

Two-day national postal strike in Romania over pay; teachers in France walk out over education “reforms” and funding; Kenyan doctors’ stoppage joined by clinicians

## 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.

### Romanian postal workers strike over pay

Around 7,000 striking workers at the Romanian state-owned postal company, Po?ta Român?, returned to work on Wednesday after beginning an indefinite strike over pay on Monday morning.

The Romanian Postal Workers’ Union (SLPR) initially called for monthly pay increases of 400 lei plus an increase in the “loyalty bonus” for workers who have been at Po?ta Român? for many years.

Po?ta Român? opened two court cases in an attempt to have the strike shut down and reportedly used strikebreakers. The SLPR published images of 13 employees of Po?ta Român? from Bucharest sent to replace striking workers in the region of Cluj, more than 300km away.

The SLPR warned that by July this year, if salaries were not increased, then 90 percent of workers at Po?ta Român? would not earn more than the minimum wage. The Minister of Research said the strike ended after the SLPR accepted an offer that was “somewhat close” to its demands, between 350 and 370 lei in two instalments, *Spotmedia* reported.

### French teachers hold one-day strike against education “reform”

On Tuesday, teachers in France joined a one-day national strike against the education policies of prime minister Gabriel Attal and to call for more resources in schools.

Through its “knowledge shock” reform, the government aims to introduce separate streams in middle schools based on grades in French and mathematics. The plan has been denounced by many teachers as “social sorting,” harmful to education and without resources for teaching extra separate classes.

*Franceinfo* reported that the government planned to rehire retired teachers to reduce shortages, which the SNES-FSU teachers’ union said was “not serious.” Minister of Education Nicole Belloubet suggested to *France Inter* that the government would hire people on fixed-term contracts to reduce teacher shortages.

Belloubet is the third education minister this year. Amélie Oudéa-Castéra was replaced in February after angering teachers with a public attack on state schools.

The decree on streams was officially issued on March 17, euphemistically calling them groups “constituted according to the needs of the students.” The decree will be implemented from the start of the 2024 school year, *France Bleu* reported.

According to *Le Monde*, the SNES-FSU teachers’ union said 36 percent of teachers from colleges joined the strike, while the Ministry of Education said it was 15 percent.

A review of the effects of separating pupils into separate streams by UK education charity the Education Endowment Foundation found no significant evidence that it benefits children. Its review of decades of studies found “setting and streaming has a small negative impact on low attaining learners, and a small positive impact for higher attaining pupils.”

It also found that some studies “conclude that grouping pupils on the basis of attainment may have longer term negative effects on the attitudes and engagement of low attaining pupils”, and that pupils from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly negatively affected.

### Self-employed nurses protest over low pay in Paris, France

Hundreds of nurses protested in Paris on Thursday. The self-employed nurses are paid for seeing patients at home out of the state health insurance fund, but cover their own fuel and other costs.

The protest was called by two trade unions representing self-employed nurses, as well as the “Angry Liberal Nurses” collective set up to organise protests outside the unions.

The nurses are calling for an increase in the basic payment for treating patients, which has not increased since 2009, according to *Le Figaro*. They said they had been “forgotten” in the Ségur healthcare reform, which raised pay for some healthcare workers. There was also a strike for pay increases and early retirement on March 19.

One nurse predicted to *France Bleu* that, given the physical and mental stress of the job, “there will eventually be nursing deserts” where new nurses cannot be recruited.

## **Pharmacy technicians at French hospital organise strike outside the unions**

Technicians at the pharmacies in the Clermont-Ferrand University Hospital in central France held a wildcat strike on March 28, criticising a reform to the regulations for their career progression.

According to *La Montagne*, the strikers, who are responsible for preparing medicine used in the hospital, are calling for clarification of the conditions for moving from junior to more senior status. One technician told the newspaper she is only counted as having four and a half years of seniority despite having worked for twelve years.

The strike was reportedly organised through an unofficial WhatsApp group. One organiser who is not a member of any trade union told *La Montagne* that more than 80 percent of pharmacy technicians across two sites of the university hospital stopped work.

## **24-hour strike after death at shipyards in Chalkida, Greece**

Workers at the shipyards in the Greek city of Chalkida held a 24-hour strike on Monday, following an accident on Saturday which killed a 42-year-old man who became trapped in the hatch of a passenger ferry, *ef.syn* reported.

A manager at the private contractor that employed the victim was arrested, but the unions which called the strike called it one of many “employer and government crimes.” The unions called for safety inspections to be increased and made independent from ship owners.

## **Strike in Spanish ports and protest in Brussels against EU directive on emissions**

Spanish dock workers held a two-hour strike on Wednesday to protest a new European Union directive on emissions trading, and a protest of around 100 people was held in Brussels.

Both were called by the European Dockworkers Council (EDC), an organisation of port unions from 12 countries, which criticised the directive and called for “genuine social dialogue and recognition of the social dimension of European initiatives for ports,” *The Brussels Times* reported.

The directive introduces charges for emissions on ships docking at EU ports. The EDC said the directive would lead to a loss of traffic and jobs, as ships would stop at ports on the North African coast to avoid the charge.

According to *El Periódico*, 95 percent of Spanish stevedores joined the stoppage, paralysing all loading and unloading for two hours.

## **Prison guards continue protests after colleague’s murder in Barcelona, Spain**

Prison guards in Catalonia, Spain, continue to protest following the murder of a cook in March by a prisoner, who later killed himself.

The cook, identified by the media as Núria L., was reportedly left alone in the kitchen with a prisoner who had been sentenced for hitting another

prisoner only a few months before.

Hundreds of prison officers have protested and blocked prisons. *Europa Press* reported Thursday morning that 70 guards blocked access to two prisons in Barcelona province.

Protestors are demanding improved safety measures and say the dismissal of Secretary of Penal Measures Amand Calderó is non-negotiable. The Catalan government denounced protestors for not providing minimum service requirements and not filing legal strike notices.

The official unions have begun negotiations with the Catalan government, in meetings they insist will not involve Calderó or Minister of Justice Gemma Ubasart of the pseudo-left Podemos. Official strikes were only called for April 26 and May 11.

## **Portuguese miners end strike after threat of layoffs**

A strike at the Panasqueira mines in Portugal was ended last week by the Mining Industry Workers Union, which cited “blackmail” from tin mining company Beralt.

According to *Lusa*, Beralt had threatened to begin layoffs if the strike was not called off by April 1.

Most of the 257 miners were on strike for the first three hours of every shift since March 14, demanding a 13 percent pay rise. Beralt claimed its offer of 6 percent plus one extra euro for the daily meal allowance, which was eventually accepted by the union, was all it could afford. The company said its offer was “three times higher than inflation,” but it reduces the gap between the wages of miners and the minimum wage, which increased by 7.9 percent in January.

## **One-hour strike to demand removal of school director in Belgrade, Serbia**

Teachers at high schools throughout the Serbian capital held a one-hour strike Monday. They protested outside the Sixth Belgrade Gymnasium, where teachers are calling for the dismissal of the director Radisav Mili? and for disciplinary proceedings against a colleague to be dropped.

The Forum of Belgrade Gymnasiums union, which called the stoppage, accused Mili? of breaking the law. Teachers at the school have held protests and warning strikes since last May, accusing Mili? of financial irregularities and threatening whistleblowers. A union spokesperson said the city’s school inspectorate had called for Mili?’s dismissal but the Minister of Education refused, *NIN* reported.

A teacher at the school, Uroš Tepavac, is facing disciplinary proceedings for allegedly refusing to allow a diabetic student to leave class to use the toilet. Tepavac says he was not aware the student was diabetic and that the complaint was a targeted attack on him as it was made by school officials and not the child’s parents.

## **National Museum Liverpool, UK workers continue walkout over withheld cost of living payment**

Around 200 workers at the National Museum Liverpool (NML) in England began an eight-week scheduled strike on February 17.

The PCS union members voted by a 94 percent majority for the action. They are protesting NML's withholding of a £1,500 cost of living payment made to civil servants as part of a pay agreement. The NML is the only one of more than 200 employers to have withheld the payment.

On March 20, NML management made an offer to settle the dispute, including a £750 one-off non-consolidated payment, increasing annual leave to 30 days and other minor concessions. The offer was conditional on staff agreeing to return to work by March 27, in time for the busy Easter holiday period. The workers rejected the offer, and the stoppage is set to run its scheduled course until April 14.

The NML workers are based at seven sites across Liverpool, including the Museum of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum.

### **Strike by Asda staff in Wisbech, UK over conditions**

Around 170 UK staff at Asda's supermarket in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, walked out on March 29-30, Easter weekend.

The GMB union members were protesting cuts in hours and accuse management of a bullying culture. Other issues include lack of adequate training, delays in settling a long-running equal pay claim and health and safety concerns.

GMB members at Asda's Lowestoft store also voted by an 87 percent majority to walk out over similar issues. No date for action has yet been set.

### **Further strikes by UK train drivers in long-running pay dispute**

Train drivers at 16 rail companies in England will walk out over pay from Friday.

Aslef members at four companies, including Avanti West Coast and Cross Country, are walking out on Friday. On Saturday, members at five companies, including Northern, LNER and TransPennine, will hold a stoppage. On April 8, drivers at seven companies, including Greater Anglia, and Southeastern, will be on strike.

The Aslef union members have been in dispute for over 18 months seeking a pay rise after not being offered one for the last five years.

Drivers will also refuse to work overtime April 4-6 and 8-9.

Aslef members working as drivers on the London Underground rail system (the Tube) are set to hold 24-hour strikes on April 8 and May 4. Transport for London, which runs the Tube, wants to unilaterally amend drivers' contracts including imposing longer working hours. The drivers voted by a 98 percent majority for the action.

### **Strike by managers and supervisors at ScotRail over on-call working**

Managers and supervisors working for Scotland's rail firm ScotRail held a 48-hour stoppage over the Easter weekend, March 30-31.

The stoppage of Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) members was part of a long-running dispute over arrangements for on-call working.

Separately around 100 train conductors working for ScotRail are being balloted over Driver Only Operation plans. ScotRail bosses say train drivers on the Barrhead and East Kilbride routes have discretion as

whether to run services without a second member of staff (a conductor) on board. The ballot closes April 11.

### **Border Force staff at London's Heathrow airport to walk out over roster and shift pattern changes**

Around 600 Border Force officers working at Heathrow airport are to hold a four-day stoppage from April 11.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members voted by a 90 percent majority to walk out. They are protesting management plans to impose a new roster and shift pattern changes. According to the PCS, 250 workers could lose their jobs because the shift pattern changes would impact those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

Border Force staff are responsible for checking passports. The action is likely to impact passengers as the busy holiday period opens up. Military personnel have been previously drafted in when border staff walked out, but this is not yet planned yet.

### **Bus drivers at Arriva Northumberland, England to walk out over pay**

Around 300 bus drivers working for Arriva Northumberland, England, are set to begin a week-long stoppage on Sunday.

The Unite union members based at Arriva's Blyth and Ashington depots are seeking an improved pay offer after overwhelmingly rejecting the company's four percent offer. Arriva drivers are paid less than other drivers in the area working for Go North East and Stagecoach. A further one-week stoppage is planned from April 21.

Arriva was recently acquired by US infrastructure investment firm I Squared for a sum believed to be around £1.4 billion.

### **Clinicians join Kenyan doctors' continuing strike**

Kenyan doctors are continuing their national stoppage, begun March 14 to protest the government's broken promises to end a 100-day strike in 2017.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union members are demanding comprehensive medical cover, permanent posts for interns, and an end to low pay and poor working conditions.

Clinicians joined the three-week stoppage on April 1. The Kenya Union of Clinical Officers (KUCO) is demanding permanent, pensionable terms for those hired during the COVID lockdown. They also demand central government and counties hire 20,000 unemployed qualified clinicians to cover the staff shortages.

KUCO previously issued a seven-day strike notice for their grievances to be addressed and joined the doctors on strike after the notice expired. KUCO Secretary General George Gibore said the strike was called after prolonged neglect by the government.

### **Nigerian telecom workers strike over work conditions**

Nigerian telecom workers plan to walk out from midnight April 4 over the anti-worker practices used by management.

The Private Telecommunications and Communications Senior Staff Association of Nigeria union general secretary, Okonu Abdullahi, said the strike call on March 31 was the result of “slavery” imposed on workers by employers.

“These workers are working like slaves in their own country,” he said, “with no entitlements commensurate with their efforts paid to them. They are made to work without working hours and risk their lives going to the field in the wee hours of the night without adequate security provided for them.”



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