

Nurses and municipal workers in Finland continue pay strikes as government plans strike-breaking measures; healthcare workers in Spain protest and strike against deteriorating conditions; long-running cost of living strikes continue in UK by pallet workers in Manchester and refuse workers in Coventry; gold miners' pay strike at Sibanye-Stillwater in South Africa continues into second month

## 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

#### **Finnish nurses' and municipal workers' pay strikes continue as government plans strike-breaking measures**

Nurses and other municipal workers in Finland continued strikes this week to demand pay increases and improvements to their working conditions.

Around 25,000 nurses across the country began a strike in six districts on April 1, called by the Tehy and SuPer unions, which announced that thousands more nurses would join from this Friday. The escalation was postponed, however, in favour of mediated negotiations. Other municipal workers also continued strikes throughout the country, with schools in the cities of Tampere and Kuopio closing for two days due to walkouts.

The employers' association claims the unions' demand for a 3.6 percent pay increase would be unaffordable for the government. The *Finnish Broadcasting Company* calculated that meeting the demand would cost an extra 300 million euros annually. The government last week added an additional 2 billion euros to its military budget to meet NATO spending requirements, as it prepares to join the military alliance against neighbouring Russia.

The Social Democrat-led coalition government is preparing strike-breaking measures against both the nurses and municipal workers. Nurses must already comply with strict "protective work" minimum staffing levels, and the Tehy union reported that at one Helsinki hospital staffing levels rose during the strike. Despite these requirements, the Social Democrats' Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services threatened to bring forward a "Patient Safety Act" if no agreement is reached, which would give public health authorities the ability to order healthcare workers back to work. The municipal strike is also facing threats of forced

arbitration.

#### **Healthcare workers in Spain protest and strike against deteriorating conditions in the sector**

In the past weeks there have been numerous strikes and protests by healthcare workers throughout Spain against conditions which have deteriorated throughout the pandemic.

On April 8, workers in primary care in the Basque Country joined a one-day strike called by six unions demanding the Basque government come up with "urgent solutions" to overwork. This was an issue even before the pandemic, according to *Europa Press*. The unions reported that 50 percent of all workers who were legally able to join the strike did so, but due to the imposition of minimum service requirements this amounted to 13.5% of the whole workforce, still several thousand.

The company committee representing healthcare workers in the Aljarafe hospital in Seville called a demonstration last week to demand improvements in working conditions at the hospital and that it be taken over entirely by the local government. The hospital is currently jointly run by the public Andalusian Health Service and the Catholic order Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God. *Europa Press* reported that workers at the hospital were on a one-day strike on March 23, as they were not paid previously agreed salary increases for 2021 and 2022, and new strikes are planned for April 28 and May 19.

On April 6, ear, nose and throat specialists in the University Hospital Complex of Santiago de Compostela (CHUS) escalated their indefinite partial strike, begun in January, to an all-out stoppage. The Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union called weekly one-day stoppages in January to demand the dismissal of the head of the service, whom it accused of "exercising leadership in an authoritarian manner" and treating staff with disrespect for years.

The government imposed 100 percent minimum service requirements

on the CHUS strike, threatening workers with legal action if the emergency service in the department does not provide 100 percent coverage. A CCOO spokesperson told *Europa Press* 10 specialists out of 18 in the department usually join the strikes. Three of them have now walked out indefinitely, while another six are on sick leave.

### **School support workers hold national strike in France**

On April 5, workers in the AESH service, who support disabled children in attending school in France, held a one-day national strike to denounce the poor pay and conditions in their profession.

Speaking with *France Bleu*, one striker pointed out that as AESH workers can only work between 20 and 25 hours each week, she had to rely on food banks to afford to feed her daughter. Another raised the lack of training, as AESH workers deal with children who have complex issues but only receive 60 hours of training. The unions are calling for AESH workers to be placed on the same pay scale as other civil servants, for a consistent 24 hours contact time per week, improved training, and massive recruitment.

There have been multiple stoppages of AESH workers since strikes began last year, and the Solidaires union reported that thousands of the 129,000 AESH workers in France joined strikes and protests, angered by a pay offer it describes as “a few tens of euros.”

### **Pool lifeguards in Quimper, France, continue stoppages over health risks**

Lifeguards at swimming pools in the French town of Quimper continued their campaign of partial stoppages this week to demand protection from the health hazards of their job.

The two-hour daily strikes began on March 14 to demand protection from exposure to chloramines, the source of the distinctive “swimming pool smell” formed by the reaction between chlorine and organic substances. Two workers told *Le Télégramme* they had suffered respiratory issues, including one which required surgery, following exposure to the substances.

Working hours in municipal services are set by a national law at 1,607 hours per year, but the National Union of Professional Lifeguards is requesting that an exemption for arduous work be applied and the hours reduced. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that chloramines form heavier-than-air gases which “settle on top of the water’s surface where they can cause negative health effects,” and recommends prevention, monitoring, and ventilation to prevent chloramine build-up.

### **Amazon workers strike over pay and conditions in Germany and France**

Workers at Amazon warehouses in the German states of Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia began a strike during the night shift on Monday, as part of a long-running dispute between Amazon and the United Services Union (Verdi).

Verdi is calling for Amazon to adhere to the same collective agreement

as the rest of the retail and mail-order sector, and has called numerous strikes since 2013 over this issue. The strike is to last three days in two of the three warehouses, but only two days in another, according to *Westfalen-Blatt*.

The latest agreement signed in the retail and mail-order sector raised pay by three percent for 2021, and 1.7 percent in 2022, while inflation is now at 7.3 percent. There are around 5,700 workers in the warehouses covered by Verdi’s latest call for a strike, and according to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* around one in five was expected to join the walkout.

Amazon workers in France also walked out on strike last week, with stoppages on Tuesday and Thursday involving around 90 of the 240 workers at the warehouse in Boves. The walk out was called by two unions to demand a five percent pay rise after the company’s below-inflation three percent offer, according to *France Bleu*. On Friday strikes were called in two shifts, with around 100 workers walking out in the morning.

### **Greek archaeologists and cultural workers walk out against “self-finance” of museums**

On Wednesday, museum workers joined a one-day strike and rally to oppose plans, announced in 2019, to make Greece’s major museums into separate, independent entities required to raise their own funds.

According to *ef.syn*, the Panhellenic Association for the Preservation of Antiquities and the Panhellenic Federation of Audience Performance described the plan as “the first step for the privatisation of culture” and said it would lead to the “financial suffocation” of smaller institutions as income would not be distributed between them.

### **Warning strike in collective pay bargaining at Lidl in Greece**

On April 7, workers at Lidl in Greece joined a two-day strike called by the General Confederation of Employees of Greece (GSEE) during collective bargaining with the multinational retailer, which employs around 6,500 workers in the country.

According to the GSEE, 90 percent of workers in many Lidl warehouses joined the stoppage, the *Press Project* reported. The GSEE is calling for a new agreement with “substantial increases” in pay.

### **Genel-?? union signs three-year below-inflation pay deal to end municipal strike in Çi?li, Turkey**

Following negotiations late on Tuesday night, the Genel-?? union reported on Wednesday morning it had reached an agreement with the Çi?li municipal government in the Turkish city of ?zmir, ending a strike of 836 workers which began on Thursday last week.

Official inflation in Turkey is currently over 61 percent, and the independent Inflation Research Group estimates prices rose by over 140 percent year-on-year in the last 12 months. The deal signed in Çi?li agrees a pay rise of only 36 percent for the first year, a total of 40 percent in the second year, and only in the third year is it indexed to inflation, *?hlas* reported. Workers speaking with the newspaper *Evrensel* denounced the

deal, saying that Genel-?? had no right to sign a three-year agreement when they had only authorised a two-year agreement. Several workers told *Evrensel* they intended to continue the strike.

### **Danish scaffolders in Vejle on wildcat strike over unilateral changes to working conditions**

Workers at Helge Frandsen Scaffolding in the Danish town of Vejle began a wildcat strike on March 31 which they have continued in defiance of back-to-work orders from both the Labour Court and their own union, the United Federation of Danish Workers (3F).

According to *Jydske Vestkysten*, which last reported that the strike was ongoing on Monday, the 22 workers are now each being fined 80 kroner by the court for every hour they remain on strike, with the fines now totalling more than 100,000 kroner.

Speaking to *Arbejderen*, the scaffolders explained they terminated their collective agreement and walked out because the employer enforced changes to their working conditions by reinterpreting the existing agreement. The payment for tasks other than building scaffolding is now on a piecework system instead of hourly wages, and their working time is measured in increments of 15 minutes instead of 30 minutes, both leading to effective pay cuts. The strikers are calling for a new collective agreement without the ambiguities currently exploited by Helge Frandsen.

### **Workers at Caterpillar in Northern Ireland walk out over pay**

Workers employed by heavy construction machinery manufacturer Caterpillar in Northern Ireland began a four-day strike on Monday over pay. The company has sites at the Springvale business park in Belfast and at Larne.

The Unite members rejected the latest unacceptable pay offer from the company predicated on compulsory overtime. Further four-day strikes will also take place on May 3 and May 9.

A Unite statement issued Tuesday said reports were circulating of Caterpillar trying to recruit untrained Caterpillar employees in other parts of the UK to fill production roles at the Northern Ireland sites. It also reported that a picket was injured by an HGV driver trying to speed past on Monday.

US-based Caterpillar recorded surging profits last year after COVID-19 measures were abandoned, with cash reserves of around £7 billion, paying out £1.75 billion to shareholders.

### **Chep pallet production workers in Greater Manchester, England vote to continue pay stoppage**

Chep pallet workers in Greater Manchester, England, on strike since December 17, voted in a ballot by 89 percent to continue their stoppage over pay. Turnout was 85 percent.

The stoppage by around 70 workers—begun when employers offered a one percent then two percent rise—is the longest-running current UK dispute, lasting more than 19 weeks to date.

Manchester Trades Union Council and the People's Assembly are providing a cover for Unite as it negotiates below-inflation wage deals up

and down the country, and keeps disputes isolated. On Wednesday, a support march and rally was organised by the Manchester Trades Union Council and the People's Assembly. Over 100 supporters marched from Media City in Salford to the Chep site. Union bureaucrats said nothing about developing the strike and spreading it to other Chep factories, just repeating “the workers united will never be defeated”.

After the march, Unite Northwest tweeted “brave workers fight for better pay in the middle of a cost of living crisis.” The union, however, is limiting the wage demand at five percent this year and five percent next year—a substantial pay cut with inflation at 8.2 percent and rising, and mortgage payments set to increase with interest rate rises.

Chep, part of supply chain company the Brambles, headquartered in Australia, recorded profits of £150 million last year.

### **UK strike continues over pay by refuse drivers employed by scab-organising Coventry Labour council**

The all-out strike by 70 UK refuse collection lorry drivers against Labour Party-run Coventry City Council continues. The strike of Unite union members began January 31, and may run into the summer.

Coventry council hired a replacement scab workforce via its wholly owned arms-length company, Tom White Waste. It has sites guarded by privately hired security staff across the city where waste can be dropped off.

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.

The Unite union members recently voted by a 94 percent margin to continue their stoppage, which will coincide with the May local elections. They reballoted as the mandate for the current action ran out March 24.

The council suspended shop steward, Peter Randle, on what Unite said were bogus charges. The union lodged a claim with an employment tribunal accusing the council of victimisation.

### **Further strikes by UK train cleaners on Avanti West Coast trains over pay**

UK train cleaners working for Atalian Servest Limited held a 48-hour strike beginning Saturday. Picket lines were held along the route taken by West Coast trains, including Carlisle, Liverpool, Manchester and Wembley in north London.

It follows previous 48-hour strikes in January, February and March.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are responsible for cleaning Avanti West Coast trains. They demand to be paid £9.90 an hour. They are currently on £9.68 an hour. They also want a sick pay scheme, as they have to come into work even if they are sick. Atalian offered a 2p an hour increase.

### **Industrial action by UK barristers over low pay and cuts to legal aid**

From Monday, around 2,500 UK barristers began industrial action to protest low pay and the ongoing crisis of legal aid funding. The action

supported by around 90 percent of barristers means they will refuse to stand in for colleagues in overrunning cases by appearing in court or doing preparatory work on their behalf. It is a process known as “returns.”

According to the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), around a fifth of junior criminal barristers have left the profession since 2016. The CBA accuses the government of being slow to implement a recommended 15 percent rise in legal aid funding, which the CBA says is “the bare minimum” to stop the system falling apart.

#### **Dates set for walkout of bus workers in Northern Ireland over pay**

Bus workers including cleaners, drivers and shunters working for Translink in Northern Ireland voted for industrial action after rejecting the company’s pay offer.

The Unite and GMB union members have rejected a three percent pay offer made by the company four times. They are to begin a week of stoppages on April 25, followed by a one-day strike on May 6.

#### **UK Croydon council ground maintenance workers set to strike over pay**

Around 20 ground maintenance workers employed by Croydon council in south London plan to strike April 25 to 27 and May 3 to 5. The workers are responsible for maintaining parklands and games fields.

The Unite union members reject the 1.75 percent pay offer imposed on all local authority workers. With inflation at 8.2 percent and rising, the offer, following a pay freeze over 11 years, means the workers are around 22 percent worse off in real terms.

Around 200 Unite union members working on refuse collection, building maintenance and passenger services for children at Hackney council in London, are striking on the same dates over the same issue.

#### **Teachers at UK independent school faced with choice between pay cut or inferior pension scheme**

UK teachers at Abbot’s Hill school, Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire fighting to defend their pensions are being presented with an ultimatum. Either they remain in the Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) in exchange for a 4.7 percent pay cut or keep their present salary but enrol in an inferior pension scheme.

The National Education Union (NEU) and NASUWT members have been on strike 13 times since November in opposition to the attack on their pensions. The school is an independent (private school) for girls charging fees of £20,000 a year.

The teachers were sent a “fire and rehire” letter by the school saying they must accept the contract changes or be fired with an offer to be rehired on the new contract. A *BBC News* website article of April 12 featured a facsimile of the letter sent to teachers. The same report quotes NEU spokesperson Paul McLaughlin explaining over 40 such letters were sent out and stated, “many have decided to leave.”

Teachers at other independent schools face the same attacks on pensions, but the unions have done nothing to unite their struggles. The NEU recently negotiated a sell-out deal at 23 schools belonging to the

Girls Day School Trust. While current staff can stay in the TPS, newly employed staff will join an inferior pension scheme.

#### **BBC journalists in northwest England work to rule over job cuts and workloads**

Journalists working for the BBC state broadcaster in northwest England are carrying out a work to rule. They are protesting budget cuts across the service, which has led to a loss of 450 jobs throughout England, and increased workloads for remaining workers.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members are also protesting having to carry out duties previously done by skilled technicians.

#### **UK refuse collectors at Wealden council set to strike over pay**

UK refuse collectors employed by waste management company Biffa on behalf of Wealden District Council in east Sussex are to begin a two-week stoppage on April 25.

The GMB members collect the domestic waste of around 65,000 Wealden householders. GMB and Biffa, however, are scheduled to hold talks on April 21 in an attempt to avert a stoppage.

#### **Refuse collection workers in Manchester, UK vote to walk out over pay deal**

Around 200 UK refuse collectors working for outsourcing company Biffa on a Manchester City Council contract voted by a 90 percent majority to strike. They rejected a 1.75 percent pay offer from Biffa. Biffa’s offer is the same offer made to council workers. It means workers being paid only 64 pence above the hourly minimum wage rate.

The Unite and GMB union member work as drivers, loaders and environmental operatives. On Thursday the unions announced that if the dispute is not resolved strikes 10 days of strikes would be held from May 3 and further two weeks of industrial action planned from May 23. An April 12 *Manchester Evening News* article reported GMB regional organiser, Michael Clark saying, “GMB’s door is open – we urge Biffa to come back to us with a decent offer to stop this strike before it begins.”

Biffa is responsible for disposal of the domestic waste of nearly a quarter of a million households in Manchester.

#### **Auto component warehouse workers in Oxford, UK set to strike over pay**

Around 150 UK workers employed by logistics firm Rudolph & Hellmann at the Oxford MINI car plant are to strike. Dates announced are April 26, 28, May 4, 6, 10, 12, 17 and 19.

The Unite union members, who work as warehouse staff and shunter drivers are seeking an improved pay offer. The union disputes claims by the company that it is offering a 10 percent rise, saying the real figure is six percent.

## **Gas distribution workers at UK firm vote for strike action after rejecting below-inflation pay offer**

### **UK financial regulatory workers vote for industrial action over cuts**

Staff working for the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) voted by over 75 percent to strike, the first time they have done so.

The Unite union members oppose plans to cut jobs, pay and impose an appraisal system. A Unite union press release announcing the vote did not give strike dates, but instead explained the union had contacted government mediation service Acas to set up talks with the FCA.

FCA staff are responsible for monitoring and regulating companies providing financial services in the UK.

### **UK academics vote for further strike action over pay and pensions**

In a further ballot over pay, UK academics voted by nearly 75 percent at 36 UK universities in favour of more walkouts. In a separate ballot, academics at 24 universities voted by nearly 80 percent for further stoppages over pensions.

The University and College Union (UCU) members at UK universities already held strikes over the issues of pay, conditions and pensions this year. Instead of a unified struggle at all universities, the UCU called out different institutions, either over pensions or pay and conditions.

The Universities Superannuation Scheme's joint negotiating committee (JNC) recently imposed massive attacks on pensions, meaning workers in the higher education sector losing tens of thousands of pounds. The JNC—comprising five employers' representatives, five from the UCU and a chair—was set up in 2018 and was presented by the union as a concession from employers to justify their sell-out of the 2018 pensions dispute.

UCU General Secretary Jo Grady recently announced the next stage in the so-called Four Fights (pay, workload, casualisation and equality) dispute, including surveys, bargaining, indicative ballots culminating in an actual strike ballot—in a year's time, from "April 2023 onwards!"

The UCU will hold a special higher education sector conference on pay and conditions on April 20, and one on pensions on April 27.

A recently published survey of university academics indicated two thirds of respondents said they were likely to leave the sector over the next five years. They cited pension cuts, pay and working conditions.

### **UK leisure workers in Sandwell vote to strike over pay**

Workers employed at nine leisure centres run by Sandwell Leisure Trust, in the English Midlands voted by an 84 percent majority to strike over a pay claim.

The GMB union members will now be consulted by the union before setting strike dates. However, a GMB press release noted strikes could be as early as April 25. Sandwell Leisure management refused to discuss a pay claim by the workers.

Sandwell Leisure Trust, an independent company with charitable status, runs the leisure centres on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough council.

Around 2,000 UK workers employed by natural gas distribution firm, Cadent have voted to walk out.

The GMB union members rejected a four percent pay offer. Cadent, which made a £900 million operating profit last year, is the largest of the four major UK gas distribution companies.

A GMB press release announcing the strike gave no dates for stoppages but said they could start as soon as April 22.

### **Freight cargo handlers at Heathrow, London airport in ballot for strike over pay**

Around 200 cargo handlers employed by Worldwide Flight Services (WFS) at London's Heathrow airport are balloting for strike action over pay. The ballot closes April 27.

The Unite union members are responsible for loading and unloading cargo for major airlines such as American Airlines and Etihad at Heathrow. Unite is calling on WFS to match pay rises of seven to 10 percent made by firms such as dnata and Menzies, and/or a one-off £3,000 payment for 2021.

### **Ballot of college staff in England shows they are prepared to take action over pay**

In an indicative ballot of Further Education staff in England, 91 percent were prepared to ballot for strike action over pay.

The UCU submitted a pay claim for 2022/23 to the employers' body, the Association of Colleges (AoC). The claim is for a 10 percent rise with at minimum a rise of £2,000. UCU figures show the pay of college lecturers has fallen by 35 percent since 2009 and their pay is around £9,000 less than teachers.

Talks between the UCU and other unions with AoC representatives over pay begin in May.

### **Hospital domestic workers at London hospital ballot over change to pay cycle**

Low-paid domestic staff working for outsourced company Mitie on behalf of St George's Hospital in Tooting, London balloted for industrial action. The ballot closed Thursday.

The GMB members are protesting Mitie's changing the pay cycle, leaving the already low-paid workers having to take out loans to meet immediate bills.

### **UK supermarket distributive staff at Asda in consultative ballot over pay**

Around 8,000 distribution workers employed by supermarket giant Asda are taking part in a consultative ballot which closes May 4.

The GMB union members work in clerical, warehouse and driving roles for Asda. Asda is seeking to cut sick pay entitlement for the first three days of a sickness absence in a pay offer which the GMB says represents a cut in real terms.

#### **Unite union calls off planned stoppage of UK logistics drivers in Burton-on-Trent**

The Unite union called off a series of planned strikes by UK HGV drivers after agreeing a deal with DHL Tradeteam, working on the Molson Coors beer manufacturer contract in Burton-on-Trent. The planned stoppages included 72-hour strikes beginning April 6 and 10.

The Unite union members were involved in a three-year dispute over excessively long route journeys. They accused the company of reneging on an agreement to employ 25 extra drivers to relieve the pressure on existing drivers.

According to Unite, the new accepted deal includes a 7.5 percent pay rise and drivers will have the right to refuse routes that would mean journeys lasting longer than 11.5 hours. Any driver willing to take such routes will be paid at a new premium rate.

#### **GMB union calls off refuse workers strike at North Somerset Environment Company in England after improved offer**

The GMB union called off strikes of around 100 UK refuse and recycling workers at the North Somerset Environment Company due to take place Tuesday and Wednesday. A further two-day stoppage April 16-17 was also cancelled. An overtime ban which began Tuesday is in place throughout April, as is a scheduled walkout April 21-22.

The GMB members turned down a 1.75 percent pay offer from the company, which is wholly owned by North Somerset council and serves 88,000 homes and were preparing to walk out. The company came back with an Acas-mediated improved offer, which is now being considered by the workers.

#### **GMB union puts strike of refuse collectors in Sussex, England on hold for talks**

The GMB union paused the strike, begun March 14, by around 60 UK refuse collectors, street cleaners and recycling workers in Adur and Worthing in Sussex.

The GMB union members voted by a 100 percent majority on a 90 percent turnout to walk out for higher pay. The employer refused to negotiate with the GMB, claiming they only recognised the Unison union. The pause was to allow for talks between the council and union due to take place Wednesday. The council agreed to pay a one-off "catch-up" payment to the refuse workers to deal with the backlog of uncollected rubbish.

#### **Unite union calls off planned stoppages by UK tugboat crews at Teesport over pay**

Unite called off a strike by tugboat crew working for Svitzer Marine at Teesport, England, due to begin Wednesday. They held a 48-hour strike March 1, followed by a 24-hour strike March 9.

The Unite union members voted 100 percent for the stoppages in opposition to 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.

A Unite union statement said the strike was cancelled after Svitzer Marine put forward an improved pay offer which was accepted by the tugboat crew. It gave no details of the settlement.

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

#### **UK heavy machinery parts delivery drivers to hold strike vote over pay offer**

Dozens of UK drivers working for logistics firm DHL delivering parts for construction machinery firm JCB are to ballot after the company tried to impose a five percent pay rise.

In a consultative ballot, the GMB union members voted by a 95 percent majority to be prepared to ballot for strike action. A GMB press release of April 11 announced the ballot but gave no dates for it.

#### **Protest 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 held a protest against low pay outside the hospital on Saturday April 9.

The GMB members are seeking pay parity with directly employed NHS staff. They are paid the minimum wage, receive a lower leave allowance than directly employed NHS staff and do not get enhanced rates for weekend work. A similar protest took place over the same issue on March 5.

#### **Further bankrupt protests by unions over UK P&O ferry sackings**

The RMT union announced a protest on Tuesday April 19 at 2pm at Maritime House in Dover. The International Transport Federation called for a demonstration outside the offices of DP World (P&O's parent company) on Thursday April 21.

The protests are over P&O's sacking of its entire 800 UK ferry crew and their replacement with a much lower-paid scab workforce on March 17 by Zoom with no notice.

Faced with the bankrupt nationalist policy of appealing to the UK Tory government to reverse the sackings, almost the entire workforce signed up to an enhanced redundancy package on offer. There was a two-week deadline for workers to accept the enhanced package.

While workers in Dover and Hull did what they could to oppose their ejection from the vessels, and Dutch dockers in Rotterdam refused to

unload P&O cargo, the RMT and Nautilus unions opposed a united struggle to defend jobs and raise wages of seafarers in all countries.

## **Middle East**

### **Iraqi power workers protest privatisation**

Workers at Shatt Al-Basra and Al-Rumaila gas power stations recently held protests outside the power stations after the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity privatised the two power stations. Following the takeover by the Kar company, some workers were laid off. The protests were organised in conjunction with Iraqi electricity unions. One power worker who took part in the protest was subsequently sacked

### **Ongoing strike of Israeli Foreign Ministry workers could disrupt Israeli Eurovision song contestants**

The *Jerusalem Post* reported April 12 that the ongoing strike by Israeli Foreign Ministry Workers' Union could hold up arrangements for Israeli Eurovision contestants to be able to take part in the competition. The Foreign Ministry workers are in dispute over unpaid overtime.

## **Africa**

### **Gold miners' pay strike at Sibanye-Stillwater in South Africa continues**

The strike at Sibanye-Stillwater gold mines in South Africa, begun March 9, is entering its second month. 30,000 miners want a R1,000 monthly rise, while the company is offering R700 a month.

The National Union of Miners (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) threaten to escalate the strike to involve 35,000 miners at Sibanye-Stillwater's platinum operations at Rustenberg and Marikana, which account for 70 percent of the group's earnings.

The NUM and AMCU also plan protest marches to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the government Union Buildings in Pretoria and the head office of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The NUM and AMCU have the power to call out a total of 163,000 miners in South Africa's platinum mining sector but are using this as a threat to pressure the company into talks. In 2019, AMCU sold out a five-month stoppage at Sibanye-Stillwater when they accepted a deal which they had previously labelled "slave labour" when first agreed by the NUM and Solidarity unions.

### **Striking workers fired at by police and security at hospitals in North West province, South Africa**

Security guards and Police used rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse hundreds of striking health workers demonstrating April 7 in the grounds of Witrand Psychiatric Hospital and Potchefstroom Hospital, North West, South Africa. Ninety-four people were injured.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union members had gathered to meet with hospital management and the provincial executive council member responsible for health. They were demanding their performance bonuses and an end to corruption in the province's health service.

### **Striker shot during ongoing stoppage at South African electrical firm**

A trade union shop steward shot during a demonstration at Jasco Electrical Manufacturers, Pinetown, South Africa, where 300 employees have been on strike since March 9, is in hospital recovering after a rubber bullet punctured his lung.

The police are treating the incident as attempted murder. It occurred when two private security guards fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the striking workers.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members at Jasco are demanding the six percent pay increase secured during the national engineering strike last October. They also want their December bonus and to be consulted about the frequency of salary payments.

The stoppage is affecting major South African domestic appliance manufacturers, Defy and KIC, both supplied by Jasco.

### **Blind and shutter workers strike for pay rise at firm in Cape Town, South Africa**

Over 100 workers at Taylor Blinds and Shutters, Cape Town, South Africa walked out April 4 to demand a R250 a week rise. The employers offered a six percent increase, which for the lowest paid workers amounts to R60, and locked the strikers out.

The Independent Commercial, Hospitality and Allied Workers Union members say they will take the matter to the Labour Court if the company does not end its lockout.

### **Nigerian university staff extend strike by two weeks**

University staff in Nigeria extended their "warning" strike by two weeks.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Allied and Educational Institutions members walked out over the government's refusal to pay the minimum wage and other issues going back to an agreement made between the government and the unions in 2009.

The unions sent a letter accusing the government of lacking sincerity over the failure to pay staff their allowances. They wrote, however, "Within this two weeks extension, if the government responds we can suspend [the strike]..."

### **Research workers in Kaduna, Nigeria, walk out on three-day strike**

Nigerian workers at the National Institute of Trypanosomiasis Research

(NITR) in Kaduna have walked out on a three-day “warning” strike, to protest poor conditions at work.

Angry workers appeared at all the entrances to NITR, holding placards, chanting slogans and singing songs of protest.

### **Union calls halt to sit-in protest on Zambian railways**

Zambian railway workers have been holding a sit-in protest, bringing Zambia Railways Limited (ZRL) to a standstill. The workers were demanding a salary increase and fairer management.

On April 9, however, the Zambia Railways Limited Workers’ Union (ZRLWU) demanded they end the protest so the union could enter talks with ZRL. The union said this was the result of a meeting between ZRLWU leaders, management and the Central Province Provincial Administration.

ZRL Acting Director, Fred Mwila, said the deadlock over salaries was settled with the union, but no figures were included in media reports.

Central Province Permanent Secretary, Milner Mwanakampwe, thanked the union for its help in demobilising the railway workers, and added that the government expects all workers involved in the sit-in protest to follow ZRLWU instructions and end their protest action. He also said the management and union should work together more closely to ensure there were no further stoppages.

ZRL transported over one million tons of cargo in 2020 under pandemic conditions, its highest annual load since 2006.



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