

General strike in Italy to protest government spending on war; Strikes continue across French transport network over pay and conditions; French energy sector poised to walk out over pay and conditions; South African Sibanye Stillwater gold miners' pay strike continues but unions oppose united action with platinum miners; thousands of tax workers and ArcelorMittal foundry workers strike in South Africa over pay

## 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.*

### General strike in Italy to protest government spending on war

Italian workers employed throughout the public and private sectors held a general strike on May 20 against Prime Minister Mario Draghi's government. Some of the sectors involved began strikes on the evening of May 19.

The strike was called by a number of trade unions under the theme of "lower your weapons, raise your wages", in protest at increased spending on war at the expense of workers' wages and living standards. Among the unions involved were the USB and the USI-CIT trade union confederation.

The Local.it website reported, "Demonstrations are set to take place in cities across Italy, including in Milan, Rome, Messina, Palermo, Catania, Cagliari, Turin, Bologna, Venice, Florence, Pisa, Turin, Genoa, La Spezia, Reggio Emilia, Trieste, Bergamo and Taranto..."

The Local cited the comments of Walter Montagnoli, national secretary of the CUB union, who spoke to SkyTG24. On the issues the strike was called over he commented, "The conflict [in Ukraine] needs to be stopped. [...] Draghi's government is taking military expenses to 2 percent of our GDP: national defence expenses will go from 25 to 38 billion euros, thus reducing the budget for healthcare, education, public transport, the construction industry and, naturally, pensions and wages."

**Strikes continue across French transport network over pay and conditions**

Strikes of French transport workers are continuing across the country. Unions called another three days of action this week at RATP in Île-de-France and Paris over negotiations on changes to the working conditions of machinists ahead of opening the network to further competitive tender in 2023.

The strike began with bus and tram workers and was extended to the Métro on Wednesday.

In Rouen, bus and tram workers are striking for 55 minutes every day from May 11 to June 15. The action by the FO and CFE unions was described by local press as an "almost invisible and incomprehensible strike." FO is continuing a similar pattern of 55-minute daily stoppages in Marseilles at RTM metros against organisational changes. The stoppages, which began May 11, will run until September 9. The initial stoppages were reported to have created little disturbance.

Workers at Taneo buses in Nevers have been on indefinite strike since May 16 demanding better pay. Bus workers in the regional Châlons transport network, operated by Kéolis, walked out last Saturday.

Unions called off a strike of signalmen on national rail network SNCF due this week. The strike was called over working conditions, as the service is chronically understaffed. Local strikes broke out over the issue already this year.

The unions called off the action when promised the recruitment of additional signalmen, bringing to 720 the number of recruits for 2022, a one-off bonus of 600 euros in June and a temporary 20 percent increase in work bonus for seven months from September.

The unions' statement made clear they are trying to stave off anger among the workers: "It is not a question of signing a blank cheque to management and considering these first advances as settling all accounts."

**Joint strike notice issued across French energy sector for improved pay rates**

Unions representing workers across the electricity and gas sectors in France issued a joint strike notice, with a call for strike action from June 2. They want wage scales to be revised to take account of inflation.

Salaries rose across the sector by 0.3 percent at the beginning of the year. With inflation reaching 4.8 percent in April, workers on the lowest pay rates are slipping below the legal minimum wage.

The unions said their intention is “not to impact on users,” according to Fabrice Coudour of the CGT’s energy section. He said he hoped employers would return to “a certain lucidity” before the proposed strike.

### **Municipal workers in Lyon, France strike over pay and conditions**

Municipal workers in the French city of Lyon came out on three strikes over two days this week to protest working conditions and wages following the pandemic.

The workers are angry that the brunt of the pandemic fell on them, with a heavier health protocol while workers fell sick and rest days were only allowed for certain groups. The CGT said these workers were “on the front line for more than two years already,” and the health crisis had shown the importance of their work.

Municipal workers in schools and the CCAS (the communal centre for social action, the local bodies responsible for prevention and social development) were on strike yesterday, followed by their colleagues in crèches today.

### **Protests, strikes of French health workers continue**

When the French government awarded a 100-euro monthly bonus for health executives and general nurses in December, it excluded some sections of care personnel like specialist nurses and childcare workers. On May 10, 60 caregivers protested outside Montpellier University Hospital against the exclusion.

The CGT and FO union members told the press they felt forgotten. Sylvia, an intensive care nursing assistant for 17 years said, “It’s as if we weren’t working.” Amélie, a childcare worker, said that “with all the difficulty that COVID has caused us ... it doesn’t make us want to stay in the hospital.”

Protests continue by the 30 percent of French healthcare workers excluded from the 2019 Ségur healthcare review’s bonus. On May 17 and 18, workers at the Kerpont medico-educational institute (IME) in Caudan walked out against their exclusion.

The IME employs 20 professionals who work with 42 young people aged 14-25 in a day school. Thierry Berrou, a specialist technical educator, said that all the administrative and general services staff are outside the Ségur review, which “is an injustice when we all have the same task of supervising young people.”

Berrou pointed to increased sickness absences, exhaustion and declining working conditions as factors making it hard to attract new recruits.

Workers at Le Jeune hospital in Saint-Renan walked out May 18, demanding an action plan to strengthen local care provision and the recruitment of more staff. The pandemic has exacerbated a crisis of working conditions.

Guilaine Gélébart, of the CGT, told *Le Télégramme*, “Because of absenteeism we are called back on our days off without any real financial compensation, just recovery days which mount up for lack of being able to take them. The teams are exhausted.”

### **Strike of Kéolis drivers ends in Aix, France, but workers fear returning to work**

The indefinite strike by Kéolis drivers across the Aix-en-Provence bus network, begun on May 2, ended Saturday. The 120 drivers demanded 100 euros gross increase in salary and improved working conditions.

The company awarded a 76 euro increase on hiring, to be introduced incrementally from 1 January 2023.

Hocine Arba, CGT union rep, admitted that while this was “close to what we wanted ... not everything is settled.” The question of working conditions remains unresolved, and Arba said “the climate remains tense.” Issues of breaks, management repression and the company sanctions system were all raised during the dispute and led to extensive sickouts.

There are still 85 workers on sick leave, 15 more than at the start of the strike, with the CGT admitting “some fear returning to work in these conditions.” Despite this, the CGT ordered a return to work, organising three meetings with management to take place by June 10. “We will see if working conditions improve, if managerial pressure will stop as well as repression against the employees,” Arba told the press.

The union is now appealing to local municipal officials to intervene with the company.

An interim transport plan has been put in place. Arba said the union hopes to see a full resumption of services by September but expects new sick leaves if nothing changes.

### **Actions increase around national public sector day of action in Belgium**

New actions continue to be announced as part of a National Day of Action across Belgium’s public services on Tuesday, May 31. The call covered all services at federal, regional and community levels. Action is expected to take different forms, including stoppages.

The day was called by unions to denounce the “general malaise” of the sector. Along with falling purchasing power, the unions are calling for greater investment, better social dialogue and an improved pension policy.

Firefighters already signalled their intention of participating in protest at staff shortages and lack of resources. They accused the government of showing “little interest” in workers on the frontline in the face of the pandemic and the floods of 2021.

Following the initial call, other sectors announced their intention to participate. Workers on the national rail network SNCB will strike against the cutting of jobs and conditions. Marianne Lerouge of the CSC union said staffing levels had fallen so low, “We can no longer provide a basic service.”

She said pensions and purchasing power were also worrying transport workers. Inflation in April stood at 8.31 percent, its highest since 1983. Service trains transporting railway workers to work are abolished, meaning they have to drive to their shifts.

Education workers will also strike, demanding preservation of their pensions and greater recruitment. The last education strike was in 2018. In Belgium unions represent different political tendencies. The liberal and Christian unions have not yet joined the socialist union’s call for an education strike.

Workers at public broadcaster VRT also announced a strike between

10am and 1pm against the company's new transformation plan. This will see 116 redundancies, the non-replacement of 50 staff, and the private outsourcing of in-house production. The unions are calling for the blocking of all radio and television broadcasts during the strike.

### **Spanish postal workers to strike against dismantling of the public service**

Unions at Spanish postal service Correos called a three-day strike June 1-3, denouncing the imminent risk of the "technical bankruptcy" of the public postal service. Correos was 264.2 million euros in debt in 2020.

The unions denounced the job cuts. Between 2011 and 2020, Correos shed almost 10,000 jobs.

Correos chair Juan Manuel Serrano, appointed by the PSOE in 2020, is pushing what it calls a transformation of its business model. Correos denies this is a privatisation programme, but the unions denounced the "Serrano model" for its "aversion to public service." They accuse the company's changes of threatening service to remoter parts of the country.

### **Bus strikes continue in Zaragoza, Spain**

The rolling series of partial strikes by bus workers in Zaragoza, Spain, begun April 18, is set to continue until the end of June. Services are stopped for three hours each day, in 60-minute shifts which vary from day to day.

Workers rejected operator Avanza's three-year pay deal, which would have seen a 1 percent rise for 2021, 2.5 percent in 2022, and 2 percent in 2023, with a revision clause of up to 7 percent at the end of the agreement. The offer also included the unfreezing of seniority and attendance bonuses. The company claimed this constituted a rise of above 8 percent for 2020-23.

The workers are demanding 16 percent and talks at the Aragonese Mediation and Arbitration Service last month broke down.

Spanish law enables the imposition of minimum service provision on striking public sector workers. Zaragoza city council set a minimum service requirement of 47-70 percent during the strike.

### **Spanish metalworkers strike for "decent" pay agreement**

Workers at Álava Metal are taking three days of strike action over their ongoing negotiation of a new pay agreement. The strikes on May 18, 24 and 26 are for a "decent" agreement.

The six unions at the company have been in negotiation for four years "without any progress," and say that "problems and precariousness continue to accumulate."

They are demanding wage increases above the consumer price index (CPI), a minimum wage of 1,400 euros, reduced hours, and limits to flexibility requirements, as well as improved safety measures against the "numerous work accidents."

Metalworkers in the Cantabria sector also announced an indefinite strike from June 2 against employers' blocking of a collective agreement and a below-inflation pay deal. The Pymetal employers' association offered 20,000 workers in the sector two percent in 2021, 2 percent in 2022 and

2.25 percent in 2023, with a review clause in 2024.

CPI already stood at 6 percent in 2021.

The unions called for a 6.5 percent rise for 2021 and rises corresponding to CPI plus one percent for the 2022-24. Other demands include reducing the working day by 13 hours a year, supplementing 100 percent temporary disability due to accident, extending paid travelling time and expanding paid leave for medical accompaniment of relatives. Pymetal has called this "flatly unaffordable."

The UGT, CCOO and USO unions, which called the strike, said workers "do not want to go to such lengths" and the strike date was to give Pymetal a fortnight's leeway to redress the injustice. César Conde of the CCOO, recalling a metalworker who died at the Gamesa plant, said "We cannot allow the demands of the workers not to be met" in a sector where "unfortunately people still die."

### **Greek bus workers in Thessaloniki strike again**

Bus workers at OASTH in Thessaloniki, Greece are striking again over pay and conditions. The workers held a 24-hour strike earlier this month, despite a court ruling it illegal. After a four-hour stoppage yesterday, the workers will be on a 24-hour strike on June 1.

They are angry that a Collective Bargaining Agreement, agreed in December, has still not been approved by the Ministries of Infrastructure and Transport and Finance. The workers have to work with reduced wages.

They are also angry at the declining condition of the vehicles they drive, accusing the company of decommissioning the bus fleet and replacing it with the expensive leasing of antiquated buses from across Europe. They say the nationalised company is being run down for privatisation.

They pointed to the lack of "basic safety standards in the midst of a pandemic" while they were "mourning the loss of several colleagues."

Giannis Dimkas, president of the OASTH Workers Union, said that there would be no stoppages during the Panhellenic Exam period, to ensure access for students.

### **Unions call off Italian local transport strike**

A strike of local transport workers scheduled for May 31 was called off by the five unions involved, following renewal of the national collective agreement.

Negotiations were ongoing for more than four years after the previous agreement expired on December 31, 2017. The new contract, effective January 2021 to December 2023 gives an average pay increase of 110 euros and a one-off holiday bonus of 500 euros.

The deal still must be ratified by the 120,000 workers affected.

### **Norwegian teachers unhappy with public sector wage agreement may strike**

Following mediation talks, the Norwegian government agreed a municipal sector wage rise of 3.84 percent on Tuesday. Teachers are angry at the offer, and strike action could begin within two weeks.

Stefan Handal, negotiator for the union confederation Unio, told NRK

teachers had come out of the settlement poorly: “[W]e were the wage losers last year,” and the employers were now “setting up a scheme that will ensure teachers have poorer wage growth.”

Handal said education strikes would begin in two weeks.

### **Portuguese airport workers strike**

Transport workers’ union STTAMP called for a six-month strike against “all activity” at ground handling company Portway. The union called the strike from June 1 to December 31 after Portway rejected its request to join the company agreement and participate in negotiations.

Other unions are also in ongoing disputes with Portway but are not trying to combine their actions. The Union of Airport Maintenance and Aviation Workers (STAMA) called 21 strike dates until the end of the year and an overtime ban, alleging breach of collective bargaining and other matters. STAMA also contested the minimum service requirements imposed by government for the Portway strike.

Because of the notice dates for the start of the dispute, STAMA said it was not possible to schedule action to coincide with a strike at Portway over the Easter weekend by the aviation workers’ union Sintac.

Sintac accused Portway of breaching agreements on holiday pay and career progression. It said the company’s evaluation system gave negative grades to 90 percent of workers, without any possibility of appeal, blocking any possibility of promotion.

Sintac said Portway discriminates against workers by specifying which unions are recognised in its assessment process. All three unions sought mediation at the industrial relations directorate (DGERT). Portway rescheduled a DGERT meeting with STAMA as it clashed with another ongoing meeting with Sintac.

### **Cyprus bank staff to strike over redundancies**

Hellenic Bank staff in Cyprus will strike May 31 against plans to axe 300 to 350 jobs as a cost cutting measure. Workers voted by 99.5 percent for the action.

Bank CEO Oliver Gatzke announced the redundancies without compensation, as under previous schemes. He also said the bank was reviewing other practices, including wage indexing, employer’s contribution to health funds, and pay rises. He said any collective agreement had to consider the bank’s revenue and expenses.

Bank workers’ union ETYK said the action would be stepped up if Hellenic did not comply with the agreements and decisions of the Labour Ministry. Yet Transport Minister Yiannis Karousos, who is standing in for the ill Labour Minister Zeta Emilianidou, immediately cancelled a meeting with union officials when the strike was called. Karousos said it was not the time for a strike, given the state of Emilianidou’s health!

### **UK drivers employed by scab-organising Coventry Labour council continue pay strike**

The all-out strike by 70 UK refuse collection lorry drivers against Labour Party-run Coventry City Council begun January 31 continues. It is reported that talks between Unite representatives and the council over the

dispute have now begun. However, the drivers are currently balloting over whether to extend their strike for a further 12 weeks.

The Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers’ pay starts at just £22,183 a year. It takes 11 years’ 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 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.

Coventry council hired a replacement scab workforce via its wholly owned arms-length company, Tom White Waste. It was recently reported that the HGV drivers working for Tom White Waste were awarded a 12 percent pay rise. The company has sites guarded by privately hired security staff across the city where waste can be dropped off.

### **Striking street cleaners and refuse collectors in Rugby, England reject latest pay offer from council and continue strike**

Striking refuse lorry drivers, loaders and street cleaning staff in Rugby, England, working for Conservative-controlled Rugby council, are continuing their strike after turning down a pay offer. The offer was £30,940 for drivers and £24,587 for refuse loaders. The strike begun April 26, has been extended until June 15.

The Unite union members include street cleaners, starting on £17,100 a year and rising to £19,200 after five years, while loaders begin at £19,200 rising to £21,300 after five years. The HGV drivers start at £21,300, reaching £23,400 after five years.

### **UK refuse collection workers in Wealden, Sussex continue strike over pay**

UK refuse collection workers employed by waste management company Biffa contracted by Wealden council began a strike on May 2 over pay.

The GMB union members who are seeking an improved pay offer were originally set to strike for two weeks but are now out until June 11.

### **Oil refinery workers at Fawley, UK plan further stoppages over derisory pay offer**

Following three days of strikes in April and early May, around 100 workers at the US-owned ExxonMobil oil refinery at Fawley, England are to hold further walk outs on June 9, 10, 16, 17 and 20.

The Unite union members representing around a third of the workforce are employed by three contractors, Altrad Services, Trant Engineering Limited and Veolia Services. The workers rejected a 2.5 percent pay offer over two years. Unite is calling for a one-year deal in line with inflation, which has reached 11.1 percent (retail price index rate).

Following the strike action, Altrad suspended one of its workers who was a Unite union representative after 50 Unite members, working for Altrad but not part of the strike, refused to cross a picket line. Unite insisted this was not secondary action, which is illegal under Tory anti-trade union legislation. Instead Unite said the action was because safety critical staff were not on site.

Around a sixth of petrol filling stations and all UK airports are dependent on supplies from Fawley.

### **Arriva bus workers in Yorkshire, UK set to strike over pay**

Around 650 UK bus drivers and engineers working for Arriva in Yorkshire are to begin an all-out strike on June 6. Arriva's depots at Castleford, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, Selby and Wakefield are taking part in the dispute.

The Unite union members voted by 96 percent majority to walk out. They rejected a 4.1 percent pay offer from Arriva.

Thanks to Unite which refuses to unify the struggles of all bus workers, bus companies can maintain different pay rates to maximise their profits in a constant race to the bottom. The union does not even unite action within companies.

Unite recently cancelled a 48-hour strike due to start May 16 at Arriva London South and recommended a pay offer of 3.5 percent plus a £250 lump sum for the 2021 financial year that was accepted by members, despite a significant "no" vote.

### **UK university lecturers begin marking boycott over pay and conditions**

On Monday, following 18 days of strike action at UK universities, academics at around 20 UK universities began to boycott marking exams, returning marks and setting coursework.

The boycott is a continuation of the action by University and College Union (UCU) members over pay, pensions and working conditions.

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

The UCU has now called off further stoppages over pensions until the new academic year beginning September. Some universities such as Sheffield and Dundee are threatening to dock 100 percent of the pay of academics taking part in the marking boycott. According to the UCU, Queen Mary, University of London is considering using external contractors to mark exam papers. The UCU estimates the boycott will disrupt the graduation process of around 100,000 students.

### **Pay strikes by Scottish further education lecturers continue**

From Monday, Scottish further education college lecturers escalated their industrial action that began on April 20 for improved pay.

The Educational Institute of Scotland – Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA) stepped up walkouts to two days a week. The EIS-FELA reduced its demand from an annual increase of £2,000 to £1,300. The employers' body is offering £850 plus a one-off £200 lump sum.

### **Further stoppages by teachers at London school against bullying, poor working conditions and pay**

Teachers at Walthamstow Primary Academy in Waltham Forest in the UK capital held the third and final of a series of three-day strikes this week.

The NEU members are protesting poor working conditions and bullying by management, and claim they are wrongly underpaid. They held previous strikes over the same issue.

### **London underground rail staff to strike over job cuts**

Around 4,000 London Underground rail staff plan to strike on June 6. The action will take place on Monday following the four-day Queen's Platinum Jubilee bank holiday weekend.

The RMT members are opposed to plans to cut 600 jobs among London Underground station staff. In total there are around 10,000 RMT members working for LU but only station staff are being called out.

### **Unite suspends 48-hour strike by GXO delivery drivers who supply Co-op after new pay offer**

The Unite union suspended a 48-hour strike due to begin on May 31 by around 330 delivery drivers employed by logistics giant GXO. The company came back with an improved pay offer on which the drivers are balloting.

The drivers work on a contract to supply Co-op stores throughout the northwest of England but extending to Leeds, Hereford and Aberystwyth. They are based at the Elton Head Road depot in St Helens. They are currently paid £14.77 an hour whereas drivers on comparable contracts can be paid £17 an hour or more.

If the new offer is rejected the remaining 19 scheduled 48-hour strikes will take place beginning on June 8 and will continue throughout June, July and August.

### **Strike of aerospace workers at Northern Ireland factory announced**

Aerospace workers employed by RCL Engineering at their Langford Lodge facility in Crumlin, Northern Ireland were to begin a week-long walkout on Thursday.

The Unite union members are seeking a pay increase and are protesting the unequal treatment of a group of women machinists who are paid £1.93 an hour less than their male colleagues doing equivalent work. The workers are also carrying out an overtime ban.

### **Gas distribution workers to hold 48-hour stoppage after rejecting below-inflation pay offer**

Around 2,000 workers in the UK employed by natural gas distribution

firm, Cadent will hold a 48-hour stoppage on May 30.

The GMB union members rejected a 4 percent pay offer. Cadent, which made a £900 million operating profit last year, is the largest of the four major UK gas distribution companies.

### **Further strikes by UK post office staff over pay**

Staff at 114 Crown Post Offices will walk out on June 4. This will be followed on June 6 by a stoppage of Post Office staff in admin and supply chain. The action will affect 11,500 sub post offices as deliveries and collection of cash etc would be disrupted.

The Communication Workers Union members held a one-day stoppage on May 3. They voted in March by a 97.3 percent majority for strike action in a ballot turnout of 70 percent. They rejected a 2.5 percent pay rise.

The proposed two-year deal includes the pay freeze for last year and a lump sum of £250 in addition to the 2.5 percent from April this year.

### **Engineering workers at Stockton-on-Tees to strike over pay disparity**

Workers at Darchem Engineering in Stockton-on-Tees in England are to begin an overtime ban on June 6, followed by 48-hour strikes starting June 13, 20 and 27.

The Unite union members are protesting after welders' pay was increased by £2 an hour but no increase was given to platers and sheet metal workers.

Darchem has a £200 million contract to supply pond liners to the extension of the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant. The strike action could delay work on the power plant.

### **UK workers at Preston brewery to strike in June over inadequate pay offer**

Around 220 workers employed by Budweiser Brewing Group (BBG) at its Samesbury site near Preston, England voted to strike against an inadequate pay offer. Following months of discussion, BBG came up with a 3 percent increase for 2022 and for 2023, as well as increasing overtime rates.

The GMB union members will hold a series of strikes in June. It will be the first walkout in the brewery's 50-year history. The company brews several well-known brands, including Boddingtons, Budweiser and Stella Artois.

### **Further stoppages announced of workers at UK drinks can manufacturer over pay**

Following stoppages of around 200 workers at Crown Bevcan in Carlisle, England on May 11 and 14, they will walk out again on June 4, 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

The Unite union members rejected a below inflation 3 percent pay rise

and one-off payment. Crown Bevcan is part of the American-owned Crown Holdings group, whose worldwide sales last year were £8.4 billion. Bevcan produces cans for drinks producers Bulmers, Coca Cola and Heineken among others.

### **Scottish fishery protection workers to strike over pay**

Around 80 staff working for Marine Scotland are to hold a 48-hour strike on Thursday and again on June 3.

The Unite union members work as engineers, cooks, officers and deck hands on Marine Protection Vessels (MPV) based at Aberdeen harbour. They are protesting a 2 percent pay offer for 2021 and the Scottish government's refusal to re-open talks on it. MPVs are responsible for imposing legislation regarding fishing in Scottish waters.

### **UK civil service ballot over pay, pensions and redundancy terms**

UK civil servants will ballot for possible industrial action over pay, pensions and redundancy terms with the ballot taking place in September.

Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union members voted by a 97 percent majority in a consultative ballot on the PCS's national pay claim for a 10 percent rise, with a £15 an hour minimum living wage. In the same ballot, 81 percent were in favour of taking industrial action.

The UK government indicated it wants to attack civil service redundancy terms and recently announced its intention to cut 91,000 civil service jobs, around 20 percent of the total number of posts.

### **Rail workers in Scotland to ballot over pay**

Rail workers in Scotland are to ballot over pay. The Rail Maritime and Transport union members rejected a 2.2 percent pay offer, following previous pay freezes and low pay rises. The RMT release announcing the ballot gave no dates for it.

### **Refuse collectors in Chesterfield, UK to ballot for strike action after rejecting below inflation pay offer**

UK refuse collectors employed by waste management company, Veolia Environmental contracted to Chesterfield council voted by 100 percent to reject a below inflation 4.48 percent pay offer.

The GMB members will ballot for industrial action, but the GMB has yet to announce dates for the ballot. In a press release announcing the pay offer rejection the GMB stated, "We have heard, unofficially, that Veolia Environmental services has said it will increase the offer to 6 per cent if workers resign from the union – if true, this is an abhorrent tactic."

### **Parking services workers at London's Hackney council to ballot over pay and conditions**

Around 70 workers employed by Hackney council's parking services department are to ballot over pay and conditions.

The Unite union members, who had been employed by private company APCOA to provide parking services, were brought back in house on April 1. However, the workers were told their pay and conditions which are inferior to other Hackney council workers will not be considered for an upgrade until next year. They are demanding the issue is addressed now.

The parking services workers join around 200 other Hackney council workers in dispute over pay. At the end of April and beginning of May the 200 workers employed in refuse collection, building services and transport for special needs and the disabled held two three-day stoppages.

They are opposed to the nationally set Local Government Association pay offer of 1.5 percent, and up to 2.75 percent for those on the lowest pay grades. The offer is a cut in real terms on top of 11 years of pay freezes, which leaves council workers around 22 percent worse off in spending power. The workers are demanding as a minimum a 10 percent rise.

### **Ballot of staff at Calderdale council, UK over bullying claims**

Staff working for Calderdale council in West Yorkshire are taking part in a consultative ballot. They work in the Green Spaces, Street Scene, Transport and Community Protection.

The GMB members are protesting the bullying of a GMB representative by management.

### **GMB union calls off strike by UK component delivery drivers employed by logistics firm DHL after workers accept new pay offer**

The GMB union called off strikes by dozens of UK delivery drivers employed by logistics firm DHL, under contract to deliver component parts for heavy construction machinery manufacturer JCB, due to have taken place Monday and Tuesday.

They voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out, after rejecting a 5 percent pay offer the company tried to impose. However, the company came back with a new deal for a 9.5 percent pay rise plus a £750 bonus. The drivers voted on the new offer Monday and accepted it by an 80 percent majority.

### **Unite union ends strike of car parts workers in County Durham, UK as workers vote for new pay offer**

The Unite union ended the strike of around 200 UK workers at the NSK Bearings and AKS Precision Ball in Peterlee after workers voted to accept a new pay offer from the company. The workers held one-day strikes each Wednesday and Saturday since March 23.

The Unite union members rejected a 1.6 percent pay offer. The two factory sites are owned by NSK Europe, which made an £80 million profit in the last financial year. The sites make bearings for car manufacturers including Renault, Toyota and VW.

The Unite press release announcing the end of the strike gave no details of the settlement other than to say the pay increase will be backdated to September 2021 and that a further increase will be paid from June 1. In addition, the next pay review has been brought forward from September 1,

2023, to July 1, 2023.

### **Unite union ends strike of auto component warehouse workers in Oxford, England after accepting a new pay offer**

The Unite union ended a series of strikes which began on May 12 by around 225 UK workers employed by logistics firm Rudolph & Hellmann at the Oxford Mini plant. They are employed as warehouse staff and shunter drivers. They walked out after rejecting an unacceptable pay offer.

According to Unite the offer is worth 21 percent over 2 years, made up of a 19 percent pay rise and lump sum worth 2 percent. In addition, overtime rates will be increased.

### **Threatened strike by UK pharmacy workers called off by Unite as new pay offer accepted**

A threatened strike by around 1,000 workers at pharmaceutical company GSK's UK sites was called off after GSK made an improved pay offer which the workers accepted. According to Unite, the new offer is worth an average 10.5 percent.

The workers initially rejected a pay increase of 2.75 percent as well as a 4 percent offer with strings attached.

GSK makes products such as Sensodyne and Panadol and many prescription medications. It recorded £34 billion in profits last year.

### **British Gas workers accept below inflation pay rise**

Workers at power utility British Gas voted to accept a 5 percent pay rise.

A year ago, the GMB betrayed a 43-day determined strike by around 7,000 engineers against British Gas's fire and rehire measures. In the end 460 gas engineers were sacked for refusing to accept inferior contracts, which included pay cuts of up to 15 percent and increased hours for no extra pay.

### **Protest at dance theatre in Leeds, UK over job cuts**

Around 100 protestors gathered outside the Phoenix Dance Theatre in Leeds, England on Monday. The Equity union members were protesting the dance company's plans for a "creative pause" from June until January next year.

As part of these plans the company says it will lay off two dancers with permanent contracts while six dancers on fixed term contracts will not have their contracts renewed. The protestors handed in a petition with nearly 2,000 signatures calling for the theatre to reverse its decision.

Middle East

### **Planned strike by Israeli teachers over pay**

Israel Teachers Union members are to hold a half day strike May 30 followed by a rally in Tel Aviv in the evening. They are demanding a pay increase. Teachers from all schools are expected to take part, including kindergarten and special schools.

Africa

### **South African Sibanye-Stillwater gold miners' pay strike continues but unions oppose united action with platinum miners**

Between 25,000 and 30,000 gold miners at Sibanye-Stillwater, South Africa, are now in the twelfth week of their strike, but the unions refuse to unite the struggle of gold and platinum miners.

On May 20, The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members rejected the latest five-year pay offer by the company, including a 5 percent profit share. Workers want basic monthly wages to be raised permanently by R1,000, a 9.8 percent increase compared with the 7.8 percent mooted by the employer. They would not have a R1,000 raise until the fifth year.

Sibanye-Stillwater have applied to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) for a verification of the workers' decision, knowing that the strike is having an immense financial impact on the miners who are fighting for their livelihoods.

As the miners face intense pressure to accept the company's offers, the AMCU and NUM, also representing 163,000 South African platinum miners agreed a new five-year deal with Anglo American Platinum, the world's biggest platinum mining multinational. Miners will have a monthly increase of R1,100 rising to R1,500 in the fifth year.

The unions kept these deals separate from the gold miners' negotiations and refused to extend the dispute to their members in Sibanye-Stillwater's platinum mines despite wage talks beginning there on June 1.

Meanwhile, the government's Minerals resources and Energy Minister hinted that the company's mining licence could be revoked after the Sibanye-Stillwater CEO said they could withstand a strike for years.

In 2019, AMCU ended a five-month stoppage at Sibanye-Stillwater, accepting a deal they previously called "slave labour" when it was first agreed by the NUM and Solidarity unions.

### **Thousands of tax workers in South Africa strike for pay increases**

Up to 12,400 tax and customs duty collection workers at the South African Revenue Service (SARS) went on strike nationwide May 25 and held marches to the National Treasury in Pretoria and the SARS office Cape Town.

The Public Servants Association and National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) members demand a 12 percent and 11.5 percent wage increase respectively. The tax body offered a 1.4 percent raise, citing a lack of funding from central government, despite inflation in the country running at 5.9 percent in April.

A NEHAWU spokesperson said, "If the employer were just to give a reasonable percentage, we will reach an understanding because we are not greedy".

### **ArcelorMittal foundry workers' pay strike in South Africa continues**

### **after court injunction refused**

More than 3,500 workers at ArcelorMittal South Africa, employed at plants, blast furnaces and coke batteries across the country, are continuing their legal stoppage after the company's application for an interdict was refused.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members walked out May 11 to demand an across-the-board 10 percent pay increase and other benefits. The union has now reduced this to 7 percent with a R5,000 cash payment. ArcelorMittal offered 6 percent with R5,000 in cash or 6.5 percent with no further payment.

ArcelorMittal make 60 percent of the steel in South Africa, and the multinational made a gross profit of \$21 billion for the year ending March 2022. The company was criticised for its poor health and safety record. Last year, three workers died in an explosion at a South African plant.

In October 2021, NUMSA called off a nationwide strike by 155,000 steel and metalworkers just as it entered its third week and was beginning to have a serious impact on the country's auto industry and economy.

### **South African government refuses to meet civil servants' pay demand for 10 percent**

South Africa's discredited African National Congress government released documents saying it has no plans to pay a 10 percent wage increase provisionally demanded by unions representing 1.3 million public sector workers in the latest annual round of negotiations.

Unions, including the Public Servants Association, are to meet May 31 to plan a way forward but have not yet mentioned walk outs.

### **South African NUMSA union closes down bus workers' pay and conditions strike with inadequate settlement**

Strikes by South African bus fare collection workers, employed by subcontractors for the City of Tshwane municipality in Pretoria, will not go ahead after their union came to an agreement much inferior to workers' initial demands.

The fare collectors, united across different subcontractors, stopped work on May 11 to demand an increased travel allowance of R2,500, a night shift allowance of R60, and medical cover with 80 percent paid by the company. They planned to intensify their stoppages and demonstrations if they did not receive a favourable response from the City of Tshwane administration.

NUMSA negotiated a much poorer deal with the municipality consisting of a R900 travel allowance, a R20 nightshift allowance, medical aid with a 30 percent employer contribution and other smaller bonuses and long-service benefits.

### **South African hospital staff stop work over unpaid bonus**

Kitchen staff at the Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital, Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa went on strike May 23 after their annual bonus was not paid.



The NEHAWU members are in negotiations via the CCMA for a 60 percent bonus which the employer says depends on company growth.

### **30,000 medical staff strike in Uganda over pay and conditions**

In Uganda, around 30,000 medical professionals went out on indefinite strike on May 16 to oppose poor working conditions and low pay. Strikers included clinical officers, clinical psychiatrists, laboratory scientists, records officers, radiographers and dental technicians.

Abbey Ssevume Kauma, a leader of the Uganda Orthopaedic Association warned that the workers would escalate the action by refusing to provide emergency services.

The World Health Organisation called on the government to intervene to bring the strike to an end, citing its effect on public health.

Strike leader Denis Alibu said that the government's recent salary review focused mainly on the top four salary grades, leaving most staff on the lower grades with hardly any improvement. The government claimed the increases are not finalized.

### **Botswana public transport workers strike over falling living standards**

Public transport workers in Botswana are refusing to work due to high fuel prices driven by increasing demand combined with the NATO/Russia war in Ukraine.

The mostly Botswana Bus, Trucks and Taxi Association members compare their job to "doing charity work" because their income is so badly hit.

In Francistown on May 20, transporters joined the strike in the capital, Gabarone. Strikers blocked others from transporting passengers.

Dusani Tafila, treasurer of the Botswana Bus, Trucks and Taxi Association (Francistown) explained, "Right now a litre of petrol costs around P16,49 while a taxi makes P28 from a single trip of transporting four passengers. If other incidental operational costs are factored in... it becomes clear that we are making losses from operating public transport. We have families to take care of but at the rate at which fuel prices are increasing, we can no longer afford to transport passengers."

Botswana's economy shrank during the Covid pandemic and is still struggling.

### **Namibian road workers' strike over pay and conditions declared illegal**

Around 370 Namibian road construction workers who went on wildcat strike May 5 received a court order demanding they return to work, as of May 24. The workers are employed by China Henan International Cooperation Group (Pty) Ltd (Chico) to construct an extension of the Gibeon-Tses Road.

The workers' demands are improved conditions of work, including higher salaries, better accommodation, and potable water. They also want improved job security. They face constant threats of losing their jobs.

Managers complained they expected only a peaceful demonstration organised by the union on 12 April, during which a petition was handed

in. The workers however, met up on May 5 and decided they would walk out because the petition was ignored.

As the union refused to back them, the workers left the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union and switched to the Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF). NEFF presents itself as a political party rather than a trade union.

Chico is said to be losing N\$366,666 per day due to the strike. Having won the N\$550 million project for the widening of the B1 road between Mariental and Keetmanshoop, the company is fined N\$20 000 for each day's delay in the project.



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