehicles, for example.

### **Nigerian petrol tanker drivers in Abuja threaten to walk out over safety**

After a threatened walkout by petrol tanker drivers, queues built up at petrol stations in the Nigerian capital Abuja. The drivers are demanding compulsory fitting of safety valves in all tankers to prevent their contents from spilling. Such spillages have led to repeated explosions, fires and deaths.

The group managing director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Mallam Mele Kyari, claimed the drivers' demands would be solved in a week.

### **Nigerian civil servants strike threat over Kaduna state government's plan to sack civil servants**

Nigerian civil servants are threatening national industrial action if the Kaduna state government carries through plans to sack civil servants. The Nigerian Labour Congress' (NLC) main criticism, however, is the state's failure to follow procedure and consult with the unions.

The NLC President, Ayuba Wabba, said Kaduna governor El-Rufai "failed to consult with the trade union or negotiate the payments to the

workers to be disengaged”.

### **Tanzanian lorry drivers at cement company Dangote strike**

Drivers for cement company Dangote walked out from the second week of April. Their demands include salary increases, travel allowances, relief from motor fines for driving damaged vehicles and signed employment contracts.

Two government ministers tried to persuade strike leaders to end the walkout. Factory management held a meeting with drivers and agreed to pay their road fines, install tarpaulins and pay for a rise in travel allowances. The drivers refused the offer due to management’s refusal to address the issues of contracts and low pay.



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