

Italy: port workers in Genoa strike to stop arms deliveries to Ukraine; Israel: unrest grows including strikes and protests; South Africa: public sector workers poised for national walkout

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 March 2023

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

### Italian port workers strike against arms deliveries to Ukraine

Port workers gathered in the Italian port city of Genoa on Saturday for a rally against the delivery of weapons to the war in Ukraine. The rally was called by the Autonomous Collective of Port Workers (CALP), which also called a one-day strike.

According to ANSA, around 3,000 people, including port workers from across Italy, joined a march to the port, with the slogan “Weapons down, wages up.”

The USB union also called its members in ports to join the CALP stoppage, against both arms deliveries and the large number of deaths at work, particularly of dock workers. *Contropiano* reported comments by the USB that more than 100 workers had been killed in the workplace in 2023 so far, and called for “homicide in the workplace” to be added to the penal code.

### Teachers continue strikes in Portugal, under draconian minimum service requirements imposed by the government

Teachers in Portugal joined new strikes this week in a fight for secure contracts, better pay and staffing levels, and improvements to the promotion system, which currently makes it difficult to find a permanent job.

Union of All Teachers (STOP) members are continuing indefinite stoppages which began in December, *The Portugal News* reported, while members of other unions also walked out on Thursday in the north and Friday in the south of Portugal.

The government imposed draconian minimum service requirements on the teachers’ strikes, requiring least three hours of classes to go ahead. *Lusa* reported that the National Federation of Teachers said the minimum service requirement was “illegal” and it would challenge it in court, but called on its members to obey the government’s order in the meantime.

### Portuguese rail workers begin three-day stoppage

Workers at the Portuguese state-owned rail company Comboios de Portugal (CP) began a three-day strike on Monday, against a below-inflation pay offer.

On Tuesday, workers at the public rail infrastructure company Infraestruturas de Portugal also walked out for three days over pay. The strike had a large impact, with a large majority of rail services cancelled according to *Lusa*.

### Doctors’ strike continues in Madrid, joined by other health workers throughout Spain

The indefinite strike by around 5,000 doctors and paediatricians, begun January over patient ratios and pay, continues in the Community of Madrid, the autonomous municipality containing the Spanish capital.

On Wednesday, doctors from hospitals also walked out on a two-day strike, demanding the return of a 35-hour week and overtime payments, after working hours in the public sector were extended in 2013. *Europa Press* reported that around 700 doctors joined a protest in Madrid.

Health workers throughout Spain are also fighting against the deterioration of working conditions and services. According to *Europa Press*, thousands of people joined protests on Saturday in Bilbao, Vitoria, San Sebastián and Biscay called by trade unions to oppose the “dismantling” of Osakidetza, the health care system in the Basque Country.

Doctors will also walk out for a one-day strike on March 6 in Valencia, and an indefinite strike is planned in Galicia in April. The prime minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, cynically expressed support for the “fair and legitimate” demands of health workers because “health is priceless,” but insisted that responsibility for meeting them lay with regional governments. According to *La Provincia*, Sánchez approved the release of 446 million euros to improve primary care, but this is a mere 0.03 percent of GDP.

### German municipal workers continue stoppages in pay dispute

Workers in public and municipal services across Germany joined warning strikes called this week by the United Services Union (Verdi), during pay negotiations for 2.5 million workers covered by public sector collective agreements. Verdi is asking for a pay rise of 10.5 percent, or at least 500 euros per month.

Verdi called many transport workers to join the strikes on Thursday and Friday. The union told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that it expected “over 10,000 strikers nationwide on Friday.” The paper also reported that in Munich, waste disposal workers joined the Thursday and Friday strikes, and health workers stopped work on Wednesday. Workers at Dusseldorf and Cologne-Bonn airports also walked out on Monday, according to Reuters, cancelling or rescheduling most flights.

### **Workers begin indefinite strike against job losses at GKN Driveline in Germany**

The 835 workers at GKN Driveline in Zwickau, Germany, walked out on Monday, after voting by 97 percent to begin an indefinite strike, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. GKN, an auto manufacturer owned by British multinational Melrose, is planning to close the Zwickau plant to move production to Hungary, *Junge Welt* reported.

While workers are determined to defend their jobs, the IG Metall union repeatedly signalled it was willing to assist in selling the closure to its members. At the beginning of the strike, it demanded *either* that the plant remain open or severance pay be increased. It has now called a vote for Thursday on whether to call off the indefinite strike after GKN offered higher severance pay, telling the *Sächsische Zeitung* the agreement would prevent “a fall into the abyss.”

### **Belgian postal workers’ one-day national strike against job losses amidst reorganisation**

Postal workers in Belgium held a one-day national strike on Tuesday, and workers at several depots maintained their pickets on Wednesday.

According to *The Brussels Times*, workers at bpost, which is 50.1 percent owned by the state, are concerned about job cuts as a result of the company’s orientation to e-commerce and competition with Amazon.

The strikes mainly took place in the French-speaking regions of Wallonia and Brussels, but post in Flanders was also affected. *RTBF* reported that workers at three depots in the Belgian province of Luxembourg continued to strike on Wednesday. The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions said that workloads were very high in the province of Luxembourg due to staff shortages, as many people travel across the nearby borders with France or the nation of Luxembourg for work.

### **Finnish bus drivers strike, while union shuts down port and lorry stoppages**

Bus drivers throughout Finland began a strike on Wednesday, which will last until March 10, during negotiations between transport workers’ union AKT and the national employers’ association.

Train drivers were due to also walk out March 6, but this was postponed for two weeks by the government’s National Conciliator.

The AKT called off strikes by lorry drivers and port workers this week, isolating the bus strike as the unions did when they accepted below-inflation pay deals for industrial, retail and technology workers in February. The union had demanded a pay rise of 8.5 percent over two years, based on the below-inflation deal negotiated by Germany’s IG Metall union, but eventually settled for something closer to the de facto pay cut accepted by the Industrial Union representing manufacturing workers.

The port deal agreed pay would increase by 6.3 percent over 25 months, less than a three percent annual pay rise. Inflation in Finland is currently at 8.4 percent, massively eroding workers’ wages.

### **Dutch regional transport workers continue strikes over pay**

On Tuesday, transport workers in local bus and rail services throughout the Netherlands walked out on a new one-day strike in a long-running pay dispute.

According to *De Telegraaf*, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) have called fifteen stoppages across the next six weeks for the 13,000 transport workers covered by collective bargaining negotiations.

The FNV demands a 16.9 percent pay rise for this year, and the CNV is calling for 14 percent spread over 18 months. The Public Transport Employers Association, which represents transport operators, including multinationals Arriva and Keolis, says it has offered an 11 percent pay rise.

### **UK land registry staff strike as part of civil servants’ dispute**

Workers at the UK HM Land Registry are on strike all this week.

The Land Registry is responsible for the registration of the ownership of land and property in England and Wales. Workers in Land Registry Customer Service centres in Durham and Swansea walked out, along with those in Customer Resolution Teams in Birkenhead, Coventry, Croydon, Durham, Fylde, Gloucester, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Swansea, Telford and Weymouth.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are among the 100,000 civil servants across 123 government departments who voted in November to walk out over pay, attacks on jobs and pensions and reduction in redundancy terms.

Rather than sanction all-out action, the PCS union bureaucracy limited action to sporadic strikes by a few thousand members.

### **UK driving examiners announce strikes joining civil service walkouts**

Driving examiners in the UK are to hold further stoppages, as part of UK civil servants’ dispute. A programme of stoppages will see driving examiners in London and the south-east of England walk out on March 6 and 7, while those in south-west England and Wales will be out March 9 and 10.

On March 15, driving examiners along with all PCS members will be on strike to coincide with the Tory government’s budget announcement. On March 20 and 21, driving examiners in the east of England, East

Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London will walk out. March 23 and 24 will see those in north-west England and Yorkshire and the Humber walk out, followed by those in north-east England and Scotland on March 27 and 28.

### **Senior UK civil servants to strike on budget day along with other workers**

Civil servants working as professionals in various government departments, including Defence and Science, the Met Office, Natural England and UK Research and Innovation, will walk out on March 15.

The Prospect union members are protesting over pay, attacks on jobs and pensions and reduction in redundancy terms. Prospect has around 150,000 members working as civil servants, engineers, managers and scientists. The strike voted delivered an 80 percent majority on a 72 percent turnout. Following the one-day stoppage they will impose an overtime ban and only work contracted hours.

According to Prospect, its members in the civil service have seen their incomes fall by 26 percent over the last 13 years.

Following a rebalot, PCS members working for HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) voted by an 84 percent majority on a turnout of over 58 percent to strike over pay, attacks on jobs and pensions and reduction in redundancy terms. Its members in the Valuation Office Agency, an executive agency of the HMRC, also voted by over 75 percent on a 54 percent turnout to strike on March 15.

Other workers due to walk out that day include junior doctors belonging to the BMA, teachers in the NEU and London Underground train drivers belonging to Aslef.

### **Strike by outsourced Transport for London staff over pay and conditions**

Outsourced cleaners, revenue protection and security staff employed by ISS on Transport for London's Dockland Light Railway (DLR) began a 48-hour strike February 24.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members want higher pay after rejecting a 1.8 percent pay offer. RPI inflation stands at 13.4 percent. They are also seeking parity on pay and conditions with directly employed DLR staff.

### **Northern Ireland road maintenance staff walk out over bonus payment structure**

Around 200 Northern Irish Roads Services maintenance workers began a seven-day strike on Monday. They are responsible for gritting roads, clearing up spillages and debris, cleaning gullies and emergency pothole repairs.

The Unite and GMB union members demand the current system of bonus payments is incorporated into their regular pay. The issue has been in contention for around four years without resolution. The workers say the current system leaves them open to the whims of particular managers as to whether or not they receive the bonus.

### **UK rail workers announce further strikes over pay, pensions, job cuts and working conditions**

Around 40,000 UK rail workers working for the 14 train operating companies (TOCs) along with Network Rail are to hold further strikes in their campaign for improved pay and attacks on jobs, pensions and safety.

The RMT members working for the TOCs will walk out on March 16, 18, 30 and April 1, while Network Rail staff will walk out on March 16. They rejected an inferior pay offer of five percent for last year or a minimum of £1,750 whichever is the greater, plus four percent for this year.

### **Strike by BBC local radio staff announced over plans to slim down local radio resources**

Journalists working for BBC local radio across the UK are to hold a 24-hour strike on March 15, the UK's government budget announcement date. They voted by an 83 percent majority for the action.

The National Union of Journalist (NUJ) members are opposed to plans whereby 39 BBC local radio programmes would share programmes with neighbouring local radio stations after 2 p.m. during the week and all day at weekends. A compromise with less programme sharing was rejected by the local radio journalists by a 70 percent majority. The NUJ members say the proposals would mean job losses and journalists applying for their own jobs. It would also mean nearly six million local radio listeners left with a "much-reduced service."

The NUJ says it is also considering further stoppages during the May local elections and the Eurovision song contest on May 9 to 13.

### **Welsh nurses reject Welsh government's "improved offer"**

Welsh nurses have rejected a pay offer from the Welsh government of an extra 1.5 percent plus a 1.5 percent one off payment on top of the existing £1,400 offer to nursing staff.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) cancelled planned stoppages on February 6 and 7 for its Welsh members to consider the new offer. The RCN called on the Labour-led Welsh government's health minister, Eluned Morgan, to restart negotiations. They added that if no new negotiations are offered by the beginning of next week, further walkouts would be planned.

In England, the RCN cancelled a 48-hour strike planned from March 1 for talks without preconditions. Other National Health Service (NHS) workers including ambulance staff plan walkouts. Around 50,000 junior hospital doctors are set to strike for three days from March 13 against a two percent award.

### **Strike ballot of Northern Irish NHS pharmacy staff over pay**

Pharmacists working for the NHS in Northern Ireland are balloting for possible strike action over pay. Because of the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly the pharmacists have not even been offered the low pay offers made to NHS staff in the rest of the UK.

The ballot begun Tuesday is the first in the history of the Pharmacists' Defence Association (PDA). The PDA has 35,000 members UK-wide.

### **Further strikes announced at airports serving the north of Scotland**

Firefighters and security staff at 10 airports run by Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL), a company wholly owned by the Scottish government, are to hold strikes beginning next week after rejecting a five percent pay offer.

The Prospect union members at Stornoway and Sumburgh airports will walk out on March 8 and 9. Those at Barra, Benbecula, Campbeltown, Islay, Kirkwall and Wick airports will strike on March 10. Those working at Dundee, Inverness and Islay airports will walk out on March 13, and those at Dundee and Inverness will hold stoppages on March 17. Following the strikes, they will begin an overtime ban and work only as rostered.

The scheduled strikes follow stoppages by around 120 airport workers, including those in administration, baggage handling, fire and rescue, ground crew and security at 11 HIAL airports, who held strikes over several days at the end of last month.

### **Teachers at Bradford College, England ballot over pay offer**

A ballot of teaching staff for strike action at Bradford College, England began Monday. The University and College Union (UCU) members are angry at a miserly 2.2 to 2.5 percent pay offer from college management.

### **Unite union postpones strike of bus maintenance workers in Glasgow and Aberdeen, Scotland over pay**

The Unite union postponed a pay strike due to begin Wednesday by around 100 workers employed by Bidvest Noonan in Scotland. They work as cleaners, maintenance staff and shunters under contract at First Bus in Glasgow and Aberdeen.

The pay of the Unite union members starts as low as £9.62, below the new national minimum wage of £10.42 an hour which comes into effect in April. They had rejected a two percent pay offer from the company.

Bidvest Noonan came up with an improved offer on the eve of the strike, which is currently being balloted by the workforce. Should the offer be rejected, Unite states strike action will begin on March 8.

The contract workers at Glasgow First Bus were outsourced in 2016, while those in Aberdeen were outsourced in 2020.

### **Protests over setting of Israeli government budgets**

Sunday saw protests of Israeli local authority workers and leaders, who gathered outside the Prime Minister's office protesting the cutting of budgets for Israeli local authority services. Garbage trucks blocked the road.

A statement from the Federation of Local Authorities highlighted the

ongoing crisis suffered by Israeli local authorities, including staff shortages and deterioration of transport and housing infrastructure. The statement included demands for more money to fund more classrooms, and increased salaries for teachers.

On February 23, in response to a call by the Federation of Local Authorities for a general strike, all Israeli local authorities apart from Jerusalem suspended most services, including education, garbage collection and welfare, in protest at the insufficient funding of local government by central government. The same day teachers belonging to the Teachers Union also walked over this issue.

Local authority leaders are to meet Thursday to plan how to take forward the fight for increased spending.

### **Protest and strike threat by Israeli social workers**

On Sunday, the Israeli Union of Social Workers announced a series of protests and threatened a general strike to pressure the Israeli Finance Ministry to impose a promised budget increase for social workers' pay.

The Union accused the ministry and government of reneging on a promise of increased funding for social work staff pay of NIS 200 million.

### **Strike by Israeli State Attorneys over department transfer**

The Israeli State Attorneys' Organisation held a warning strike on February 23.

It was in opposition to plans by the Israeli government to transfer an entire department including its workers, from the prosecutor's office. The department will be transferred to a non-professional purely administrative role.

### **"National disruption day" protest against Israeli government judicial system changes**

Wednesday saw big protests in Tel Aviv against the Israeli government's plans to change the judicial system, weakening the independence of the judiciary, and impose more authoritarian control.

Thousands took part in a so-called national disruption day, blocking roads and clashing with police. Security forces delivered a heavy-handed response to the protestors using stun guns and water cannon.

### **Strikes and protests by Iranian workers continue**

Iranian workers continue to strike and protest over pay and conditions. On Saturday, workers at the Isfahan Steel company walked out over low pay and poor working conditions.

The same day, some Haft Tappeh sugarcane factory workers came out on strike and protested outside the management office calling for improved pay and working conditions. The Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers have a long history of militant struggles.

On February 22, teachers in the city of Shiraz rallied outside the

provincial ministry of education building. Their demands included the release of teachers imprisoned during protests and for wage rises in line with accelerating inflation.

On February 23, workers at the Esfandagheh chromium mine walked out, protesting wages three months in arrears.

### **National strike of public sector workers looming in South Africa**

South African Public service workers began protests this week outside government departments, in opposition to the unilateral implementation of a wage increment of three percent.

The protests by Public Servants Association members are part of the ongoing struggle of public sector workers for a ten percent pay increase and the filling of vacant posts, especially of doctors.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union and Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa are calling all-out strike action from March 6.

### **Strike in Abia State, Nigeria over non-payment of salaries**

Public sector workers in Abia State, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on February 28, causing the state to be plunged into darkness due to power cuts.

The workers are protesting the non-payment of their salaries. National Union of Electricity Employees members joined the strike having not received their salaries for months and, in some cases, years.

Hospitals and health clinics are facing temporary closure due to the high price of fuel to keep them running.

### **Mauritanian teachers hold week-long strike over pay and conditions**

Teachers in Mauritania held a strike from February 21 to 25. A coalition of striking teaching unions said the strike involved 7,787 teachers in 2,702 of the 3,306 primary schools (67 percent), and 4,528 teachers in 307 of 363 secondary schools (86 percent).

Demands include higher pay, bonuses throughout the year, abolition of assistant teaching posts and review of teachers' status, equal treatment of all secondary teachers in terms of bonuses and rights, and improvement of land distribution and housing. The strike was undermined by managers and others doing the jobs of teachers, which the unions denounced as illegal.

### **Ugandan doctors continue strike over unpaid allowances**

Striking Ugandan senior medical doctors refused government calls to go back to work without their grievances being resolved.

They walked out on February 20 to demand payment of unpaid allowances from the previous six months. Responding to the Health Committee of the Ugandan Parliament, Dr. Robert Lubega explained, "We have written letters, but no one responds back. You call people and

they do not pick up. We send them WhatsApp [messages] but no one responds. So, we cannot take back empty words to our colleagues and tell them, 'You angry people, we have called off the strike'."



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