

Portugal: rail workers resume strike over pay, conditions and safety; Israel: Palestinians hold one-day general strike after doctor murdered by police; South Africa: strikes continue at retail giant Makro over pay and sackings

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 April 2023

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

Portuguese rail workers begin new strikes over pay, conditions and safety

Rail workers in Portugal began new national strikes on Saturday, to last throughout April.

Drivers and conductors working for the state train company Comboios de Portugal (CP) will hold partial strikes all month. These have already led to the cancellation of hundreds of services, *Lusa* reported. CP workers are calling for “effective wage increases” and improvements to working conditions and safe maintenance.

On Thursday, workers at the state-owned rail infrastructure company Infraestruturas de Portugal also held a 24-hour strike over pay.

EasyJet cabin crew in Portugal hold three-day strike over pay

Cabin crew from Portugal working for the British airline EasyJet began a three-day strike on Saturday to demand a pay rise. According to AFP, their pay has been frozen since 2019.

The National Union of Civil Aviation Flight Personnel agreed minimum service requirements with the airline and government. These mainly covered flights from the islands of the Azores and Madeira. *Lusa* reported that 220 flights were cancelled in total due to the strike.

Another three-day strike, due to begin Friday, by pilots at the state-owned TAP Air Portugal, was called off after an agreement on working conditions between the pilots’ union and the airline was narrowly approved by a 50.6 percent vote.

Teachers in Greece begin partial strikes against evaluation system

Greek teachers began a series of three-hour daily stoppages from Monday, called by the Teachers’ Federation union against implementation of a new system which would be used to categorise schools and teachers, *Lifo* reported.

Teachers are opposed to the implementation of the scheme, which they say seeks to shift the blame for issues in education from systematic underfunding to teachers themselves.

There have been numerous strikes and boycotts of assessments over more than a year, but the unions only called short and partial stoppages. The three-hour strikes called by the Teachers’ Federation are between April 3 and 28, most of which falls in the Easter holidays.

Greek educators have compared the new system with the widely despised British Ofsted inspectorate. Teachers in the UK are protesting against Ofsted after the suicide of head teacher Ruth Perry following an “inadequate” rating from inspectors, who accused the school of inadequate safeguarding of children based on what Perry’s sister called “scant” and “sensationalist” evidence.

Bus drivers in Athens hold work stoppages against cover-up over deadly train crash

Bus drivers in Athens held a five-hour stoppage on Monday, with more walkouts between Tuesday and Thursday, to protest the train crash on February 28 in Tempi which killed 57 people, for which the Greek government has attempted to cover up its responsibility.

Millions of workers joined strikes in March to oppose the government’s attempt to scapegoat a single stationmaster for the crash, and denounced the privatisation and budget cuts which led to the disaster.

Strikes continue at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium against franchising plan

Workers at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium continue strikes this week against plans by the company to convert the 128 supermarkets it directly

operates into franchises. The walkouts began a month ago and continued in large numbers of supermarkets, despite the fact that the trade unions are not paying strike pay.

Delhaize claimed 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.

Het Laatste Nieuws reported that on Saturday, 73 of the 128 supermarkets were closed by strikes, including all 22 in Brussels. Slightly fewer strikes occurred on weekdays, with only 50 shops closed on Monday. According to *Nieuwsblad*, workers in other supermarkets across Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia joined a “solidarity action” in support of the Delhaize strikers on Saturday.

Hundreds of warehouse workers also walked out in Delhaize’s supply chain in previous weeks, but returned to work following police threats and arrests.

Retail and warehouse workers begin weekly stoppages in Asturias, Spain

Around 12,000 workers in shops and warehouses in the province of Asturias, Spain, walked out on the first of a series of weekly 24-hour stoppages on Saturday. The strikes were called by the Workers’ Commissions, General Workers’ Union and Syndical Workers’ Union, after employers in the sector refused to pay a 1,200-euro annual bonus for 2022 which was in the previous collective agreement.

Teachers strike over workload and funding in Navarre, Spain

Thousands of teachers joined a one-day strike in the Spanish autonomous community of Navarre on Monday, to demand improved funding in schools to reduce class sizes and excessive workloads, and for pay rises to compensate for inflation. They held a previous walkout on February 15 for the same demands.

The unions announced that 55 percent of teachers joined the walkouts, despite high minimum service levels imposed by the government, while the government claimed that only 21 percent were on strike. Striking teachers were required to provide one third of classes in infant and primary schools, and a quarter of normal classes in secondary schools.

Teachers also held a protest in Pamplona, where they chanted, “Military spending for schools and hospitals,” and demanded equal conditions for all school workers.

Warning strikes over understaffing and pay in German clinics

Healthcare workers in several clinics joined strikes in Germany this week, demanding increased staffing levels and a reduction in workload, and pay rises to compensate for high inflation.

At Giessen-Marburg University Hospital, medical and non-medical workers joined warning strikes last week to demand increased staff on each shift. *Junge Welt* reported that between 600 and 1,000 workers stopped work, and 4,000 joined a protest in Marburg.

The United Services Union (Verdi) also called warning strikes on Wednesday and Thursday in the Chemnitz Clinic, demanding an 11

percent pay rise to compensate for inflation, as well as shorter hours. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported Verdi’s estimates that 270 workers joined Wednesday’s walkout.

Lorry drivers strike in Germany after months of unpaid wages

More than 50 lorry drivers, mainly from Uzbekistan and Georgia, have been on strike in a service station near Darmstadt, Germany since March 20, *taz* reported. The drivers, working for the Polish-based Mazur Group but technically self-employed, are paid below the German minimum wage.

A striking driver from Georgia told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that he had not been paid for 50 days, so was owed 4,250 euros. He said, “My wife doesn’t work. If I don’t send money, she has nothing to live on, just like my parents and other relatives.” Other drivers also told the newspaper they were owed thousands of euros.

Miners promised overdue wages after strikes in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Coal miners in the town of Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, who walked out after not receiving their wages, have been promised their wages will be paid. Some had begun a hunger strike last week.

Six hundred miners stopped work, and 15 were on hunger strike, *Al Jazeera* reported, and on March 29 miners in all seven state-owned coal mines in the country held a one-hour stoppage in support of the Zenica miners.

The mine’s operator, RMU Zenica, is owned by Elektroprivreda BiH, the state-owned energy company, but its bank account was frozen by the local government as it owed significant local debts and taxes. *Blic* reported on Wednesday that the city council unfroze the bank account following the miners’ strikes.

Months-long strike of Crnogorski Telekom workers in Montenegro ended as union signs wages deal

On Tuesday, the strike of workers at Crnogorski Telekom, Montenegro’s largest telecommunications provider, ended after 136 days when the Telecom Union signed a deal over pay, *SEEBiz* reported. Around 200 workers walked out in November to demand a 30 percent pay rise.

The deal signed by the union increases the wages of the lowest-paid workers by 15 percent from this month, by 2.5 percent in January and 2.5 percent in January 2025. Inflation in Montenegro is currently 15.1 percent and was higher over the past five months, meaning workers’ wages this year barely keep up with prices, and will fall behind drastically in the coming years.

The company said that this was “certainly the best collective agreement in the private sector in Montenegro.” Crnogorski Telekom is part of the Deutsche Telekom group (formerly T-Mobile), which is around 30-percent-owned by the German state.

UK passport workers begin five-week strike over pay and conditions

Around 1,000 UK passport workers began a five-week strike on Monday.

The strike is part of a programme of stoppages by around 130,000 civil servants, who voted for action in November last year in a dispute over pay, conditions, job cuts and the dilution of redundancy terms.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members mounted picket lines at passport offices in Belfast, Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport (Wales), Peterborough and Southport. According to the PCS, around 40,000 civil servants rely on foodbanks to get by and 45,000 claim in-work benefits, unable to manage on their wages.

Rather than sanction all-out action, the PCS union bureaucracy limited action to sporadic strikes by a few thousand members. Only two one-day stoppages by the entire civil service PCS membership were held, with one more due April 28.

Security staff at London Heathrow airport walk out over pay

Around 1,400 security guards working for Heathrow Airports Limited (HAL) at Terminal 5 at London's Heathrow airport walked out on March 31 until Easter Sunday.

The Unite union members had rejected a pay offer from the employer. At the last minute, HAL upped their offer by putting forward an additional lump sum, but this was rejected by the workforce and the stoppage went ahead.

The security guards responsible for checking cargo at Terminal 5 are paid only a basic £26,000 salary, plus a £4,000 shift allowance. Between 2017 and 2019, HAL paid over £2 billion in dividends to its shareholders.

In 2020, during the pandemic, HAL fired and rehired its entire staff, resulting in pay cuts.

Strike by London Docklands Light Railway outsourced staff over pay offer

Staff working for contractor ISS on the London Docklands Light Railway held a 48-hour strike at the weekend.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) members, who work as cleaners, security staff and in other roles, rejected a 1.8 percent pay offer from ISS. The workers are seeking parity with other directly employed Transport for London (TfL) staff working in similar roles. All staff working directly or indirectly on TfL infrastructure have been granted free travel, except ISS staff.

UK teachers at Plymouth school walk out over workload

UK teachers at Plymouth Academy, run by the Thinking Schools Academy Trust, began six days of stoppages on March 30.

The NASUWT members are taking the action over excessive workload and working hours. A NASUWT press release announcing the strike stated, "Teachers cannot be expected to work effectively if their workloads are excessive and unmanageable. Despite all our best efforts

the employer continues to fail to recognise this or to show any willingness to act to improve working conditions at the school."

Strike of social workers in South Gloucestershire, UK over pay parity

Social workers and occupational therapists working for adult social services at South Gloucestershire Council, England began a three-day strike Tuesday.

The Unison union members are demanding that a £3,000 temporary additional payment paid to staff in children's services at the council should also apply to them. According to Unison, a quarter of local authorities are having to pay such "market-forces" supplements to attract and retain social work staff.

Further one-day strike by BBC local radio journalists over job cut threat

BBC local radio journalists will walk out from midnight on May 5. The stoppage is expected to hit coverage of UK local elections on May 4.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members oppose plans for 39 BBC local radio programmes to 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."

They held a previous one-day stoppage on March 15, which disrupted local TV and radio programmes.

UK university staff renew mandate to strike over pay and pensions

University and college academics have renewed their mandate to take further strike action in their dispute over pay and pensions.

University and College Union (UCU) members at 150 universities across the UK voted by an 85.6 percent majority on 56.4 percent turnout in the pay and working conditions ballot, and by an 89 percent majority on a 58.4 percent turnout on pensions. The number voting for stoppages is up on previous ballots.

Whether the UCU will implement the ballot result is moot. In late February, UCU general secretary Jo Grady called off planned further strikes shortly after university academics had held three days of stoppages. The UCU and other unions representing university staff are in talks with the employers' body, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). The UCEA stipulated talks would only begin if no further industrial action were called. The UCU said it would not agree to any cessation of action, but entering the talks is a de facto acceptance not to undertake industrial action.

On March 16, the UCU declared the employers had agreed to restore the 35 percent cut in pensions but this is conditional on pension valuations to be announced in September. Higher education workers' pensions are far from safe in the hands of UUK (Universities UK body representing universities over pensions), the USS (Universities Superannuation

Scheme) governors, or supposedly neutral central bankers.

A UCU press release announcing the result stated, “Members will now be consulted on proposals in both disputes, and employers know strike action can be called again at will. Importantly, we have shown university bosses that it is staff who are in the driving seat.”

UK local government staff ballot over pay offer

Local government staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are to ballot over the pay offer for 2023/24 from the councils’ employers’ body.

The offer is for a lump sum £1,925 rise. This amounts to nine percent for the lowest paid, but only around four percent for other staff. The ballot will be on an employer-by-employer basis. Under Tory anti-trade union laws strikes would only go ahead if the vote in favour was based on a more than 50 percent turnout.

No stoppages would take place before September. GMB and Unite union local government members are currently taking part in consultative ballots on the offer, to conclude by early May. Unison members will begin balloting in May.

Scottish lecturers’ ballot over derisory pay offer

Scottish college lecturing staff are balloting to strike over pay.

The Educational Institute of Scotland–Further Education Lecturers Association members have rejected the two percent offer for 2022-23. The postal ballot deadline is Monday.

Huge majority vote by UK further education staff in consultative vote over pay and conditions

College staff at over 100 UK further education colleges have voted to ballot for strike action over pay and conditions. The UCU members voted by an 87 percent majority. No date has yet been announced for the strike ballot.

UK Google workers protest outside London HQ over job losses

Hundreds of Google employees gathered outside the company’s UK headquarters in Kings Cross, London on Tuesday, to protest global job cuts of around 10,000 announced by the company.

Organised by the Unite union representing Google employees, they protested the threat of the loss of around 500 jobs in Google’s UK organisation. According to Unite, the company is refusing to allow the union to represent workers threatened with redundancy.

A Unite press release announcing the protest explained, “The company is... attempting to limit legal representation for workers, who have to sign a settlement agreement to receive a redundancy package. Staff have been told they can only use solicitors from a list approved by the company if they want to receive a payment for legal costs. This has resulted in concerns about the independence of the legal services available to the

workers.”

Protest called over sacking of electrician in Liverpool, UK for raising safety concerns

A protest was called for Thursday to protest the sacking of UK electrician Lee Fowler by electrical contractor Bilfinger.

Fowler, a Unite union member, raised safety concerns at Cargill’s rapeseed crushing and refinery plant in Liverpool and was sacked for his efforts. The protest was to take place at the Brocklebank site on Regent Road, Liverpool at 12 noon, Thursday.

Strike by Israeli Palestinians over shooting death of young Palestinian doctor by police

Palestinians living in towns and cities within Israel held a one-day general strike on Sunday. The strike affected municipal and educational facilities along with private businesses and shops.

The strike was in response to the shooting dead of 26-year-old Palestinian doctor Mohammad Khaled al-Osaibi by Israeli police. He was shot around midnight last Friday, at one of the gates leading to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem’s Old City.

Lebanese telecom union suspends strike over pay

The executive council of the union of telecom workers at Lebanon’s state-run operator Ogero have suspended the indefinite strike begun March 24.

Workers were 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.

The suspension followed threats by the government earlier in the week to bring in the army to run Ogero if the strike continued. Ogero-run generators required to keep open the internet relay stations Lebanon’s phone operators, Alfa and Touch, rely on, were not refilled as part of the strike. On Saturday Alfa and Touch topped up the generators with diesel to maintain services.

Striking Makro workers picket US embassy in Pretoria, South Africa over sackings and pay

South African workers at giant retail company Makro continued their strike this week, to demand the reinstatement of 600 workers sacked for taking strike action. They picketed outside the US embassy in Pretoria and handed over a memorandum. Walmart, which owns Makro, is a US company.

The South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union say the company has threatened to sack a further 300 workers following last month’s strikes for a 12 percent or R900 salary increase across the board.

Unpaid municipal workers in Mangaung, South Africa strike against unpaid wages

Municipal workers in Mangaung in Free State, South Africa took strike action last Wednesday, after they were not paid their full wages or overtime pay. Some were only paid R23.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members in the municipality, which was taken into administration in 2022, have to do overtime due to a shortage of employees.

South African bus workers in uThukela call for strike action over Easter weekend

South African bus workers in uThukela district in KwaZulu-Natal Province are calling for strike action over the Easter weekend if a wage offer including health insurance benefits is not forthcoming. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa want this at a national not regional level.

Bus workers do not have medical aid or insurance, and cannot afford medical aid on their salaries.

Mozambican miners at Montepuez Ruby Mining hold wildcat strike to demand higher pay and better conditions

Mineworkers at Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM), in the province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique walked out on an unofficial stoppage at the end of March. The workers are demanding a pay increase and improved working conditions.

The company said it was “taken by surprise” by the action, but that “by working with the recognised union and state labour authorities, a solution to the situation will be found soon.”

Nigerian port workers preparing to down tools

Port workers in Nigeria are preparing to begin strike action over longstanding grievances. These include the refusal of employers to pay aged seafarers monthly pensions despite a court ruling demanding they do so, refusal to comply with marine notices and regulations, and failure to restore the roles of ship gangway security and tally men.

The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) issued a 14-day strike ultimatum to the Federal Government and other authorities from March 6. The end of the ultimatum came and went without any strike being called, however. An MWUN official complained, “It is as if we are not being taken seriously by the government and other authorities concerned.”





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