

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Belgian workers in national strike against attacks on living standards and workers' rights

On March 12, tens of thousands of workers across Belgium held a 24-hour national strike in protest at the federal government's austerity policies. There were demonstrations in central Brussels and other cities with transport, public sector, health and industrial workers participating. Strikers and protesters are members of all the main union federations.

The strike and demonstrations are in opposition to measures such as pension reforms, changes in laws on secure employment, attacks on indexed pay levels and deterioration in working conditions.

In Parliament, Prime Minister Bart De Wever, the leader of the New Flemish Alliance told deputies the government would continue its offensive stating he was aware that the austerity would leave a "bitter aftertaste" for some. However, "striking will not change reality" and "above all, our government must stay on course".

Thousands of Greek health workers strike for improved pay and conditions

Services in Greek hospitals were disrupted nationwide Wednesday and Thursday when doctors and nurses held 24-hour strikes and demonstrated outside the Ministry of Health in Athens.

The members of the Federation of Hospital Doctors' Unions and the Panhellenic Federation of Employees in Public Hospitals demand salary increases, more permanent staff recruitment and improvements in terms and conditions.

They warn of increased pressure on the health service after years of austerity, real-terms pay cuts, the loss of bonus salaries and chronic understaffing following the departure of thousands of healthcare workers.

Doctors in Spain hold week-long national strike for statutory improvements to pay and conditions

Thousands of doctors throughout Spain held a second five-day stoppage this week, part of a series of monthly strikes continuing until June. They demand a separate statutory framework for their pay and terms and

conditions of employment.

In Madrid, 400 medics marched to the Ministry of Health to protest their working conditions and for greater official acknowledgement of their responsibilities within the health system.

The doctors, members of six different medical unions, demand statutory recognition of their profession through improved salaries, a 35-hour working week and better pensions and holiday payments. They also want consideration of the extra years of training and specialisation not required of other health workers.

Thousands of workers in northern Spain strike for higher minimum wage

Thousands of workers in the Basque and Navarra regions of Spain went on strike Tuesday, demonstrating in Bilbao, San Sebastian, Pamplona and other cities. They are demanding a minimum wage of 1,500 euros, after central government set a level of 1,221 euros.

The protesters, represented by many different unions, also want improvements in working conditions.

Striking health visitors at Welsh health board to extend stoppage over pay grading

A strike of around 100 health visitors working for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) University Health Board in Wales, due to end Friday, has now been extended until May 15. It began at the end of February.

The Unite union members, who are currently paid on band six, argue that their skill levels mean they should be paid at the higher band seven. Unite said, "The CTM University Health Board has refused to acknowledge their own job descriptions and pay health visitors accordingly."

The downgrading leaves the health visitors around £8,000–£9,000 a year worse off. They held a march to the Welsh Parliament last week in support of their campaign to be re-banded.

Academic staff at several UK universities involved in stoppages over redundancies and conditions

Four Scottish universities are involved in strike action this week. University and College Union (UCU) members at Aberdeen University

were on strike Tuesday and Wednesday, following two days of stoppages last week. They voted by over 80 percent for the action over the threat of compulsory redundancies. Forty posts have already been eliminated through voluntary redundancies.

The same days also saw action by UCU members at Dundee, Heriot-Watt and Strathclyde universities against threats of compulsory redundancies.

At Strathclyde, they were joined by Unite union members working in estate management, security and other roles such as lab technicians. They walked out for the whole week over the university's plans to cut around 75 jobs to bridge a £35 million funding gap.

UCU members at Northumbria University near Newcastle were on strike Monday and Tuesday, following previous action over plans by the university to downgrade their pension provision. The university proposes to move staff from their current Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) to an inferior Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). They are also due to walk out March 25–27.

UCU members at Essex University were on strike Monday through Thursday, following 12 days of previous action. They are protesting plans to cut 200 academic and 200 support staff roles in efforts to save around £20 million. According to the UCU, the university has already been able to make £10 million in savings by staff agreeing to cut hours and accept voluntary redundancies.

UCU members at Essex also voted to take further action in April alongside support staff represented by Unite and Unison if their ballots approve industrial action.

Academic staff at four colleges of the Windsor Forest Colleges Group across Berkshire and Surrey walked out Tuesday and Wednesday. The UCU members have rejected an initial 1.5 percent pay offer and an additional £500 a year. Even with the additional amount, the offer is still below the employers' body the Association of Colleges' recommendation of 4 percent.

UCU members at the University of Sheffield International College (USIC) are continuing their series of stoppages over pay and conditions. This week, strikes took place Monday and Wednesday, with another planned for Friday. Two-day stoppages are also planned for each of the next two weeks. USIC prepares international students for university courses.

Despite the universal attack on higher education jobs, pay and conditions, the UCU is leaving affected workers isolated and fighting alone in disparate local disputes.

Miners begin stoppage at Afrimat in South Africa's Matlosana Municipality over attacks on pay and conditions

Miners at Afrimat in South Africa's Matlosana Municipality began a protected indefinite strike on Wednesday over pay and conditions.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members accuse the company of eroding pay and conditions that existed under the ownership of the previous company, Lafarge.

Negotiations between the NUM and company over attempts to downgrade the current medical aid scheme have been dragging on for a year. Currently the employer pays 65 percent and the worker 35 percent. Afrimat is seeking to replace this with a flat monthly contribution of R1,265 (£55), which the NUM says would leave workers "vulnerable and under-insured."

Workers have also rejected a pay offer of 5 percent and are demanding 7 percent.

Workers at 10 healthcare clinics in Eastern Cape, South Africa walk out over staff shortages, pay and conditions

Community Health Workers and Outreach Team Leaders at 10 healthcare facilities in the Buffalo City Metro, Eastern Cape, South Africa began unofficial strike action Monday.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) members are demanding permanent contracts, more staff, owed safety allowances and higher wages. They describe pay at R3,500 per month as "slave wages."

The Eastern Cape Department of Health said services were disrupted at clinics including NU12, Beacon Bay, Gonubie and Nontyatyambo Community Health Centre. It took legal action against the NEHAWU, and police were called to remove pickets from entrances.

Bus drivers at the Algoa Bus Company in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, South Africa walk out over conditions

Dozens of bus drivers at the Algoa Bus Company in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, South Africa held a stoppage and picket on Tuesday.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union members are protesting against being disciplined if they fail to check that all passengers pay their fare. Drivers are also demanding provision of toilet facilities and water while on duty.

Company spokesperson Fezekisiwe Keke said, "We are open to any talks with unions. The costs as a result of the strike are very high. We ferry 70,000 passengers a day." On Wednesday, the unions suspended the action pending negotiations.

Hail-and-ride drivers strike over rising costs in Lagos and Ogun States, Nigeria

Nigerian hail-and-ride workers in Lagos State and Ogun State employed by Uber, Bolt and inDrive began a three-day strike on March 18. They are calling for improved conditions and a reduction in the commissions charged by the companies.

In a video announcing the strike, a driver who called himself Bashir said the protest was aimed at creating a system that would allow them to operate sustainably given rising costs.

He said the protest is not aimed at commuters but at the companies who run the platforms. "Drivers want you to understand that they are not your enemy... They are requesting a balanced partnership between the app and the drivers."

The Amalgamated Union of App-Based Transporters of Nigeria, thought to have coordinated the strike, said the action followed months of complaints by drivers about high commissions, low fares and rising fuel and maintenance costs.

Social media users expressed sympathy with the drivers' demands for better pay and a fairer deal.

Namibian mill workers told to return to work after 59 days on strike

Around a thousand workers employed by Namib Mills in Namibia were told to return to work by the Namibian Revolutionary Transport and Manufacturing Union (Naretu) on March 11—59 days after they began their strike.

A deal was struck by Naretu leaders with Namib Mills managers at meetings attended by the Minister of Justice and Labour Relations, Wise Immanuel. Announcing that the strike was being called off, Naretu commander-in-chief Petersen Kambinda thanked Immanuel for his efforts in bringing it to an end.

He said the deal means workers receive “part of” last year’s benefits and called for high discipline during the return to work.

Some of the workers had been employed at the mills since 1989 without receiving any significant salary increase, while others had been kept on poverty-level wages. A large majority of the workforce had voted to strike as a result.



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