

French workers continue struggle against attacks on pensions;
Zimbabwe trade unions try to hold back general strike

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.

French workers march against pension attacks

Workers held marches in France on Tuesday protesting attempts by the Macron government to force through pension provision changes. Marches took place in Paris and Marseilles, among other cities.

Tens of thousands of workers including youth and yellow vest protestors are in ongoing struggle against the policies of the government, which has deployed the police using rubber bullets and tear gas against demonstrators, inflicting many serious injuries. Members of the Stalinist-led CGT as well as FO, CFE-CGC and FSU trade unions took part.

Strike by Louvre art gallery workers in Paris, France over coronavirus fears

Staff at the world-famous Louvre art gallery in Paris, France walked out on Sunday over concerns about coronavirus infection. The French government has banned gatherings of over 5,000 to slow the infection rate. The Louvre has around 10,000 visitors each day and staff are concerned no safety measures are in place to protect them.

The 250 strikers are responsible for guarding the exhibits and showing visitors around. They are calling on the Louvre management to provide plans to protect them from possible infection.

Paris subway workers are also calling for measures to be implemented to protect them from coronavirus infection.

UK rail franchise workers' strikes planned

Rail guards employed by South Western Railway are to hold 24-hour strikes on March 9 and March 12. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) members oppose the extension of driver only operated (DOO) trains.

It will be the sixth set of strike actions taken at South Western Railway, which operates out of London and serves southwest England. Their last tranche of action was 27 days of strikes in December.

The strike is part of a long-running dispute over the use of DOO trains, which threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. Action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at several private train operating companies. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token stoppages on a regional basis, while accepting various forms of DOO on several franchises.

UK: London underground workers to be balloted for strike action

Around 10,000 UK workers at the London Underground rail network

are to be balloted for strike action. The RMT members are demanding a pay increase, alongside train drivers in Aslef. Protracted talks have taken place for over a year with no resolution. A pay increase was due from April. The RMT called on London's Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan to remove a cap on pay and allow an increase.

UK baggage handlers at London airport announce series of strikes

Around 80 UK baggage handlers working for Dutch firm Vanderlande at Heathrow airport voted by a near 90 percent majority on a 90 percent turnout to hold a series of strikes. The Unite members are seeking a pay rise. They turned down a 2.5 percent offer made last August. The offer was increased to 3.2 percent, but the company said it would not apply to new workers.

The strike dates are March 14, 27 and 28, with further stoppages planned for the run up to Easter on April 3, 4 and 9. The baggage handlers are employed at Heathrow's Terminal 3 serving airlines including Virgin Atlantic and Emirates.

In a separate dispute, workers employed by Global Baggage Solutions at Heathrow airport walked out on Monday for a week. Further strikes are planned for March 14 to 21 and from March 26 to April 2. They have already been on strike on two occasions in February. The Unite members are responsible for locating passengers' lost luggage.

The company failed to offer a pay rise last year and this year only offered a 32p an hour rise. Workers are demanding to be paid the London Living Wage of £10.75 an hour and more for senior staff.

Strike by cleaning staff at London University

Cleaners employed by outsourcing company, Nviro, at the University of East London went on strike Tuesday. The more than 30 workers, Cleaners & Allied Independent Workers Union members, are opposing increased workloads and low pay.

Protests as Israeli El Al airline lays off trainees

The Israeli airline El Al has laid off 60 trainee pilots and 100 cabin steward cadets. The airline is blaming financial problems resulting from flight cancellations because of concerns over the spread of coronavirus. According to the Israeli financial newspaper *Globes*, these are only the first of a planned 1,000 layoffs.

Thousands of El Al workers held an emergency meeting on Sunday to protest the layoffs.

Zimbabwe trade unions attempt to head off general strike

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) is calling on its members to demonstrate to deflect their demands for a general strike.

Public sector workers, including doctors, have taken months of strike action to demand their wages are paid in US dollars to offset runaway inflation of 600 percent. They cannot even afford travel costs to work.

The ZCTU is touring the country asking workers if they would support “sustained” nationwide demonstrations over wages.

The Zanu-PF government is proposing a 2.5 percent tax on civil servants to subsidise the military, and to subsidise commodities for the armed forces, fearing civil disorder.

A recently paid 140 percent wage increment has been eroded by inflation, to be taken back in taxes and increased costs in services.

After the failure of negotiations with the government last week ZCTU General Secretary Peter Mutasa said, “As we report back to workers, we have no doubt that the only mandate we will be given is to call for a general strike.”

South African public sector strike threat over reneged wage deal

Public sector workers in South Africa are threatening a stoppage over pay.

The Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA) members oppose the government’s plan to annul a seven percent pay increase in 2020, the final year of a three-year pay deal.

Cyril Ramaphosa’s African National Congress (ANC) government is looking to save R160 billion on the public sector wage bill over the next three years.

Other union federations including the Confederation of South African Trade Unions, a partner in the ANC, called the reneged deal a declaration of war. FEDUSA said it is waiting to see if the government goes through with the wage cut before it decides on any action.

South African health workers strike over suspended refurbishment at Uitenhage hospital

Medical staff at the Laetitia Bam Day Hospital in KwaNobuhle, Uitenhage, South Africa walked out on Monday. Around 100 National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union (NEHAWU) members are protesting the suspension of a R3.9 billion hospital refurbishment.

The contract started in November and was to be completed by February. The Uitenhage authority said it had run out of money and the project could only be restarted following the April 2020 budget.

Staff complain they cannot work under dangerous conditions which encourage the spread of disease, such as lack of ventilation and air conditioning. Doctors are using non-medical areas as consulting rooms, while nurses take meal breaks outside the hospital, since construction is interfering with the general functioning of rooms and facilities.

The hospital treats 900 patients a day.

South African College students demonstrate over lack of accommodation and funding

College students protested outside the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in Umgungundlovu municipality South Africa over lack of finance and accommodation.

Hundreds demanded to know what happened to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Some students have not been paid the NSFAS since 2019, leaving them without money for food and other basic needs.

A large student accommodation closed in the area in 2018 leaving a shortage of lodgings, which the municipal government promised to replace.

The demonstration is a part of similar protests by students across the country.

A student delegation put in a memorandum to the college management and an agreement to meet was due Thursday.

South African airline workers at Airlink protest sackings

South African airline workers marched Friday to the OR Tambo International Airport (ORTIA) to protest seven sackings by Airlink.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) members are part of the ground/ramp staff recently recruited to SATAWU against management objections, which refused to allow the union to negotiate on their behalf.

The sacked workers conducted union discussions on WhatsApp, and when confronted by management were accused of insolence.

SATAWU wants to take the dispute to the arbitration services, CCMA, not LabourNet, an industrial relations company at Airlink, which workers consider biased towards the employer.

South African Airways holds a 2.9 percent stake in Airlink, the largest private airline in South Africa, catering for two million passengers last year.

Airlink has been profitable since its inception in 1992, but only concluded a wage contract in January 2020.

Young unemployed workers in South Africa demand a future

Young South Africans demonstrated last week in Cape Town ahead of the budget February 26.

The Assembly of the Unemployed protest demanded a living wage of R12,500, an end to austerity and casualisation, and opposed the EPWP cheap labour scheme.

The South African Municipal Workers Union also organised a demonstration, appealing to the ANC government to bring them on board, claiming they had solutions.

Youth organiser of the unemployed, Khokhoma Motsi, said, “Contrary to the view of the few, we have proved that we possess urgency, will and creativity to pave the way forward and address the crises our country is facing.”

Zambian university workers strike over unpaid wages

Workers walked out at the University of Zambia demanding the payment of their January and February wages.

UNZARALU, the research and lecturers’ union, UNZAPROSU, the professional staff union, and UNZAWU, the allied workers union members demonstrated at the university’s Great East Road campus with banners.

UNZARALU was deregistered after its secretary general was accused of verbally affronting the ruling Patriotic Front government.

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