Portugal: teachers continue strikes over pay and career progression; Lebanon: telecom workers on indefinite pay strike; South Africa: workers at retail giant Makro begin 10-day pay strike

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Teachers in Portugal resume strikes over pay and career progression

On Wednesday, teachers in Portugal began a new partial strike, stopping work during the last class of the day, as well as not working overtime and refusing non-teaching duties, *The Portugal News* reported. The stoppage was due to begin on Monday, but the government intervened to force a postponement, saying the statutory 10 days' notice was not given.

Teachers in Portugal have been holding strikes and protests for months over pay and a career progression system which makes it difficult to be promoted. The Union of All Teachers members have been on an indefinite strike since December, and other unions have called regional and time-limited walkouts. More regional stoppages are planned in April.

The government has imposed draconian minimum service requirements, requiring striking teachers to provide three hours of classes every day. Teachers in Coimbra held a large protest last week against the attacks on the right to strike, but the unions have not organised any mass defiance of the restrictions.

Strikes continue at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium against franchising plan

Workers at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium continue strikes begun three weeks ago against the company's plan to convert the 128 supermarkets it directly operates into franchises.

Delhaize claimed that workers would be able to keep their current pay and working conditions, but only for six months. The existing Delhaize franchises pay less than the directly operated stores.

Around 500 workers demonstrated in front of Delhaize's headquarters on Tuesday, *Le Soir* reported. Warehouse workers joined the stoppages last week, but returned to work following police threats.

According to *RTL*, hundreds of workers picketed one warehouse in Zellick, near Brussels from Friday, stopping any lorries from leaving. A union spokesman told the media, "The police then threatened to place everyone in administrative detention. After that, the action was halted." Two workers were arrested at the scene.

The trade unions welcomed the federal government's appointment of a mediator at the request of Delhaize, telling media, "We hope that the arrival of a mediator will show Delhaize that its position is untenable." Delhaize has refused to negotiate its franchising plan, and has already found potential buyers for all 128 stores.

Call centre workers in Cyprus on indefinite strike against sacking of union representative

Workers at the Anytime insurance company call centre in Cyprus have been on an indefinite strike since March 9. It began after one of their colleagues, who was also a steward for the Pancypriot Labor Federation (PEO), was fired in the middle of negotiations over a collective agreement.

In-Cyprus reported statements from the PEO that Anytime had sent letters to striking workers threatening dismissal if they did not immediately return to work.

Anytime is owned by Interamerican, which sells insurance in Cyprus and Greece. *902.gr* reported that a protest was called outside the company's offices in Greece in support of the walkout in Cyprus.

Bin workers in Copenhagen, Denmark end wildcat strike after court imposes huge fine

Workers at the waste disposal service in Copenhagen, Denmark resumed work on Monday, a week after 550 bin workers began a wildcat strike against changes to their working conditions by their new employer. The workers are to be employed by Amager Ressourcecenter (ARC), a municipal company, which is taking over from the several private companies that previously provided the service.

One striking bin worker told *Arbejderen* that they were previously paid by the day, so could go home after completing their round, but ARC wants to move them to an hourly wage, so they have to work longer hours. He

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said, “ARC wants maximum flexibility at the lowest price, but that makes it impossible to have a reasonable family life.”

A court imposed a fine of almost 1.2 million kroner, to increase the longer the strike went on, on top of lost wages. The 3F trade union, which is negotiating with ARC now the strike has ended, opposed the wildcat walkout, and its local secretary said, “I of course encourage the striking members to resume work,” while the company had made no concessions.

Norwegian warehouse workers begin “sympathy strikes” in support of month-long walkout by workers at 360 Logistics

Workers at online retailer 360 Logistics, who have been on strike since February 9 for a collective agreement, were joined this week by colleagues at five other companies who will refuse to handle goods for delivery to 360 Logistics from Saturday.

The 14 workers at 360 Logistics, Fellesforbundet union members, want the company to offer a collective agreement in line with the rest of the industry, as the difference in pay is up to 100,000 kroner, *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

Oil workers begin strike in Norwegian waters, defying threat of sackings

Oil workers aboard the service ship “Island Captain,” run by British company SLB UK, began a strike over working conditions on Thursday night.

Nine of the British crew are members of the Norwegian Industri Energi union, which accuses SLB of not paying compensation for overtime or work at night, and says workers regularly work 14-hour days, *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

Although the ship services an oilfield in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea, SLB claims its employees cannot be represented by a Norwegian trade union. Industri Energi wrote on its website that the crew members were notified any strike would be a breach of their contract and they would be fired.

Protesting clinic workers fired in Serbia

Last week, 47 workers at the Dr Laza Lazarevi? psychiatric hospital in Belgrade who had taken part in protests against management were fired.

The hospital’s workers have been holding protests, including stoppages, since last year, demanding the dismissal of the director, whom they accuse of creating an intolerable atmosphere for employees and patients, *Danas* reported. More than half the hospital’s employees signed a petition to dismiss the director.

The hospital management accused the sacked workers of blocking ambulances during a protest at the start of March. One psychiatrist who joined the protest told *Danas*, “That is an absolute lie, because no one was at the entrance,” and one colleague who was not even at the protest received a dismissal notice.

The dismissals relied on an anti-democratic provision of the law preventing gathering or making noise near the hospital.

Miners begin hunger strike over unpaid wages in Bosnia and Herzegovina

On Monday, 15 coal miners in the town of Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina began a hunger strike after not receiving their wages, which should have been paid on March 15, S*rpaskainfo* reported. The miners said nobody from the mine’s management had even contacted them about the delay.

The mine’s operator, RMU Zenica, is owned by Elektroprivreda BiH, the state-owned energy company. According to *Srpaskainfo*, the local government froze RMU Zenica’s bank account as it owed significant local debt and taxes.

Spanish public lawyers vote to accept pay deal, ending months-long strike

Public lawyers in Spain voted this week to accept a pay deal, ending a strike that lasted more than two months. According to *Europa Press*, the Lawyers of the Administration of Justice (LAJ) union agreed a monthly pay rise of between 430 and 450 euros, spread over two years. LAJ members voted 76 percent in favour of the deal and 21 percent against.

Striking lawyers were calling for their salaries to be set at a minimum 85 percent of a judge’s salary and demanding the increase in payments promised in 2009 when they were given new responsibilities.

The strike had a major impact, suspending 400,000 hearings and trials, and preventing the payment of 1.5 billion euros in fines and compensation from court cases, *el Periódico* reported.

Union calls off strike by Finnish cleaning workers at the last minute

At 11pm on Wednesday night, just one hour before cleaning workers in Finland were due to walk out, the PAM union announced a pay deal with the Kiinteistötyyontanjien employers’ association and called off the strike.

Around 25,000 cleaning workers joined the two-day national strike last week according to *YLE*, and 27,000 were due to walk out for three days from Thursday. Workers had demanded a 200 euro monthly pay rise, but the deal signed by PAM only raises wages by around 130 euros.

UK civil servants to continue programme of stoppages over pay, jobs and conditions

Around 133,000 UK civil servants across 130 government departments will walk out on April 28.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union had already announced its 1,000 members working at Passport Offices in Belfast, Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Newport, Peterborough and Southport will begin a five-week walkout on April 3, which is expected to impact the issuing of new and renewed passports at the beginning of the UK holiday season.

PCS members at the gas and electricity suppliers’ regulator Ofgem based in Glasgow and Canary Wharf in London will walk out April 10-14

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and on April 17.

The series of stoppages by PCS members was announced in November as they voted to strike to protest pay, attacks on jobs, pensions and a reduction in redundancy terms. Apart from two one-day stoppages in February and March, the union has limited stoppages to sporadic, regional stoppages.

Health logistics drivers at UK firm to strike against below-inflation pay offer

Drivers at the Coventry-based Movianto health logistics firm in England will walk out on April 6 and April 11. The GMB union members rejected a below-inflation pay offer. RPI inflation is currently 13.4 percent.

Movianto drivers deliver healthcare products, including pharmaceuticals, diagnostic kits and medical equipment, to the NHS and private companies.

Staff at UK local authority set to hold further walkouts over pay

Around 150 UK street cleaners and social housing maintenance workers employed by Harlow Trading Services (HTS) are to hold a series of strikes on April 5, 6, 24, 25, 27 and 28 over pay.

The Unite union members are demanding higher pay, asking for a one-off £3,000 payment and regrading of pay bands. HTS is a wholly owned company of Conservative-run Harlow council. The workers held a one-day strike February 21.

College lecturers in Sheffield, UK reject "improved" pay offer

Lecturers at Further Education colleges in Sheffield, England have rejected the employers' latest pay offer.

Around 200 University and College Union (UCU) members held five days of strikes in January and February to protest a 2.5 percent pay offer. They voted by an 87 percent majority for the stoppages. After the strikes were suspended for talks at government mediation service Acas, the college came back with an "improved" 3.5 percent pay offer. This was rejected at ballot by an 81 percent majority. No further strike dates have yet been announced by the UCU.

Scottish lighthouse staff in ballot over pay offer

Around 30 workers employed by the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) in Scotland are balloting over a pay offer. The ballot closes April 24.

The Unite union members work as assistants, cooks, seamen and technicians for the NLB, maintaining lighthouses, beacons and buoys around the Scottish coast to provide safe passage for seagoing vessels navigating around Scotland. They rejected a two percent pay offer which followed a pay freeze last year.

The NLB, which is based in Edinburgh, maintains over 200 lighthouses and two seagoing vessels, with bases in Inverness, Shetland and the Orkneys.

Local authority workers at Croydon, London voting over job cut threats

Council workers in the payroll section of Croydon Council in UK capital are balloting for strike action over job cuts.

The GMB members are facing the loss of around a quarter of the jobs, as the council seeks ways to overcome its £1.6 billion debt hole. The ballot closes on April 6.

Union plans coordinated strikes across London and southeast England

A union representing migrant and precarious workers is to ballot workers across 16 workplaces, including a care home, a school, an Amazon warehouse, offices and car showrooms in London and southeast England for strikes over pay.

The United Voices of the World (UVW) plans to hold coordinated stoppages if the ballot is in favour of strikes. To launch the action, it is holding an assembly on April 15.

Protest outside UK parliament by food processing workers who face fire and rehire threat

Around 100 workers employed by Pilgrim Food Masters (PFM) held a protest outside Parliament in London on March 23.

The GMB members were protesting plans by PFM to impose fire and rehire tactics to push through changes to working conditions. The company, based in Southall, west London, employs around 1,000 workers who are threatened with an attack on their terms and conditions. The company produces prepared meals for well-known brands such as Fridge Raiders and Richmond.

PFM wants to abolish paid breaks, reduce sick pay and get rid of Diwali holiday pay. The workforce consists of a majority of women of south Asian or Somali origin. The company made around 100 workers at its Collett Way site in Southall redundant when it closed the facility.

Middle East

Lebanese telecom workers on indefinite strike over pay

Telecom workers at Lebanon's state-run operator Ogero began an indefinite strike on March 24.

They are protesting the erosion of their pay as the Lebanese currency continues to fall. Last week it reached a record low of 100,000 Lebanese pounds to one US$. The inflation rate in January was 124 percent.

Ogero chairman Imad Kreidieh called on the Lebanese government to intervene to improve pay. He said the whole network will soon grind to a halt as generators run out of fuel due to spiralling costs. The generators are needed to keep Ogero's internet relay stations operating. Lebanon's

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phone operators, Alfa and Touch will soon be impacted by the stoppage.

Palestinian teachers continue their pay strike

The strike by Palestinian teachers on the West Bank is soon to be in its third month. It began February 5, and the teachers have ignored Administrative Court rulings suspending the action.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh promised teachers they would get a 15 percent pay increase plus a 10 percent retroactive payment. As this has so far failed to materialise, the teachers continue their walkout.

Continuing protests in Iran over deteriorating living conditions

Retirees in Iran held protests on Tuesday in the cities of Shush and Ahvaz. They were protesting the deteriorating value of their pensions as inflation eats away at their value.

On Sunday, Haft Tappe sugar cane workers protested in front of the company headquarters. They were protesting government proposals to set the minimum wage at 5,370,000 Tomans. The workers demanded wage parity with workers in other companies who are paid a higher rate.

Africa

Makro workers in South Africa begin 10-day pay strike

Workers at retail giant Makro began a 10-day strike action last week, demanding a 12 percent salary increase. They are also demanding the reinstatement of 400 workers who were dismissed for fighting for better wages.

The South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union members are marching to Makro stores across the country urging people to boycott the stores.

Massmart, which owns 22 Makro stores in South Africa, has employed outsourced labour. This struggle has been ongoing for nearly a year.

Sacked community health workers in Gauteng province, South Africa protest for reinstatement

Around fifty former community health workers protested outside Gauteng health department in South Africa to demand reinstatement.

The workers, who claim to represent 382 health care workers based in Ekurhuleni, were terminated in June 2022.

The workers went door-to-door, testing, counselling and creating awareness around HIV/ AIDS, TB and sexually transmitted infections. They also referred patients to clinics or hospitals and did COVID screening during the pandemic.

A memorandum was submitted, and an arbitration hearing takes place April 3.

Health workers in Gauteng, South Africa march to Department of Health to demand more staff and an end to layoffs

Health workers employed in the South African state of Gauteng Health Department marched through Johannesburg calling for the employment of more nurses and other critical staff in the province's public hospitals. Many nurses who worked through the pandemic are to be sacked at the end of March.

Radio and TV workers in South Darfur, Sudan strike over non-payment of wages

Employees of the Radio and Television Corporation of South Darfur, Sudan stopped work on March 27 due to unpaid salaries.

A lot of newspaper correspondents, news agencies, state broadcasters and other radio stations declared solidarity with the strikers, whose number is increasing.

The Southern Darfur Committee announced on the first day of Ramadan that all broadcast workers had stopped working in response to the committee's decision. The North Darfur and Blue Nile regions did not join the strike.

Explaining the failure to back the strike, Magda Abdullah, programme manager at Blue Nile Radio, said it was due to confusion over the status of the committee that called it. She said the committee had been dissolved days before the announcement of the strike, and then reconstituted without their knowledge.

Nigeria Labour Congress and TUC call off strike over cost of living

Having claimed they were calling a strike on March 29 in response to their members suffering due to shortages of fuel and currency, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) climbed down at the last minute.

At the end of its National Executive Council meeting on March 28, the NLC leaders announced it would be giving the government and central bank another two weeks to act on the grievances, putting the initiative in their hands.

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