

South African Clover Foods workers determined to continue 4-month strike until their demands are met; health care workers strike and protest over pay and conditions across Spain and France; 24-hour strikes bring London underground to halt

## 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.*

### Africa

#### **South African Clover Foods workers vow to continue strike until their demands are met**

The strike by 5,000 dairy workers at Clover Foods in South Africa has now entered its fourth month. The workers demand that the firm halt factory closures, retrenchments and salary cuts of 20 percent, and reinstate the 2,000 workers already dismissed.

The General Industrial Workers' Union of South Africa and Food and Allied Workers' Union members have faced continual violence on the picket lines, while Clover blamed strikers for the deaths of two security guards. The unions say evidence gathered by them contradicts the firm's accusations. They are also suffering economic hardship.

Meetings facilitated by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration are taking place this week between the Department of Employment and Labour, the unions and Clover management.

In 2019, Clover was taken over by Israeli-owned Milco, part of the Central Bottling Company which operates in Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank and Golan Heights.

#### **Thousands of South African gold miners in strike ballot**

Miners at Sibanye-Stillwater, a multinational company owning three South African gold mines employing 31,000, were balloted Tuesday after rejecting the latest pay offer from the company. Negotiations lasted seven months.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), Solidarity and UASA union demanded a R1,500 per month rise in September, but dropped this to R1,000 despite being granted a certificate giving them the legal right to strike. Sibanye-Stillwater offered increases for most workers of R800 a

month for the next three years. Artisans and officials were offered a five percent rise.

In 2019, AMCU sold out a five-month stoppage at Sibanye-Stillwater. It accepted a wage agreement, already signed off by the NUM and Solidarity, which it had previously called a "slave labour deal."

#### **South African public sector union threatens strike over unmet pay obligation**

The Public Servants Association (PSA) in South Africa has threatened to call a strike of its members across the public sector in response to a judgment Monday by the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

The PSA and the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union appealed to the apex court of the judicial system, after a Labour Court ruling said the third year of a pay agreement made by the ANC government in 2018 did not have to be honoured.

The ConCourt ruled the multi-year wage agreement was invalid and unlawful, stating the unions and its members would be "unjustifiably enriched" by the terms of the agreement.

#### **Hundreds of South African Airways cabin crew demonstrate over redundancies**

South African Airways (SAA) cabin crew picketed the offices of the Department of Public Enterprises in Pretoria on Tuesday, in protest at the retrenchment of 225 airline workers at the end of March.

The South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA) and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members say the consortium that took over the insolvent airline trained them but would not now absorb them into the new airline, as previously agreed.

SACCA say that SAA are employing workers who already left under a Voluntary Severance Package and accuse the interim management of financial corruption and cronyism. Workers have suffered a 35 percent pay cut while management received increases.

## **Contracted-out hospital porters arrested after jobs protest in Cape Town, South Africa**

Fourteen contracted-out hospital porters were fired on by police and arrested Tuesday, after blocking roads and demonstrating outside the Groote Schuur hospital, Cape Town, South Africa.

The porters, represented in negotiations by the black nationalist Economic Freedom Fighters party, demanded to be employed directly by the hospital after a new company took over the portering contract and they lost their jobs.

The Western Cape provincial health department said it was not their responsibility but that of the recruitment company, despite the workers being employed at the hospital for between six and twenty years.

## **South African driving instructors in Tshwane stop traffic in protest over online booking system**

Driving instructors protested in Tshwane, Gauteng, South Africa this week, halting traffic on the highway to the Midrand Licensing Department and closing other licensing stations in the municipality. They say a newly introduced online booking system unfairly discriminates against them.

The National Driving Association of South Africa members are aggrieved that the Road Traffic Management Corporation no longer allows driving schools to pay a premium to book their pupil's appointment slots via the online National Traffic Information System (NaTIS).

## **Mauritanian teachers walk out over pay and conditions**

Teachers in Mauritania walked out for a week-long strike on February 21, demanding improvements to pay and conditions. The pay demands include increases to basic pay and the introduction of bonuses.

Some 7,787 teachers in 67 percent of primary schools (2,702 out of 3,306), and 4,528 teachers in 86 percent of secondary schools (307 out of 363) took part. Five education unions were involved.

Teachers in the inland regions held sit-down protests in front of the education directorates and inspectorates.

## **Sudanese teachers and lecturers demand payment of longstanding arrears**

Primary and secondary teachers in South Kordofan, Sudan walked out on February 19 to demand full payment of monies owed to them.

The teachers are owed payments from as long ago as 2020 and a salary increment.

Teachers had been struggling with the non-payment of their entitlements for years before their union was forced into calling a strike. The union threatened an indefinite strike on March 3 but are now in negotiations.

Professors at the Sudan University of Science and Technology are also

being restricted to a limited strike over similar issues, having voted for strike action by 71 percent.

## **Sugar workers at plantation in Mozambique strike for higher wages**

Sugar workers at the Xinavane sugar plantation north of Maputo, Mozambique walked out on January 31 for four weeks. The workers have been demanding an increase in basic monthly wage from 4,500 to 7,000 meticais since August last year.

Police arrested seven of the workers on February 22, detaining them in the Manhica district police command, with the claim that they were "inciting" others over the broken promise of a pay rise. An angry crowd sought the release of those arrested and damaged some company property when this was not achieved.

The union ended the strike based on a promise of a pay rise on March 3.

## **Europe**

### **Health and social care workers throughout Spain strike to defend working conditions and services**

Health and social care workers in several of Spain's autonomous communities and cities have been on strike the past two weeks, to demand improvements in their working conditions and oppose the deterioration of services.

On February 22, *Europa Press* reported that dozens of nurses, physiotherapists and midwives protested in Barcelona to demand increased resources for the healthcare system in Catalonia. The Nursing Union (SATSE) also called for protests in other regional capitals throughout Spain.

The next day, workers in care homes stopped work and joined a rally in front of the Navarrese parliament in Pamplona against working conditions, which make it impossible to provide decent care. *Europa Press* printed a statement by the four unions involved saying most care homes were privatised, so the most precarious workers were left with seven minutes per patient, had only one weekend off each month, received the minimum sick pay, and were paid under 1,000 euros per month.

On February 25, workers throughout the entire health service of the Basque Country joined a 24-hour strike to oppose the "dismantling and precariousness" of services. The Basque government announced extensive minimum service requirements for the strike to go ahead, preventing large numbers of workers from joining. A further stoppage took place on Monday, and the unions announced that in many hospitals almost every worker who was legally able to join the strike did so.

### **French healthcare workers continue protests and strikes against low pay, poor conditions and temporary contracts**

Healthcare workers in France continued a wave of strikes to defend their working conditions, which have deteriorated throughout the pandemic.

Workers at the private Bonnefon clinic in the town of Alès remain on an indefinite strike begun in January after a colleague was fired and the local

representative of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT)—who called the sacking “unjustified”—was disciplined along with other colleagues. The CGT has also demanded the payment of the same bonus granted to many public sector healthcare workers in 2019’s Sécur healthcare review.

According to *France Bleu*, the strike forced the Elsan Group, which runs the Bonnefon clinic, to suspend admissions and transfer patients. Elsan is the largest private healthcare provider in France, with a turnover of 2.2 billion euros in 2020.

An indefinite campaign of partial stoppages was called last week by the CGT and French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) at the Brest-Carhaix university hospital, with a stoppage for one hour every Tuesday, according to *Le Télégramme*. The unions are calling for a 118-euro bonus granted to nurses and managers to be extended to all workers.

On February 24, the FO, CGT and CFDT trade unions called for another strike in all departments of the Yves-Le Foll hospital in Saint-Brieuc to demand increased recruitment as well as negotiations over annual leave and pay, *Le Télégramme* reported. Workers in the A&E and surgery departments have already been on indefinite strike since the end of January, treating patients as usual but refusing administrative duties.

#### **Waste collection and other municipal workers walk out in Le Mans, France, over pay**

Since February 22, waste collection workers in the French city of Le Mans have been on an indefinite strike to demand a 100-euro increase to their monthly salaries.

Strikers initially picketed the local waste treatment centre, and on February 25 were joined by other municipal workers, including kitchen staff producing meals delivered to local schools and care homes. After the city government made legal threats, the pickets were lifted, but the strike continues.

The local government had filed a lawsuit against two representatives of the CGT and FO, but according to *Ouest France* the city withdrew the case this Wednesday, the day of the hearing. Around 200 people gathered outside the court to oppose the lawsuit.

#### **Teachers in France continue to protest cut in allocated school hours**

On Monday, teachers at the Pré de Cordy high school in the Dordogne joined a one-day strike, following the announcement that total teaching time would be cut by 68 hours this year, according to *France Bleu*.

The National Union of Secondary Education (SNES) and CGT called the stoppage, pointing out that the cut in hours threatened six job losses.

The hours allocated to each school in France are decided annually by the government, and there have been many local protests and stoppages in schools where hours were cut this year. On Tuesday, teachers at the vocational Roz Glas high school in Quimperlé also held a one-day walkout over a cut in hours. Speaking to *Le Télégramme*, one teacher said that the cut of around 40 hours meant the average class would miss out on seven and a half hours of lessons.

#### **Italian transport workers hold one-day national strike over contract renewal**

On February 25, transport workers throughout Italy joined a 24-hour strike to demand the renewal of the collective agreement for the sector with improved pay and conditions.

*ANSA* reported the bus, tram and regional railway networks in major cities including Milan, Rome and Naples were affected by the strike, and the unions reported 90 percent of workers joined. The collective agreement between the transport unions and three employers’ associations expired at the end of 2017, and another national one-day strike took place last January to demand its renewal.

#### **Doctors strike and protest in Rome, Italy, against unsustainable workloads**

A two-day strike of doctors in Rome began on Tuesday, called by the Italian Doctors’ Union (SMI) and Italian Union of Local Doctors (SIMET) to oppose the high workloads faced by doctors and the lack of compensation for families of doctors who died from COVID-19.

The union statement, reprinted by *ANSA*, describes their treatment by the government as a “slap in the face by the state, especially to the orphans of these doctors.”

The SIMET press release says that 300 doctors joined a rally during the strike, including colleagues from outside Rome, while the strike was opposed by other unions.

#### **Lithuanian chemical workers continue indefinite strike for collective agreement**

Chemical workers at the Lithuanian fertiliser producer Achema have been on an indefinite strike since February 8 to demand a collective agreement.

The union at the plant announced that around 300 out of 1,300 workers joined the strike in its first week. The number fell to around 50 in the second week, *LRT* reported, following the company’s threat to lock out striking workers and hire scabs. The union’s response to the strikebreaking was to threaten to take the company to court.

Achema said it would not sign any collective agreement and offered to grant a 6.5 percent pay rise “when the whole market stabilises,” on top of a previous 3.5 percent increase, according to *LRT*, while inflation in Lithuania rose to 12.4 percent in January. The Lithuanian Trade Unions Confederation said this is the first large-scale strike in the private sector since Lithuania left the Soviet Union in 1990.

#### **Workers at German airports hold warning strikes in collective bargaining dispute**

Workers at German airports held several warning strikes in the last two weeks during collective bargaining between the United Services Union (Verdi) and the Federal Association of Aviation Security Companies over a new pay deal for 25,000 workers.

On February 25, security staff at Düsseldorf Airport stopped work for the day, cancelling 160 of the 280 flights planned for that day, according to the *Westfalen-Blatt*. Workers at Frankfurt Airport were also on strike on Friday, but according to the *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland* Verdi

prevented workers performing passenger security checks from joining the stoppage, so no flights were cancelled. This Monday, workers at Cologne Bonn Airport also stopped work for 24 hours.

### **UK: Striking refuse drivers employed by scabbing Coventry Labour council to reballot over pay dispute**

The all-out strike by 70 UK refuse collection lorry drivers working for Labour-run Coventry City council is continuing.

The mandate for the current action runs out on March 24, so the Unite union members are currently reballoting to continue the action which, if renewed, could continue into the summer.

The drivers, on strike since January 31 over pay, voted by a 98.5 percent majority to strike. 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 some councils increased pay or made retention payments to keep refuse collection drivers.

In response to the strike, Coventry council hired a replacement scab workforce mobilised through its wholly owned arms-length company, Tom White Waste. It set up 11 sites across the city where waste can be dropped off. The sites are guarded by privately hired security staff.

### **Further strike by teachers at UK chain of independent schools over attack on pensions**

Around 1,500 teachers working for the Girls Day School Trust (GDST), the largest network of independent (i.e., private) girls' schools in the UK, walked out from Tuesday to Thursday, following a one-day strike February 10 and a two-day strike on February 23-24. The GDST runs 23 independent schools across England and Wales.

The National Education Union (NEU) members are protesting plans by the trust to withdraw from the Teachers' Pensions Scheme (TPS). This would cut the annual amount of pension payments they receive on retirement by a massive 20 percent on average. Teachers were threatened with "fire and rehire" if they do not accept an inferior pension scheme.

The trust's schools in Brighton, Cardiff, London, Newcastle, Northampton, Nottingham, Norwich, Oxford, Portsmouth, Sheffield and Shrewsbury were among those taking part.

The strike ballot returned 95 percent in favour of action, on an 85 percent turnout. The strikes are the first in the GDST's 149-year history. A three-day stoppage was scheduled from March 1.

The GDST made a revised offer under which teachers would be able to remain in the TPS until September 2023 together with a pay rise, but this was rejected. On February 25, they made a further offer of continuing TPS membership on "favourable terms" or becoming a member of a separate GDST pension scheme. The NEU says it has not been given full details of the new proposal but that it "appears to have unknown strings attached."

In 2013, the unions sold out pension strikes across the public sector, including in schools and further and higher education. University employers have just imposed massive cuts to lecturers' pensions through the joint negotiating committee, which the University and College Union (UCU) joined in 2018 to head off strike action.

### **Teachers at Ipswich School, UK strike over fire and rehire threats over pensions**

Teachers at the private Ipswich School in East Anglia walked out on Tuesday. NASUWT and NEU union members oppose plans by the school to impose an attack on working conditions, including transferring their pension out of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) into an inferior one.

### **Indefinite pay strike continues by pallet production workers in Greater Manchester, England**

The stoppage by around 70 UK workers at Chep in Trafford Park, Greater Manchester, continues. The indefinite strike began on December 17, after workers rejected a one percent pay offer.

The Chep workers reballoted to continue the strike, with 94 percent in favour.

The Unite union members, who make pallets for companies like Heinz and Heineken, are paid less than workers at other Chep sites, who earn £1,000 more than those at Trafford Park. They voted 75 percent to strike against a two percent offer. Chep recorded profits of £150 million last year.

A rally in support of the CHEP workers was due Thursday at the CHEP site in Trafford Park.

### **Council workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland set to strike over pay offer**

Local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are set to strike after rejecting a 1.75 percent pay offer from the employers' body, the Local Government Association.

Of the Unite members who voted in around 400 separate ballots, 80 percent were in favour of taking industrial action. A Unite press release on Monday stated it would shortly release a list of local authorities where action will take place. It will be confined to councils where the 50 percent legal threshold of members taking part was met.

Unite is calling for a 10 percent pay rise, but notes council staff have had a real terms pay cut of 22 percent over the last 11 years. The RPI inflation rate is 7.8 percent.

### **Workers at aviation manufacturer in Gloucester, UK set to strike**

Around 90 UK workers employed by Dowty Propellers, a subsidiary of GE Aviation Systems Limited, plan to strike on March 4.

The Unite union members voted in November, to walk out after rejecting a two-year pay offer of 4.5 percent. Unite delayed action hoping to negotiate a deal. Following Friday's strike, further stoppages are scheduled for each Friday up to May 20.

### **Workers at metal packaging company in Liverpool, UK to walk out over sacked union representative**

UK workers at Envases in Liverpool, employed as printers at the packaging company, plan to walk out in support of sacked union representative John Williams.

The Unite members plan strikes on March 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 28, 29 and 30. In a press release Monday, Unite says Williams was dismissed after he exposed the company's efforts to sow divisions between Unite and another union at the plant.

#### **Confectionery workers at factory in York, UK vote to strike over pay and conditions**

Workers at Fox's sweet factory in York voted to strike. Fox makes well-known brands including Fox's Glacier Mints, Mint Humbugs and Poppets.

The GMB members are protesting a below-inflation pay offer. Also, the lowest paid workers were excluded from a one-off payment, others stand to lose two days leave, and the company gave notice to end collective bargaining at the site.

The workers twice rejected the pay offer from Fox who have refused to improve it, despite making an improved offer to its employees at its Pontefract site.

The GMB has not yet announced any dates for stoppages, but instead appealed to the company to reopen talks.

#### **Engine systems manufacturer workers in Kilmarnock, Scotland vote to strike over pay and conditions**

Around 130 workers at MAHLE Engine Systems in Kilmarnock, Scotland are to hold three seven-day strikes beginning March 14, March 28 and April 4.

The Unite union members voted by an 89 percent majority on an 82 percent turnout to walk out. They will also ban overtime. The dispute is over pay, terms of employment and working conditions.

#### **Strike by tugboat crews at Teesport, UK over pay**

Tugboat crew working for Svitzer Marine at Teesport, in northeast England began a 48-hour strike on Tuesday. It will be followed by 24-hour strikes on March 9 and 26.

The Unite union members voted 100 percent for the stoppages. They oppose a pay freeze enforced by the company. Svitzer is part of shipping giant Maersk, which is forecast to announce profits of nearly £12 billion for 2021.

Tugboat crews are responsible for docking and guiding the giant container ships that use the port.

#### **Chemical workers at Teesside, UK plant balloting over pay offer**

Around 270 workers at the two Sabic chemical plants on Teesside, England are balloting for industrial action after rejecting a 2 percent pay

offer for 2022.

The ballot of Unite union members closes on March 8. Sabic, along with Ineos in Grangemouth, is responsible for the production of most of the ethylene used in the UK. Any disruption to supplies by a strike would disrupt production of rubber and plastic used in UK industry.

#### **Port workers in Lerwick, Scotland ballot over attack on conditions**

Following a unanimous consultative vote, workers at the Port of Lerwick in the Scottish Shetland Isles are balloting for industrial action.

The Unite union members, comprising engineers, electricians, joiners and general operatives, oppose detrimental changes to their pay and conditions. These include basic pay, overtime rates, pension contribution and cuts to standby and call-out payments.

The port services liners as well as oil and gas production platforms. The ballot closes March 9. Unite states any industrial action would begin at the end of March.

#### **Window blind manufacturing workers in Inchinnan, Scotland, ballot for strike over pay offer**

Around 50 workers employed by Eclipse Blinds in Inchinnan, Renfrewshire, Scotland are balloting for industrial action after rejecting a 4.3 percent pay offer.

The Unite union members, predominantly women paid just above the minimum wage of £9.62, are seeking a six percent rise. The ballot closes March 9.

#### **Council workers in Glasgow, Scotland to ballot over broken promises on equal pay**

Staff at Glasgow City council, Scotland are to ballot over the council's broken promises over equal pay.

In 2018, several thousand Glasgow city council workers, predominantly women, walked out, demanding to be paid in line with male workers carrying out equivalent roles. The council agreed to recompense the workers, but there have been big delays. The settlement figure was around £500 million.

A Unite union press release on Monday noted, "Despite progress being made for around 5,000 claimants who have had no settlement for the period up to March 2018, around 18,000 claimants are still waiting for a settlement for the period after March 2018."

#### **Recycling and refuse workers in North Somerset, UK, ballot for strike action**

Around 100 UK refuse and recycling workers at the North Somerset Environment Company are balloting for industrial action. The ballot closes Friday.

The GMB members turned down a derisory 1.75 percent pay offer. The

company, wholly owned by North Somerset council, serves 88,000 homes.

### **Indicative vote by college lecturers in northwest England to fight for improved pay**

Around 1,000 academic staff at six colleges in England voted to ballot for industrial action. The colleges are Hopwood Hall, Bury, Burnley, Oldham, Manchester College and City of Liverpool College.

The UCU members voted by between 70 and 92 percent majorities on turnouts ranging from 60 to 71 percent in favour of a strike ballot.

They demand a pay increase in line with inflation. The UCU press release announcing the result noted that since 2009 pay in real terms fell by 35 percent, and the pay gap between college and teaching staff is around £9,000 in teachers' favour.

### **Staff at Bristol, UK food warehouse to ballot over low pay**

Around 250 UK warehouse workers employed by DHL at its distribution centre in Emerald Park, Bristol will ballot between March 8 and 22.

The Unite union members are employed on contracts to supply Sainsbury's stores across southwest England and parts of Wales. Unite is calling for a minimum of a £1.70 an hour increase.

### **Unite postpones planned strike by outsourced workers at London hospital over pay and conditions**

A strike due to have begun Monday of outsourced staff working for Serco at St Barts hospital in the UK capital was postponed until March 7. Unite called for a St Barts NHS Trust board meeting due to take place Wednesday to consider the services provided by Serco to be brought in-house.

The Serco workers provide cleaning, portering, catering and reception services at the hospital. They are seeking pay parity with directly employed NHS staff, who earn up to 15 percent more than outsourced staff. They are also protesting excessive workloads and accuse management of bullying.

They took previous action in the dispute, including a two-week strike, at the beginning of February.

### **GMB suspends strike of UK refuse workers in Wiltshire after employer makes offer**

The strike by around 70 UK refuse operatives, loaders and drivers working for Hills Waste Solutions providing refuse collection on behalf of Wiltshire County Council, due to begin Monday, was suspended by the GMB union.

The GMB suspended the strike after Hills made a new pay offer, on which the workers were balloted. The ballot closed Wednesday.

The workers are responsible for bin collection at around a quarter of a million homes in Calne, Salisbury and Trowbridge. They oppose a two percent pay offer, a real terms pay cut. They voted by a 98 percent majority on an 85 percent turnout to walk out.

### **Planned walkout of refuse workers in East Sussex, UK called off by GMB union after accepting pay offer**

A planned strike by refuse collectors working for Biffa Municipal in East Sussex, covering the towns of Hastings and Rother, was called off after the company made a new pay offer which the workers accepted.

According to a GMB press release, the pay offer is a one-year deal giving a rise of between 11 and 19.5 percent plus a £500-£600 bonus payable before April 1.

### **Protest planned by hospital workers in Halifax, UK over low pay**

Catering, cleaning, security and other staff employed by outsourcing company, ISS at the Calder Royal Hospital in Halifax, England are to protest on Saturday between 2 and 3.30 outside the hospital against low pay.

The GMB members are seeking pay parity with directly employed NHS staff.

### **Middle East**

### **Strike of Iranian oil workers in Abadan over pay and conditions**

Iranian workers at the state-run petrochemical company in Abadan went on strike February 24.

They were protesting the company reneging on promises made to them over pay, bonuses and employment rights. They have been protesting over the same issues since last year.

The previous day a protest of newly hired petrochemical workers took place in Tabriz. They were protesting over employment rights and job security.



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