Occupation of Kavali Oil plant by Greek workers met with violence by riot police; Romanian miners hold wildcat strike to demand early retirement; teachers demonstrate across Iran over wages and rights; strike by South African Clover food workers against pay and job cuts enters second month

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 December 2021

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

Europe

Greek riot police stormed the plant of Kavala Oil around 6am on December 21 to break an occupation of around 120 workers.

The workers were occupying management's offices to protest company plans to lay off approximately 80 workers, around a third of the total workforce, and inadequate safety protocols at the plant.

These layoffs come just months after Kavala Oil received government guarantees worth 100 million Euros, supposedly aimed at safeguarding jobs and propping up the company's financial viability. The plant is in the village of Nea Karvali, around 11km east of the city of Kavala in north-eastern Greece.

According to local news site *proininews.gr*, this was the first time that riot police have been deployed against workers at the plant. The police presence vastly outnumbered the workers.

A video posted on Facebook by social activist group Menoume Energoi shows workers using water hoses in an attempt to push back the police. Stun grenades deployed by the police can be seen and heard, and there is a temporary power cut caused by one grenade after it reportedly hit a high voltage transformer.

The irresponsible use of stun grenades in an oil refinery could have resulted in a lethal explosion. These brutal tactics illustrate the modus operandi of Greece's police and its riot police units.

To escape from police, workers climbed to the top of a pylon, where they remained for hours until they were guaranteed lawyers would be present. A total of 17 workers were arrested and taken into custody. In solidarity, a protest was held later that evening outside Kavala's police headquarters, followed by a motorcade protest across the city. Both events were captured by the video posted on Menoume Energoi's Facebook group.

The following day, the 17 arrested workers attended a court hearing in Kavala's main court, and large numbers gathered outside in solidarity. Large numbers of riot police attacked them with tear gas, as a video uploaded on YouTube shows. All 17 workers were released pending a preliminary investigation to determine whether they will be prosecuted.

On December 13, around 6,000 miners in the Oltenia Energy Complex, which produces large amounts of Romania's coal, walked out on a wildcat strike. The walkout lasted at least two days, after the government failed to implement a law allowing miners to retire at the age of 55.

A government pensions body rejected the law, claiming it did not have the necessary software to implement it, despite the law being adopted by parliament.

The leader of the Oltenia Lignite Union told news agency *Agerpres*, "There is a riot in every mine because the rulers do not respect a law which has come into force, the union leaders are no longer recognised, and all the movements are spontaneous." Following token two-hour strikes the previous week, he said he believed "the miners and energy workers will go on general strike without control, because the union leaders are no longer credible."

On Monday morning, workers at the Romanian National Railway Company (CFR) spontaneously stopped work following a pay freeze for public sector workers announced by the government the previous Friday.

A law which would provide a significant wage increase was postponed, according to *Napi*, for the third time. It was due to be implemented next April but is now suspended until January 2023.

By Monday afternoon, the Federation of Romanian Railway Carriers' Unions announced that the government had agreed to pay an increase in line with inflation for CFR workers sometime in March or April. Teachers are currently balloting for a strike in January over the same national public-sector pay freeze.

Another spontaneous stoppage of transport workers took place on Tuesday morning, on the trams in the city of Timi?oara, after a delay in paying wages. *Radio România* reported that the management said workers would be paid their wages later the same day.

Workers in the French healthcare system continued a wave of strikes against poor conditions and pay in the sector, which have led in many cases to permanent dangerous levels of understaffing.

In the past few weeks, workers from multiple departments at the Brest university hospitals protested about working conditions. On December 13,

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the switchboard operators for all seven establishments linked with the university hospital centre walked out for two hours and distributed leaflets to patients and workers about their conditions.

According to *Le Télégramme*, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) called the stoppage to demand the hiring of two full-time staff to replace those who had retired in the past year, blue-light filters to protect their eyes, and acoustic partitions in the call centre. The operators were among the many professional groups that did not receive a pay rise in last year's "Ségur" healthcare review, and they demanded an increase.

On December 10, workers in the internal medicine department at the Cavale-Blanche hospital, part of the Brest university hospital system, walked out on a one-day strike to denounce their working conditions and low staffing levels. One worker told *Le Télégramme* that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased their workload even further, and said that the hospital should have a separate COVID ward.

In previous weeks, workers at the cafeteria, laundry and equipment sterilisation service at Brest university hospitals also protested over working conditions and their exclusion from the Ségur review.

A further protest was planned on Thursday at Carhaix hospital over understaffing, after it was revealed there would be no anaesthetist on the site on Friday and Saturday. This action was called off by the CGT and the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), after the hospital management announced it had found anaesthetists for the period.

On Monday, the Force Ouvrière (FO) union announced it had reached a deal with the local government of the Aix-Marseille Metropolis, bringing to an end a nearly two-month-long strike of waste collection workers. The indefinite strike began on November 25, to oppose the implementation of a new law which increases working hours for public sector workers, with workers demanding a reduction in their hours due to the physical demands of the job.

France Bleu reported that FO signed a deal on working time already agreed by other unions, reducing working hours by 15 percent, and FO announced the addition of a 100-euro bonus for working on a Sunday or public holiday.

FO, the largest union among Marseille waste collection workers, originally signed a deal in October reducing working hours by 9.5 percent from the 35-hour week set by the new law. The smaller unions maintained their call for a strike, and FO members rejoined the strike two weeks ago.

An FO official told the AFP news agency, "It wasn't FO which wanted to continue the strike, but it was the rank-and-file which was more than determined."

Before reaching an agreement with FO, the local government stepped up its efforts to break the strike, having already brought in strikebreakers from private sector companies. Police "requisitioned" 249 strikers according to BFMTV, ordering them to return to work for the period December 16–20 or face a six-month prison sentence and 10,000 euro fine.

Workers in Toulouse and Porte de l'Isère also began indefinite strikes recently over the same working-time law. The Porte de l'Isère strike was ended by the unions with a 150 euro monthly pay rise and a promise of "negotiations" over a reduction of working hours, while the stoppage in Toulouse continues, according to *France Bleu*.

On Wednesday, bus drivers at three depots in the public transport network TEC of Wallonia, Belgium, walked out spontaneously, denouncing the poor condition of the fleet, as well as understaffing and aggression from passengers.

RTL interviewed an official from the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (CGSLB), who made clear the strike would be shut down in favour of negotiations with management, saying, "As long as management does not go to the depots, [the drivers] will not go back on the roads … They want dialogue."

Despite an announcement on Wednesday evening that work would resume the next day after the CGSLB's request for "dialogue" was granted, TEC management complained that drivers in the Mons depot had not resumed work on Thursday morning, when no buses left the depot.

Lorry drivers in the region of Murcia, Spain began a strike on Thursday which is scheduled to last until January 2, during collective bargaining negotiations between the unions and transport companies.

According to *Europa Press*, the unions denounced the companies for paying workers according to mileage rather than hours of work, which amounts to massive underpayment of wages. The pay demand of the unions is a mere 6 percent after two years without a pay rise, while inflation has recently soared to 5.5 percent.

This strike was called after a threatened lockout by employers was called off following an agreement with the government. The media widely reported the lockout as a "truckers' strike," accepting the claims of the employers' organisation, the National Road Transport Committee, that it is fighting for better working conditions by demanding drivers be banned from loading and unloading cargo. However, its other demands included decreasing the employers' social security payments and decreasing statutory break times.

On December 18 and 19, workers at airline EasyJet and ground handling company Menzies Aviation in Spain held two two-hour protest strikes against layoffs.

The Workers' Commissions and General Workers' Union announced that such strikes will take place every Friday and Saturday, until EasyJet reinstates nine fired workers, "establish[es] normal channels of negotiation, and agree[s] on the necessary measures to guarantee the viability of the companies and jobs."

Ground-handling crew employed by WISAG at Frankfurt Airport, the busiest in Germany, were on a one-day warning strike on Wednesday. Around 40 flights were cancelled, according to the *Frankfurter Rundschau.*

The strike was called by the United Services Union (Verdi) as part of collective bargaining for the 600 workers at WISAG in Frankfurt Airport. In the collective bargaining it is demanding a reduction in working hours from 40 to 37.5, and a 90 euro increase to the monthly salary.

A Verdi spokesman said workers had suffered from an increased workload since a third of the workforce were laid off last year. In a lawsuit against the job cuts, two former WISAG workers exposed the brutal working conditions even before the layoffs, and denounced the works council, on which Verdi sits, as "in cahoots with the management" in working out the plan for mass layoffs.

Workers in seven Amazon shipping centres in Germany joined a one-day warning strike on Monday, as part of a long-running dispute between Verdi and the multinational retailer.

Verdi is calling for Amazon to join the same collective bargaining agreement as the rest of the retail and mail order sector. The recent collective agreement for this sector provided a pay rise of only 3 percent for this year, and 1.7 percent the year after, while inflation in Germany is currently 5.2 percent.

Russian taxi drivers for the gig-economy platform Yandex Taxi began a new three-day strike on Monday, to demand the company reduce the commission it takes from drivers and increases minimum fares.

Following a previous strike last week, four organisers were arrested for "organising or holding a public event without filing a notice of its holding in the prescribed manner." Two were sentenced to a day in jail, and the other two fined 10,000 rubles. According to the *Caucasian Knot*, drivers have stayed sitting in their cars during this week's strike while refusing to accept orders through the app, to avoid the same charge.

Drivers on the London Underground (LU) service staged a further 36-hour strike from December 17, one of the busiest weekends before Christmas. The disruption to the Central, Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria lines caused delays on other lines.

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The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members oppose plans by Transport for London (TfL) to scrap a 2016 agreement that established a dedicated grade of Night Tube drivers—favoured by female staff and carers. The Night Tube service, suspended at the start of the pandemic, was reintroduced two weeks ago. All drivers are forced to work at least four weekend Night Tube shifts per year.

Workers from Aslef, the other train drivers' union, respected the picket line despite their union leaders accepting TfL's proposals. Some RMT union members not affected by the changes walked out in solidarity.

Also, 10,000 RMT members are balloting on whether to strike over attacks on pensions, conditions and jobs, including the proposed cutting of 600 customer service assistants (CSAs) jobs. The ballot closes January 10. CSAs address travel queries, help customers purchase tickets, deal with ticket problems at the gateline, carry out security checks and provide first aid.

The UK scaffolders' stoppage at Actavo, Scunthorpe has entered its twelfth week.

The 62 Unite union members are demanding payment in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering and Construction Industry (NAECI) rates of £17.45 an hour. They are paid 10-15 percent less than NAECI rates.

Actavo (UK) is under contract to British Steel's Scunthorpe site to provide scaffolding and at-height services. The site, which employs 3,000, was taken over by Chinese steelmaker Jingye Group in March 2020 in a £50 million deal.

On Wednesday, supporters and families joined the strikers outside the UK's company's headquarters in Wakefield, where they handed in a petition with 14,000 signatures demanding Actavo "pay the rate."

Last week, Unite organised a stunt outside the company's main headquarters in Ireland, appealing to the largest shareholder in Actavo, Ireland's second richest man Denis O'Brien, to intervene on behalf of the workers with management! As well as the UK and Ireland, Actavo has branches in 15 Caribbean countries and the Middle East.

UK workers at Chep in Trafford Park, Greater Manchester began an indefinite strike on December 17, rejecting a pay offer of one percent.

The Unite union members, who make pallets for companies such as Heinz and Heineken, engaged in four previous strike days and an overtime ban. The drivers, deemed as key workers, say their 24-hour pickets will continue over Christmas if necessary. Workers delivering Calor gas needed for the site's forklift trucks refused to cross the picket line.

Workers at other Chep sites, who are paid £1,000 more than those at the Trafford site, voted 75 percent to strike against a two percent offer. The retail price index rate of inflation rose to 7.1 percent. Chep recorded profits of £150 million last year.

UK Just Eat drivers launched a five-day strike in the seaside town of Blackpool on Saturday, over pay. They joined the stoppage begun by Just Eat drivers in Sheffield, who are into their third week of action.

The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members are protesting a pay cut of 25 percent imposed by employer Stuart Delivery, a subcontractor for fast food chains like McDonalds. Stuart's profits rose 30 percent in 2020.

Workers at Somers Forge, Halesowen in England walked out on December 17 and 21, over pay. Further strikes are planned for January 5, 12, 21 and 24.

The GMB union members rejected a 4 percent pay deal over two years, not even backdated to April. The employer reneged on the second year of a previous pay deal.

Russell Farrington, GMB regional organiser, said the union was keen to end the strike, "Rather than trying to pull a fast one, the company should come back to the table and we'll hammer this out together."

Somers Forge supplies defence components for the Ministry of Defence.

Around 70 UK refuse collection drivers at Labour-run Coventry City Council began strike action over pay and work arrangements over Christmas. The first strike ran from Tuesday until Friday. Strikes are also planned for January 5-6, and January 11-14.

The Unite members voted by a 98.5 percent majority to walk out. The Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers' pay starts at just £22,183 a year. It takes 11 years of service to reach the top of the pay scale. There is a UK-wide shortage of HGV drivers, and other councils increased pay or made retention payments to keep refuse collection drivers.

The council also tried to make last-minute changes to the workers' contracts, with a buy-out option to make Christmas working compulsory. For the last 20 years, this has been voluntary.

Unite originally proposed that drivers strike for every other hour throughout their shift, returning to depot for the strike hour. The council claim to have rejected this proposal as "impractical," which allowed the union to save face by pointing out that employers cannot decide the form of action taken during a legal dispute.

Instead, the drivers will take standard strike action, but bin collection workers are not on strike.

The council refused to negotiate, and Labour councillors denounced the strike on social media.

DHL workers subcontracted to provide rail catering for the Avanti West Coast Line, England walked out on December 21 demanding better pay.

According to the RMT union, DHL parent group Deutsche Post AG paid shareholders £1.4 billion in May. DHL paid its directors £2.7 million in a year. Avanti West Coast parent company First Group PLC promised shareholders £500 million in September.

UK assistance workers at Luton airport, England plan a further walkout over pay from December 31 to January 4. Workers previously struck December 19-23.

The Unite members are employed by contractor Wilson James. Front-of-house workers are paid the minimum wage of £8.91 an hour. Drivers with HGV licences transporting passengers to and from planes are paid £10 an hour.

Unite regional officer Jeff Hodge said, "This matter can be resolved and any further disruption to passengers avoided but only if Wilson James and Luton airport put forward an offer our members can accept."

After two previous week-long strikes against pay restraint, bus drivers at Stagecoach in South Yorkshire, England will begin indefinite strike action in January.

Around 560 Unite union members covering Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield began their action after rejecting a two percent pay offer. They voted by 95 percent against a revised pay offer that did not meet their demands for a deal to meet the rising cost of living.

Indefinite strike action begins on January 1 in Barnsley and Rotherham, and January 2 in Sheffield.

The drivers earn £10.52 an hour in Sheffield, and £10.80 an hour in Barnsley and Rotherham. They are demanding a minimum of £11.40 per hour.

Stagecoach is pleading poverty, but this year saw a 104.3 percent increase in profits in the six months to October—£32.9 million. Latest accounts show it made £58.4 million profit in 2020.

Unite has divided pay disputes nationally and locally, and pledges only "to support this campaign until… staff are offered a reasonable pay deal." The union suspended action over Christmas, with regional officer Phil Bown saying, "The last thing our members want is to cause disruption to members of the public."

Around 20 biomedical scientists at the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust in Burnley and Blackburn, England began a 12-week strike on December 15. The strike, which runs until March 8, is the third in a long-running dispute over the Trust reneging on a 2019 agreement to upgrade pay.

The Unite union members, responsible for analysing patient blood

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samples, are seeking a lump sum to cover loss of pay. They are owed between £8,000 and £12,000.

Unite met the Trust in an attempt "to avoid further strike action and to re-establish union/Trust relations." The Trust rejected their overtures.

Dockers working for GB Terminals at Sheerness, on the Thames and Medway estuary in England, will strike in the New Year against plans to cut jobs and change minimum overtime hours. More than 50 workers are affected.

The Unite union members are responsible for unloading Volkswagen (VW) cars off ferries arriving at the terminal. They will hold four 24-hour strikes in January, 21 days of strike action in February and 20 days in March.

The strike dates are targeted to impact the supply of 2022 plate VW vehicles in the UK. Unite is treating this as a commercial question. The VW Sheerness contract is up for renewal and Unite is appealing to VW either to pressure GB terminals to drop its plans or to award the contract to another bidder.

Drivers, engineers, cleaners and shunters employed by Cambus in Cambridge, Fenstanton and Peterborough in England voted by 96 percent to walk out over pay. Ten days of strikes will take place between January 4-20.

The Unite members rejected a 1.5 percent pay offer backdated to April with a further 1.5 percent this month for 2021/22.

Cambus is owned by Stagecoach, which raked in profits of £58.4 million last year and has liquid assets of £875 million, according to Unite. In November, Unite suspended strikes by hundreds of workers at Stagecoach garages across the country, allowing the company to roll out unequal, below inflation pay deals.

Marie Curie nurses in the UK rejected a revised pay offer by 60 percent. The ballot, in which 28 percent eligible participated, closed December 14.

The latest offer means members whose contract mirrors the NHS Agenda for Change (AfC) will get 3 percent in England and Wales and 4 percent in Scotland. Members whose contracts are not aligned with AfC will get the same percentage rise plus higher unsocial hours enhancements for weekends and bank holidays.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members rejected a two percent offer in May. Half of those eligible voted by 80 percent to reject.

The RCN said they would consider the next steps in 2022. Marie Curie is a charity which tends to terminally ill patients.

Workers at the UK Care Quality Commission, which regulates health and social care, voted by 91 percent for strike action or action short of a stoppage.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members oppose the lack of a pay offer from employers. There will be a further ballot early next year.

Unison union members working for the same employer will also ballot over the issue.

Nearly 600 UK bus drivers at Nottingham City Transport (NCT) rejected a "sub-par" pay deal offered by the company. The Unite union said it was "consulting" its members over strike action.

Drivers' pay starts at £10.70 an hour. Drivers demand as an absolute minimum a £1 per hour rise. They are also seeking faster wage progression towards the top rate, which is currently only £12.10.

Council-owned NCT offered a deal that would see wages rise gradually by £1 an hour after two years. It would still leave wages lower than at nearby bus companies, where the top rate is closer to £13.

The union warned NCT that its pay could mean losing drivers to other companies. Unite has worked systematically to isolate pay disputes among bus drivers by company and region.

Workers at UK logistics company GXO voted overwhelmingly in a consultative ballot to proceed to a substantive industrial ballot over ongoing payroll difficulties. Since the introduction of a new payroll system nine months ago, around 1,700 workers have not been paid what they are owed in full and on time each month.

In the consultative ballot held by Unite, union members returned a 99 percent vote to proceed to a full-scale industrial ballot. The union consultative ballot is a tactic used by the union bureaucracy to delay any possible industrial action. If a substantive ballot goes ahead, it will take place in January and any strike after that.

Warehouse and clerical workers and Light Goods Vehicle (LGV) drivers at UK supermarket giant Asda indicated their willingness to strike over pay in an overwhelming indicative vote.

The GMB members voted by 94 percent to proceed to a strike ballot after the company failed to come up with a "meaningful" offer.

The GMB is engaged in a long-running dispute over equal pay for 40,000 mainly women shop floor workers, who the union argue are not paid the same money for the same work as those employed in distribution centres. The union accused the company of holding back distribution workers' pay against future liabilities in that dispute.

The company, which made a profit of £486 million in the year to December 31, 2020, said the GMB agreed a two-year pay deal in May 2021.

UK economic forecasters at the National Institute for Social and Economic Research (NIESR) are balloting for industrial action over pay. The ballot closes January 7.

The NIESR froze pay this year, and offered a 2 percent rise for 2022, an effective pay cut.

NIESR has provided quarterly forecasts for the UK and global economies since the 1980s, and many outside research contracts.

A planned stoppage action by around 90 workers employed by logistics firm DHL at Bellshill, Scotland was called off by Unite, which hailed an "inflation-busting" pay deal.

The warehouse workers, shunters and drivers rejected an initial offer of nine percent over two years, because it did nothing to resolve the "poverty pay" most receive. Following talks brokered by the government mediation service Acas, DHL made a revised offer, which was rejected by 88 percent of the workers on a 95 percent turnout.

Unite's role nationally is to keep disputes isolated and separated. It trumpeted other above-inflation deals for drivers at Sainsbury depots, despite the disparity between them. It suspended their strike to prevent the disputes becoming a focus for opposition among the whole workforce.

The union reported the low wages at Bellshill only as an average of £12.50 an hour. The union continues to divide the workers, saying that "many" Bellshill workers will receive "a pay increase of between 10 and 19 percent." Regional officer Debbie Hutchings said the revised offer only that it "goes some way to address the low pay experienced by the majority of drivers on the site."

The Unite union suspended a planned strike by delivery workers who supply 1,500 convenience stores in London and South East England. The 45 HGV drivers, employed by Tesco-owned Booker Retail Partners at its Thamesmead site, planned to walk out on December 23 and 24.

Drivers previously voted unanimously in September to strike from October 4, after Booker refused to pay them the temporary £5 an hour increase being paid to its drivers in Hemel Hempstead.

Unite suspended a strike in October, when Booker offered a 3.3 percent pay increase and promised to review pay in February 2022. Booker reneged on the agreement, but then backed down.

The shortage of HGV drivers meant the drivers could have been in a strong position, especially in the run-up to Christmas. Lorry drivers suffered decades of super-exploitation, thanks to the collaboration of the unions with the companies. On August 22, rank-and-file drivers on the Professional Drivers Facebook Group organised a nationwide stay-at-home protest against abysmal pay and conditions.

The ongoing dispute on the Woolwich Ferry service across the Thames

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in UK capital has intensified, with management suspending seven workers and removing the ferry from service until the New Year.

The 58 Unite union members have been in a long-running dispute with their current employer TfL and previous employer Briggs Marine Contractor Ltd. They took over 30 strike days this year, over issues including agreement on a new pay and reward scheme, excessive use of agency staff, victimisation of union representatives and a lack of adequate health and safety training for new employees.

After a 90 percent vote for walkouts, strike dates were announced. From January 3, 24-hour strikes were planned every Monday, Wednesday and Friday until the end of March 2022.

On December 21, TfL suspended seven workers, including two union representatives, with no reason given. Citing "technical issues," TfL suspended the service altogether until the New Year. Unite, while accusing TfL of "declaring war," decided to cancel the strike action planned for the first fortnight of January.

Prior to the pandemic, the ferry transported around 20,000 vehicles a week, with an estimated annual 2.6 million passengers. There has been a ferry at the site since the 14th century.

Middle East

Teachers demonstrated in 120 Iranian cities, demanding improved wages, the release of imprisoned school union leaders and the implementation of long-promised health insurance and pension payments. Other demands include an end to ethnic and denominational discrimination in education, and the renovation of dilapidated school buildings.

The strikes were met with police repression and arrests.

In Tehran, hundreds of teachers gather in front of the Parliament building. To quieten the protest, deputies voted for a wage increase for primary and secondary school teachers.

One of President Ebrahim Raisi's first actions on his election in June was to cancel the teachers' pay rise approved by his predecessors. Raisi's most recent budget provides for a 240 percent increase in military spending and a 56 percent rise in funding for the state media. State employees, including teaching staff, saw an average rise of 10 percent.

Africa

Around 4,000 striking workers at the Clover food and beverage group across South Africa are threatening to occupy all the company's six factories to protest pay cuts, redundancies and longer working hours.

The General Industrial Workers Union of South Africa and the Food and Allied Workers Union members are in the fifth week of an indefinite protected strike, begun November 22. The unions are calling on the public to boycott Clover products.

Clover wants to close several factories and save R300 million by retrenching 1,400 workers and introducing 12-hour days, worked over four days in every six, without overtime pay. They also issued a Labour Relations Act restructuring notice, which proposes a 20 percent reduction in wages as the only way to reduce redundancies.

Assembly workers at the multinational First Automobile Works (FAW) truck company in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa have been on strike for pay rises and improved conditions since October 15.

Over 160 National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members, including 70 outsourced workers comprising 85 percent of the workforce, demand a R40 per hour pay increase backdated to September 2020. Most FAW workers earn R39 an hour. The industry standard is R99 an hour with some workers receiving R136. FAW offered 7 percent in talks conducted through the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

The workers also demand full employment for outsourced workers, a minimum wage, medical insurance and provident fund contributions.

Grape harvesting workers at four farms in the Lower Orange Region, Northern Cape, South Africa are striking in protest over poor living conditions, low pay and abusive labour practices.

The College Workers Union of South Africa members are housed eight to a room and not given a living wage. They are threatened with the sack if they complain. The union want police to investigate assaults on the farm workers.

African National Congress (ANC) administrative staff are still waiting for salaries owed them by the ruling party.

The ANC, who also failed to make medical aid and provident fund contributions, blame their cash flow problems on the new Political Party Funding Act. They make empty promises to staff, some of whom have not been paid since August.

Uganda's laboratory technicians walked out on December 21 for first time ever, over pay and conditions.

The Uganda Medical Laboratory Technology Association sent written notice to the Ministry of Health but got no response. The 13,000 workers are paid a salary of Shs1.2 million, despite many having degrees and PhDs—little more than lab assistants, who also earn a pittance of Shs 800,000.

Other issues include the refurbishing of dilapidated equipment and laboratories, compensation for families of those who died during the pandemic response, filling vacant positions, introducing internship training for lab graduates, and providing housing allowance.

The strike was declared just as the government announced it had resolved the grievances of 1,400 medical interns who had been on strike since November 8 in a dispute over pay and conditions. The Ministry of Health had sacked all the strikers and ordered them to leave the premises to make way for new starters. The new starters refused to do work left undone because of the strike.

An indefinite strike by lecturers at Plateau State University, Nigeria, was called off by the union in favour of negotiations.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities members demand pay arrears for the first quarter of 2021, and allowances owed since 2012/2020.

The state government previously reneged on a memorandum of understanding, signed with the union March 2, to make good the arrears. A nine-month strike over the issues was suspended in December 2020. Other issues include lack of accommodation for staff and students, inadequate security and lack of lecture halls.

Workers at Ekiti state universities, polytechnics and colleges are threatening action over N3.17 billion unpaid subventions.

A planned walkout by dockers at the Ivory Coast's two main ports, Abidjan and San Pedro, was called off by the FNADCI union after the government offered to negotiate.

The government reneged on a 2019 agreement to pay dockers $3.40 an hour. They are currently on little more than $1 an hour. The strike would have massively impacted the export of cocoa beans. Around 500,000-600,000 tonnes of cocoa beans are expected to be exported by mid-January.

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