

French GPs begin week-long wildcat strike to demand more funding for health services; airline workers in Spain continue cost of living strikes; UK rail workers strike during Christmas holidays over job losses, pay and safety; South African food workers' pay strike at chicken factories

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 December 2022

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

### **French GPs begin week-long wildcat strike to demand more funding for services**

General Practitioners (GPs) in France began a week-long strike on Monday, demanding the doubling of consultation payments.

The stoppage of the self-employed doctors was called by “Doctors For Tomorrow,” a group of doctors outside the unions organised around a Facebook group with almost 16,000 members. *BFMTV* reported that the current payment for a GP consultation in France is 25 euros, while the European average is 45 euros.

Doctors speaking to *La Montagne* said the extra payment would allow them to hire staff and buy new equipment, reversing the decay of services over recent decades. One doctor said she had employed a medical secretary 20 years ago, but “I had to gradually reduce her working hours and then fire her.”

One member of Doctors For Tomorrow estimated that around half of GPs joined the strike.

### **Airline workers in Spain continue cost of living strikes**

Spanish airline workers continue widespread strikes over the Christmas period, fighting for pay rises which keep up with soaring prices.

Cabin crew at Ryanair have held partial strikes since August, stopping work between Monday and Thursday every week. Workers demand that the budget airline end its outsourcing of staff and guarantee basic working rights, including Spain's minimum number of paid holiday days and minimum wage.

The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government imposed draconian

minimum service requirements on Ryanair workers of between 57 and 82 percent of flights. Ryanair fired at least 11 workers, whom it accused of defying the effective strike ban, and strikers are demanding their reinstatement.

Workers at Vueling, Spain's largest airline and a subsidiary of the International Airlines Group, have also been holding regular stoppages since the start of November, demanding a 13.4 percent pay rise for the year.

According to *Europa Press*, the president of Vueling described workers' demands as “unfeasible,” but Vueling is now even more profitable than before the pandemic. *Flight Global* reported that in the third quarter of 2021, Vueling made an operating profit of 259 million euros—29 million more than the profit for the same quarter in 2019.

Pilots at Air Nostrum are continuing a campaign of eight 24-hour strikes on various days, begun December 22. The airline made a pay offer well below the rate of inflation—10 percent over the next three years for captains, and 13 percent for co-pilots.

### **Retail workers in Italy strike for rest days on public holidays**

Retail workers in Italy held several strikes during recent public holidays, fighting for the right to rest on public holidays. Strikes were first called by the “grassroots” union USB on December 24 and 31, and the traditional trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL followed up with their own announcement of strikes on December 25-26, and January 1 and 6.

*ANSA* quoted a statement by the CGIL and UIL that “commerce is not an essential service,” and “many rulings have established that work on civil and religious holidays identified in the National Contract is not an obligation.” However, as the USB pointed out, the national contracts are signed by the unions, which signed off on the employers' demand that workers work up to 25 Sundays per year.

### **Portuguese port workers strike over pay negotiations**

Workers at ports in Portugal, on the mainland as well as Madeira and the Azores islands, continue a campaign of stoppages begun with a 24-hour strike on December 22, walking out for 48 hours from Tuesday.

The National Union of Port Administration Workers (SNTAP) is demanding the port operators negotiate over pay, accusing them of a “total lack of availability” to discuss a pay rise for 2023, *Observador* reported.

According to *The Portugal News*, SNTAP proposed minimum services during the strike. It called on its members to continue handling cargo like medicine, livestock and perishable food, but included military ships and supplies for military aircraft.

### **Rail workers in southwest Germany strike for equal contracts**

Rail workers at state-owned Southwest German Regional Transport (SWEG) and its subsidiary Bahn Stuttgart (SBS) began an open-ended walkout on Wednesday. This followed short stoppages called over the previous months by the Germany Train Drivers’ Union (GDL).

GDL suspended an indefinite strike in November, declaring it wanted to give the company “breathing space... to admit the instability of their position.” The union has not announced how long the current walkout will last.

GDL members demand pay and working conditions at both SWEG and SBS be determined by a single collective agreement. SWEG refuses to negotiate equal conditions, as it intends to reprivatise SBS, which was acquired from Abellio after it ran into financial difficulties.

### **UK rail workers strike over Christmas holiday period over pay, job losses and passenger safety**

Around 20,000 UK Network Rail staff stopped work from 6pm Christmas Eve until 6am on Tuesday. The strike was part of rail stoppages by Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members working for Network Rail and the train operating companies (TOCs) over pay, job losses and passenger safety.

Trains do not run Christmas Day, and on Boxing Day there is only a very restricted service. The few trains scheduled for Boxing Day were cancelled. However, the two-day holiday is usually used to carry out major engineering works. Network Rail resorted to using contingency staff to carry out most of the planned engineering.

Though the strike ended on Tuesday, there were disruptions to some services as a result of engineering works overrunning and the knock-on effects of the strike.

Rail workers at the CrossCountry company held a 24-hour stoppage beginning on Boxing Day. The TSSA members working in customer service management and other roles oppose attacks on pay, conditions and jobs. TSSA members at Great Western Railway and West Midlands began 24-hour strikes at noon on Wednesday over the same issue.

RMT members at Network Rail and the TOCs are scheduled to hold 48-hour strikes January 3 and January 6, with drivers’ union Aslef holding a 24-hour strike January 5. The combined strikes will mean severe disruption to train services during the first week of the New Year.

### **Rail staff on London’s Crossrail to strike over pay and pensions**

Rail staff on the new London Crossrail network, the Elizabeth Line, plan to walk out on January 12. It will be the first strike by operating staff on the line since its opening in May 2021.

The TSSA members, whose roles include traffic and infrastructure management, are seeking a higher pay offer and oppose plans to water down their pension provision. They voted by a 90 percent majority to strike. They will also carry out a work to rule after the strike until February 28.

### **UK Border Force staff strike over pay, conditions and job losses**

UK Border Forces staff at major airports and the port of Newhaven in East Sussex walked out December 23-26. The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are responsible for checking passports of those leaving and entering the country. They resumed their strike December 28 until the end of the year.

They demand higher pay and oppose the attack on jobs and reductions in redundancy terms. Around two million people pass through the airports hit by the strikes over the holidays.

The government has drafted in military personnel to attempt to break the strike.

### **Rolling strikes of UK driving agency staff over job cuts and pay continue in Midlands and East of England**

The strike of Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA) staff began at 71 test centres in the Midlands and eastern England on Wednesday.

The rolling strikes begun in Scotland and northern England on December 13 are part action by UK civil servants. The PCS members oppose a government-imposed two percent pay rise and plans to cut jobs and erode redundancy terms.

DVSA staff work as driving test examiners, Approved Driving Instructor examiners and local driving test managers. Their strike continues until December 31 and will resume for one day January 3. The action will then move to London, southeast England, southwest England and Wales from January 4-10.

### **UK court workers continue strikes over new computer court system**

Court associates and legal advisers working for the HM Courts and Tribunals Service are continuing their programme of strikes at courts across England and Wales on various dates from December 24 to January 4.

The PCS members oppose the introduction of a new computer court system, the Common Platform, because it increases their workload. They voted by a 97 percent majority for the stoppages. They already walked out on various dates at English courts between December 2 and 5.

### **Further strike dates announced by UK nurses over pay**

Around 100,000 National Health Service (NHS) nurses at nearly 80 employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland walked out on December 15 and 20, demanding a five percent above inflation pay rise, rejecting the government-imposed four percent.

It was the first strike by nurses belonging to the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in its 106-year history. The RCN announced further stoppages for January 18-19. On these dates, the strikes will only take place in England, but the number of employers affected will increase. The RCN said further strike dates will be announced in the New Year.

Nurses have endured below-inflation pay rises since 2010, reducing the value of experienced nurses' pay by 20 percent. This resulted in high vacancies and unbearable workloads for remaining staff.

### **Junior doctors in England to be balloted for industrial action over pay**

A pay ballot of junior doctors in England is to begin January 9. The British Medical Association (BMA) members rejected an insulting two percent pay rise.

According to the BMA, the real terms value of junior doctors' pay has eroded by around 25 percent over the last 15 years. A recent BMA survey found 40 percent of junior doctors are actively planning to leave their NHS posts as soon as they find alternative employment because of pay and poor working conditions.

Junior doctors in Scotland will ballot during the first three months of the new year. A BMA survey of junior doctors in Wales showed nearly two thirds would be prepared to strike over pay and conditions.

In September 2016, the BMA capitulated to the Theresa May-led Tory government and accepted the imposition of an inferior contract for junior doctors, calling off a year-long campaign including six days of strikes.

### **Unite union cancels scheduled strikes of UK Wirral refuse workers after new pay offer**

The Unite union has cancelled further strikes of refuse workers employed by outsource company Biffa, contracted to Wirral Council in northwest England.

The workers carried out several stoppages in December for an improved pay offer. According to a Unite press release December 28, workers will receive a 15 percent pay rise backdated to April 2022. In addition, Class HGV2 drivers will receive an extra £1.49 on top of the percentage rise. From April 2023, workers will get a rise of between seven and nine percent depending on the rate of inflation at the time.

### **General strike call in Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Tubas after shooting death of Palestinian soccer star by Israeli army**

A call was made for a general strike in the city of Tubas by a Fateh spokesman after Palestinian soccer star Ahmed Daraghmeah was shot dead during a confrontation between Israeli Defence Force (IDF) members and a group of Palestinians.

The IDF were escorting a group of settlers on December 22 to the disputed site called Joseph's Tomb in Nablus on the West Bank. The

23-year-old Daraghmeah died from gunshot wounds to the back. A member of the Thaqafi Tilkarem football team, he scored six goals in four recent matches.

### **Long-running strike by Moroccan hotel workers continues**

Around 140 workers at the Mogador Al Madina hotel on the seafront in the city of Agadir, Morocco have been on strike since July 2021.

The hotel, part of the Riad Mogador chain, received government support during the pandemic. Following the recovery of trade, the hotel laid off many workers, who then picketed the hotel in protest and to demand lost earnings.

The workers receive no strike pay but have support from the CDT trade union confederation. They also receive financial support from passers-by, including tourists. Twice a day around 30 of the hotel workers hold rallies with songs and chants to publicise their dispute.

### **South African food workers' pay strike at chicken factories**

Workers at Daybreak Farms, one of the largest integrated chicken producers in South Africa, took strike action in the run up to Christmas over pay, mounting pickets at a number of the factories.

The Food and Allied Workers Union members demand a 33.3 percent pay increase, or R2,000 to top up their R6,000 salaries. Following three months of negotiations, Daybreak is offering seven percent or R420.

One striker told *News24* that, because the "company is only offering a R420 increase for two years," workers saw no other way out but to strike before Christmas to try to secure a living wage for themselves and their families.

### **Health workers in Ghana set to join other government employees on strike**

From December 27, health workers in Ghana will join other government employees on indefinite strike action to demand the exclusion of pension funds from a debt swap arrangement between the central government and the IMF.

The debt swap would give the debt holder, the IMF, an equity position should the government prove unable to repay its loans, thus gambling with workers' pensions.

The unions involved include the Ghana Medical Association, Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association, Health Services Workers' Union and Government and Hospital Pharmacists Association.

Announcing the strike, the Secretary General of the TUC, Dr Yaw Baah, said the government failed to respond to the demands of organised labour.

A December 21 statement issued by the unions in Accra said the workers would withdraw emergency services on January 2, and all services on January 9, unless the government changed course. The strike action is set to begin with the ending of all Out-Patient services on December 27.

## **Doctors in Kisii County, Kenya on strike to demand two months of unpaid salaries**

On December 24, striking doctors in Kisii County, Kenya accused Governor Simba Arati of making light of their suffering caused by a two-month delay in their salary payments.

The governor threatened to sack workers for demanding payment for their work. Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union regional Treasurer Linda Kemunto said, “A hungry doctor under financial stress is a risk to the patient. We cannot afford to endanger lives of patients, by putting them under the care of mentally distressed care givers.”

Other staff in the county have been on a week-long go-slow over the same issue of non-payment.



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