Hungary: indefinite teachers' pay strike; West Bank: 24-hour strike in response to killings by Israeli military; Nigeria: public sector workers to begin general strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 March 2023

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

Hungarian teachers begin indefinite pay strike

On March 16, teachers in Hungary began an indefinite strike, over a year after their dispute over pay and long working hours began. The Democratic Teachers' Union (PDSZ) called the indefinite walkout after the latest negotiations with the government in which "nothing encouraging was said," *Napi.hu* reported.

Draconian minimum service requirements were imposed on the school strikes, and several teachers were fired for defying them. Teachers in vocational schools are not subject to the minimum service requirement, and have also joined the indefinite walkout, but *Nepszava* reported that many have been threatened by schools.

The PDSZ told the paper that several vocational schools accused the teachers of joining an "illegal" strike, since they had not negotiated with school management before walking out. The PDSZ pointed out that schools do not have the ability to meet management demands, and they were negotiating with the government.

German public sector workers continue warning strikes for pay increase

Hundreds of thousands of workers in the German public sector joined warning strikes this week for above-inflation pay increases. Workers in hospitals, schools, airports, public transport, cleaning and other public services walked out across many states.

The strikes are being called by the United Services Union (Verdi) during collective bargaining negotiations for 2.5 million public-sector workers. Verdi is calling for a 10.5 percent or 500-euro wage increase, whichever is higher.

The *Westfalen-Blatt* quoted the head of Verdi that, "There is a strike participation in the public sector that has not been seen for decades and… there are high expectations of a result that is actually accepted among the employees." Indicating that Verdi would reduce its demand for at least 500 euros, he told a rally in Cologne that "there will be no deal without a sufficiently high minimum amount."

Other workers in public services not covered by the same collective agreement also walked out this week. Thousands of Berlin teachers joined a two-day walkout called by the Education and Science Union, demanding smaller class sizes.

The *Berliner Morgenpost* also reported that thousands of doctors in private clinics in several states joined strikes and protests called by the Marburger Bund, calling for a pay increase of inflation plus 2.5 percent for 55,000 doctors. Another walkout by doctors is planned for March 30.

Dutch healthcare workers strike over pay and working conditions

Healthcare workers in the Netherlands held a one-day strike on March 16, demanding a 10 percent pay increase plus improvements to shift bonuses and rosters. According to *De Telegraaf*, health workers rejected an offer of 13 percent spread across two years, which would be below inflation, which currently stands at eight percent.

In the 64 striking hospitals, only emergency care was provided. *NU.nl* reported that a new one-day strike is planned next month.

Couriers continue stoppages at Russian online retailer Wildberries

Couriers working for Wildberries, Russia's largest online retailer, began a new strike on Monday, demanding the company stop deducting excessive fines from their pay, *Lenta* reported.

A woman told the newspaper that when her husband worked for Wildberries, "For three weeks [he] did not receive a salary at all: let's say he could earn 8,000 rubles and received a fine of 10,000 rubles. No matter how hard he tried, he came at 6 in the morning and returned at 10 in the evening, he still did not earn anything."

Strikes began last week following a protest outside Wildberries' headquarters in Moscow, and quickly spread across Russia. The striking couriers are technically classed as self-employed, as 3,500 of Wildberries' 9,000 delivery points are owned by workers and run on a "gig economy" basis.

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Many self-employed workers who joined the stoppages had their contracts with Wildberries terminated, and the company threatened protestors with fines for disseminating "inaccurate or inciting information." *Lenta* reported that due to a large public outcry, some of the terminated contracts were reinstated.

Strike by Greek taxi drivers for improved conditions and against deregulation

On Thursday, taxi drivers in Athens began a 24-hour strike, calling for improvements in their economic and working conditions, and demanding "accountability for the national tragedy of Tempi," the train crash which killed 57 people on February 28.

A one-day general strike against the government's attempt to shift the blame for the crash was held last week.

Alfavita published the announcement of the Attica Taxi Drivers' Union, which called the strike and a march to the Ministry of Transport. The statement blamed the government for "indifference to the slow death of taxis," and demanded "clear and without grey areas" regulation of gig economy platforms.

Finnish Railway Union ends rail strike with below-inflation deal

The national strike of train drivers in Finland begun Monday was ended by the Railway Union (RAU) on Thursday, after RAU and the employers' organisation Palta approved a proposal by the government's national conciliator.

The two-year deal will increase salaries by four percent in May 2023, and two percent in June 2024. With inflation in Finland currently at 8.8 percent, the deal will see drivers' real pay fall drastically. This real-terms pay cut is in line with the "Finnish model" of industrial relations, in which all workers are expected to accept the below-inflation deal for manufacturing workers agreed in February.

The agreement also included none of the workers' major demands over working conditions, including rest times. Instead, the union and Palta set up "working groups" and will consult an "external expert," reported *YLE*.

Justifying the abandonment of the workers' demands, the chairman of RAU told *YLE*, "It was seen that getting these texts into the collective agreement would have required a strike of weeks." He told workers they would have to put up with short rest times for now because "The elephant must be eaten in pieces. I would have liked a bigger piece, but this is what we're going with now."

French Amazon workers walk out after 44 colleagues are sued for picketing

Amazon workers in France held a strike on Wednesday, demanding the company withdraw a lawsuit against 44 of their colleagues, and a 300 euro pay rise.

The 44 workers at an Amazon warehouse near Orléans walked out March 15-20, an action called by the Solidaires union against a pay offer of only six percent, part of it as a one-off bonus.

Amazon accused the 44 workers of completely blocking the site, but their lawyers said they held a legal picket which only partially slowed traffic, according to *La République*. They also accused Amazon of "a restriction of the possibility of defence," as the workers received summons over the weekend and only two were able to find a lawyer before the first hearing on Tuesday.

Warehouse workers join strikes of Delhaize supermarket workers in Belgium against franchising plan

Workers at the Delhaize supermarket chain in Belgium continuing strikes begun spontaneously two weeks ago have been joined by their colleagues in Delhaize's warehouses.

Striking workers oppose the company's plan to convert the 128 supermarkets it directly operates into franchises, affecting around 9,000 workers.

According to *RTL*, 103 of the 128 supermarkets were closed by the walkouts on Saturday, and 72 in the week. Warehouse workers at a contractor serving Delhaize's e-commerce operations stopped work on Saturday morning after the company offered free deliveries to undermine the strike, and warehouse workers in the supermarket supply chain stopped work from Monday.

The trade unions announced they would only call staggered strikes against the plan, since "people on strike don't receive pay" from the unions.

Strikes and protests by Mata Automotive workers in Turkey against low pay and mass firings

Autoworkers at Mata Automotive in Istanbul, Turkey are continuing their campaign of stoppages and protests for a 25 percent pay rise, begun four weeks ago with stoppages of one hour per shift.

United Metal-?? union members are also demanding the reinstatement of colleagues fired since the strikes began. These now number 620, according to *Evrensel*.

Hundreds of workers strike over unpaid wages in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

On March 14, hundreds of workers in the Azerbaijani city of Nakhchivan began a strike after not receiving their wages for three months, *Media.az* reported. Workers walked out from multiple factories owned by Arkoz Holding, which is owned by Emin Uchar, a Turkish businessman closely linked to the former ruler of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Vasif Talibov, who resigned in December.

Strikers told the media they had been threatened with dismissal and arrest by Arkoz Holding's management, but they intended to stay out until their wages were paid.

National Express West Midlands in England puts new pay offer in effort to end strike

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National Express West Midlands, England has put another revised pay offer in an attempt to halt strike action over pay by around 3,000 bus drivers.

The strike was initially scheduled to being March 16, but was suspended after the company came up with an “improved” offer, reported to be 14.3 percent, with strings attached, according to the Unite union.

Some drivers are only on £11.80 an hour. Pay rises to £14.40 an hour after three years.

The company claimed its original offer was worth 14 percent, but the union said it was only worth eight percent. In a ballot for strike action on this offer, drivers voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out. They then voted to reject the second offer by 71 percent majority, and an all-out continuous strike began Monday.

National Express has now presented a third offer, of 16.2 percent. A letter from the company states that Unite will accept recommendation, although the strike is continuing at present.

The company announced its latest profit figures last week, stating pre-tax profits for 2022 of £146 million, up from £40 million the previous year. The strike is expected to disrupt National Express services in the West Midlands, affecting the conurbations of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

Strike of rail engineers at UK firm over pay

UK workers employed by Balfour Beatty began a 36-hour strike over pay on March 17.

It was the third 36-hour strike by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members since rejecting a 5.5 percent pay rise offer from April 2022. The workers are employed in construction and maintenance roles on the rail network.

Balfour Beatty, the UK’s most profitable construction company, saw its profits increase by 42 percent last year over the previous year. It made a £150 million share buyback, driving up shareholders’ returns.

Container manufacturing workers in Portadown, Northern Ireland begin strike over pay as company flies in strikebreakers

A walkout by around 200 workers employed by Kingspan Water and Energy Ltd in Portadown, Northern Ireland began Monday.

The Unite union members voted by a 99 percent majority on a 91 percent turnout to walk out. They rejected a five percent pay offer from the company, as well as an improved 8.5 percent offer on the eve of the strike. They are angry that the Portadown workers were not offered a £1,000 cost-of-living payment made to other Kingspan employees. Kingspan, which manufactures containers for mass storage of water and fuels, made a £733 million profit last year, up 10 percent from the previous year.

To try to break the strike, Kingspan has flown in workers from its plants in Wilton in Somerset and Rokietnica in Poland. According to Unite, many of the Polish workers were unaware that the Portadown workers were on strike. Portadown strikers of East European origin held placards in Polish explaining the situation. According to Unite the company has been scheduling lorry deliveries and distributions out of normal working hours to avoid the striking pickets. In response, pickets began 24-hour picketing.

Unite also states that while the Wilton workers have been put up at a four-star hotel in Portadown, the Polish workers are billeted in hostels. Kingspan is a sponsor of Ulster Rugby.

Arriva bus drivers and engineers in Newcastle, UK in ballot over pay

Around 330 bus drivers and engineers at bus company Arriva in Newcastle and Northumberland, England are being balloted over pay. The ballot closes March 30.

The Unite union members are opposing a 10 percent pay offer to be paid in two stages, but only to the highest paid workers. Those on lower pay are offered less. RPI inflation is at 13.4 percent. Qualified drivers at the company are only on £12.65 an hour. With pay so low, the company is struggling to fill both driver and engineer roles, leading to a growing vacancy list.

The depots involved are at Ashington, Blyth and Walkergate in Newcastle. Should workers vote in favour of strikes, Unite states they would take place after Easter.

UK offshore oil workers set to strike over pay and conditions

Around 1,400 UK offshore oil servicing workers are set to strike. They are seeking higher pay and improved working conditions.

The Unite union members work for Bilfinger, Stork, Petrofac Facilities Management Limited and Wood Group UK Limited. Votes in favour at each servicing company were over 90 percent, with that at Petrofac being 100 percent. The servicing companies are under contract to the big oil production companies such as BP, Shell and Total, and action by the servicing company employees would affect their production abilities.

The workers, who carry out various roles for the servicing companies, include electrical and mechanical engineers, deck crew, crane operators and scaffolders. Monday’s press release by Unite did not give dates for any possible walkouts.

Around 200 Unite members working for oil production servicing company Sparrows Offshore Services are set to hold a series of 24-, 48- and 72-hour strikes between March 29 and June 7 over a demand for improved pay.

Junior hospital doctors announce further strikes in England

Junior hospital doctors in the National Health Service (NHS) will walk out across England for a further four days from April 11, after talks with the government failed.

On March 3, around 45,000 junior doctors represented by the British Medical Association and the smaller Hospital Consultants and Specialist Association first walked out to protest a two percent pay offer. In real terms, their pay has been eroded, and they want it restored to 2008 levels, a rise of about 35 percent.

The fight over pay and conditions in the NHS has been divided and doctors isolated, as the Royal College of Nursing, GMB, Unison and Unite trade unions settled for below-inflation pay deals.

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UK Heathrow airport security staff set to strike over pay and conditions

Around 1,400 security guards working for Heathrow Airports Limited (HAL) at Terminal 5 at London's Heathrow airport are due to begin a 10-day strike March 31. The strike would coincide with the run-up to the busy Easter holiday period.

The Unite union members are seeking a pay increase and improved working conditions.

UK passport issuance workers to hold five-week strike as part of programme of walkouts by civil servants over pay, jobs and conditions

Around 1,000 UK civil servants working at Passport Offices in Belfast, Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Newport, Peterborough and Southport will begin a five-week walkout on April 3. It is expected to impact the issuing of new and renewed passports at the beginning of the UK holiday season.

The passport workers are a section of the 130,000 civil servants, in around 130 government departments, who voted to strike to protest pay, attacks on jobs, pensions and a reduction in redundancy terms.

Apart from one-day stoppages in February and earlier this month, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union has limited stoppages to mainly sporadic, limited, partial strikes. Other PCS members due to walk out as part of the ongoing dispute are those in the Home Office in Northern Ireland, who will stop work April 12-14. National Highways staff at its operations centre in the West Midlands will strike April 3-7. Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency staff, comprising 1,500 driving examiners and admin staff, will hold a series of rolling regional stoppages between April 5 and 28.

In April, PCS members at the British Library, British Museum, the two Animal and Plant Health Agency centres and Government Digital Service will be taking several days of strikes as part of the action.

On Monday, the PCS began balloting its members to renew its strike mandate, due to expire in May.

Waste company workers at UK firm to ballot over pay offer

Around 100 workers at the Suez Recycling and Recovery UK plant in Haverton on Teesside are to ballot for strike action.

The GMB members voted by nearly 99 percent in a consultative vote to be prepared to hold a strike vote, after rejecting a six percent pay offer. The ballot is expected to begin shortly. According to GMB, the workers have seen their real-term pay eroded by 30 percent since 2012.

Rent strike occupation at University of Manchester, England ends as students forcibly removed by bailiffs

UK students occupying a building at the University of Manchester (UoM) since February 13 were removed by bailiffs on Wednesday, enforcing a court order. The students had also occupied three other buildings, and protested this week outside the Board of Governors.

The UoM Rent strike group have been protesting the exorbitant cost of rent and poor conditions in halls of residence. Protesters said they were dragged and carried from the building. The occupiers also extended support to academic staff in England, who have been taking strike action for improved pay and against cuts in pension provision, jobs and the ongoing casualisation of the profession.

The University and College Union sent an electronic yes/no survey to their members, asking if they both support members having a vote on unspecified proposals and pausing strike action.

Strike across Israeli-occupied West Bank in response to killings by Israeli military

A full-day strike was held across the West Bank on Saturday, leading to the closure of public transport, schools, universities, shops and other businesses.

It was in response to the killing of four young Palestinian men, including a 16-year-old youth, in the West Bank city of Jenin. Twenty others were injured in the Israeli military operation. The number of deaths of Palestinians at the hands of Israeli defence forces is now more than 80, and is rapidly approaching last year's total. The number of killings in 2022 was the highest since 2015.

Palestinian West Bank teachers pledge to continue strike despite court ruling

On Sunday, Palestinian teachers on the West Bank declared they will continue their strike begun February 5, despite an Administrative Court ruling last week suspending it.

The Teachers' Movement called for a sit-in outside the Ministry of Education in Ramallah to protest the ruling, while the Teachers' Union said teachers would refuse to invigilate exams for secondary school pupils or mark their exam papers.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh had promised teachers they would get a 15 percent pay increase plus a 10 percent retroactive payment. However, the amounts failed to appear in their latest pay packets, and teachers continued their walkout.

Sickouts by Israeli Ulpan teachers in dispute over pay

Israeli teachers in Ulpan institutions announced Sunday that they will report in sick in a protest campaign for improved pay.

The hundreds of Teachers' Union members are employed by the Education Ministry to teach Hebrew to new immigrants to Israel. In the last year, around 72,000 immigrants arrived in the country. The demand for Ulpan courses to learn Hebrew means there is a six-month waiting list for the courses.

Continuing protests in Iran over death of Mahsa Amini and cost of living

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Protests continue in Iran over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police for wearing her hijab “improperly” in September.

These protests have taken place in over 280 cities across Iran’s 31 provinces. It is reported that around 750 deaths and 30,000 arrests have resulted from Iranian security forces’ response to the protests.

As well as protests over her death, there have been numerous protests over declining living conditions. One of the latest protests was by pensioners on Sunday in the cities of Shush, Ahvaz and Shushtar.

Public sector workers in Nigeria to begin national strike

Public sector workers in Nigeria are to begin a national strike on March 29 over the rising cost of living, which means they cannot afford travel to work.

The government ignored the umbrella Nigeria Labour Congress’ (NLC) seven-day ultimatum to strike. The NLC hopes to pressure the government to end the scarcity of currency and fuel.

At a press conference, NLC President Joe Ajaero said, “Last week, we gave an ultimatum for the review of the cash crunch bedevilling the country, but we have discovered to our dismay that as at this moment not much effort has been made to ameliorate the situation...”

Liberian rubber workers strike at Cocopa plantation

Workers at the Cocopa Rubber Plantation in Liberia walked out after being told they will not receive their salaries and other benefits on time.

The workers recently blocked the main highway leading to Saclepea, demanding the government push the management of Nimba Rubber Incorporated (NRI) to pay their salary arrears from last year. Riot police stormed the workers’ barricade, and used tear gas to disperse them.

The company blames falling rubber prices for its failure to pay the workers. NRI also owns a factory which processes rubber before it is sent to customers. The price of rubber has dropped below US$600 per ton, and the current price of processed rubber when exported has dropped to about US$1,500.

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