

Portuguese health staff strike, Greek ferry workers fight Syriza government austerity

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Two-day strike by Portuguese health staff

Portuguese doctors began a two-day strike midnight on Tuesday, with nurses also carrying out a work-to-rule.

As a result of their action, nearly 7,000 elective surgical operations were postponed along with the cancellation of around 142,000 consultations.

The medics are demanding a 150-hour limit on overtime rather than the current 200-hour limit, a doubling of the overtime rate, more rest breaks and more staff. The doctors are concerned at deteriorating conditions in the Portuguese health system, accusing the government of “progressively degrading the quality of medical care.”

The medics said that during the stoppage, they would only guarantee minimum coverage that is provided at weekends. Emergencies would also be covered, as well as providing essential services such as dialysis, chemo and radiotherapy.

Greek ferry workers strike

Greek ferry workers organised by the PNO union struck on Tuesday and Wednesday. The strike was in protest over the Greek Syriza-led government’s recent agreement with the European Union and International Monetary Fund to impose further austerity measures, tax rises and pension cuts.

The strike is part of a growing protest movement at the pseudo-left Syriza government’s attack on wages, pensions and social benefits, as it commits to paying back Greece’s overall debt of £300 million.

Strike at French oil refinery

Nearly 200 employees at the Total oil refinery in Feyzin in eastern France walked out on strike on May 4. The members of the Force Ouvriere union walked out after talks between the company and the union over bonuses and other matters reached a deadlock.

The oil refinery was the scene of a major disaster in January 1966, when a liquid propane container caught fire, resulting in the deaths of several fire fighters.

Irish road maintenance staff to strike

Road maintenance staff working for Cork County are due to strike on May 18. The members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) are taking the action over the failure of Cork County council to recruit staff, which has led to severe staff shortages.

Irish union faces action by its own staff

Staff employed by the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), and members of SIPTU and the National Union of Journalists have voted to take industrial action up to and including strike action over a range of issues.

Strike threat by UK cement drivers

Over 80 HGV drivers working for the ready-mixed cement company, Cemex, have voted for industrial action by a large majority.

In a ballot held by the Unite union, they voted by an 87 percent majority for strike action and action short of a strike. They have rejected a below inflation 1.6 percent pay and allowance increase, backdated to July 1 last year.

They are due to begin a work-to-rule on May 22, followed by a one-day strike on May 26. The action would hit the company’s four sites at Rugby, Tilbury, Barton-on-Humber and Newport in south Wales.

Wildcat strike at UK postal depots

Royal Mail staff at nine depots in the Milton Keynes and Luton area walked out Monday in a wildcat strike. They took the action after two Communication Workers Union (CWU) reps were suspended on May 5 for allegedly claiming unauthorized overtime.

Other Royal Mail staff respected the picket line set up by the strikers. They returned to work on Tuesday after Royal Mail agreed to lift the suspension, but the reps still face disciplinary measures.

Strike by UK Fujitsu staff as more strikes announced

Staff working for the Japanese based IT technology company Fujitsu held a further one-day strike on Monday and a two-day strike Thursday and Friday. Sites affected by the strike are at London, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Basingstoke, Belfast, Crewe, Stevenage, Wakefield and Warrington.

The action is part of a longrunning dispute. The members of the Unite union are protesting the company's plans to push through around 1,800 redundancies, the attack on their pensions as well as pushing for a pay increase and union recognition. Unite has announced a further five days of strikes, with a 48-hour strike to begin May 18, a 24-hour strike on May 22 and a 48-hour strike on May 25.

Housing maintenance staff in Manchester, England set to strike

Around 170 staff employed on the maintenance of social housing in Manchester are to strike on May 15, followed by rolling strikes every following Monday, Thursday and Friday.

The Unite union members work for a private contractor, Mears, and a joint venture organization, Manchester Working. The dispute centers on staff being paid at different rates even though they carry out the same role.

Labour-run Manchester City Council is currently in the process of breaking up the joint venture organisation and transferring the jobs to Mears.

Manchester university lecturers to strike in defense of jobs

Lecturers at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) are to hold a 48-hour strike beginning May 24 to protest plans by management to close its Crewe campus based in Cheshire. The members of the University and College Union (UCU) fear the move will see the loss of 160 academic posts.

UK atomic weapons staff hold further strike

Staff employed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Burghfield and Aldermaston in England held a 24-hour strike Wednesday as part of an ongoing series of strikes that began in November last year. The Unite union members are protesting AWE's plans to replace the current pension scheme with an inferior one. A further strike is due on May 18.

London tube staff hold further strike

Staff at London Bridge railway station began a 24-hour strike at 10 p.m. Sunday night. Workers are protesting the dismissal of a member of staff and the disciplining of another two resulting from an incident in which they intervened to apprehend a fare dodger.

UK train maintenance staff to strike

RMT members working for the train maintenance company, Arriva Traincare, are to hold a 24-hour strike on May 19. They are seeking a pay increase. Arriva Traincare is based in Crewe with depots at Bristol, Gateshead, Cambridge and Eastleigh. The company refuses to recognise the RMT as the negotiating union for its staff.

The maintenance workers are set to strike under conditions of isolation from other maintenance workers and from rail conductors and train drivers. The RMT and drivers union, ASLEF, have called off all struggles nationally—after more than a year of strikes—against the introduction by a number of train companies of Driver Only Operated trains.

Middle East

Israeli foreign ministry staff to strike

Foreign Ministry diplomatic service staff in Israel are to strike after the Finance Ministry reneged on promises over pay reached two months ago. The action by diplomatic staff may interrupt a planned visit by US President Trump later this month.

Africa

South African Airline union accept strike ban

Airline workers at South Africa's largest operator, South African Airways, (SAA) were sent back to work last week with the union giving way to a court order banning the strike.

The South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA) said it hoped for a repeal of the decision and return to industrial action, although talks had resumed with SAA. The appeal failed even though it had been authorised to hold the strike by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

Cabin crew struck to demand an increase in allowances when on overseas flights. Crew state that their allowances for hotel and meals in other countries are not adequate.

South African Municipal workers on strike

Municipal workers in Free State, South Africa are on strike over late payment of wages and nonpayment of remittances. The members of the South African Municipal Workers Union demand payment of pension contributions and health insurance, and full time jobs for qualified

workers.

Workers demonstrated in Sasolburg last week to raise the issues of late payment, remittances and contractor employment, alongside opposition to sackings and privatisation.

Meetings with management have had no impact.

Municipal workers are also threatening to strike in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa over overtime payments. The South African Municipal Workers Union agreed to abolish a bonus payment for refuse workers, to be replaced with a lump sum payment.

South African university staff threatens strike over inadequate pay offer

Strikes loom at South Africa's Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University if a pay demand of 10.4 percent is not met, according to National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU).

The 10.4 percent demand is made up of two parts: a 6.4 percent for a wage increase and 4 percent increase in allowances. The initial response of university management was to offer a four percent increase. The union says this offer would keep its members in poverty.

NEHAWU are demanding that contractor outsourcing be abolished and the workers be employed as direct employees of the university.

NEHAWU members are threatening imminent strike action at Pretoria University. They are demanding a 10 percent pay increase, now reduced to eight percent. Further to their pay demand, they want a 13-month bonus cheque and a reduced cost medical scheme.

Employers have offered a seven percent pay increase and a one-off payment of R3000 (US\$222).

Nigerian journalist at state broadcaster strike over owed wages

Journalists employed at the Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation have padlocked their workplace and gone on strike. The reporters have taken action after several meetings with management over unpaid wages resulted in no agreement.

Journalists are reportedly owed over 148 million naira (US\$471000).

The two unions involved, the Nigerian Union of Journalists, and the Radio Television and Theatre Arts Workers Union, say this amount accounts for wages, pension payments, union dues, housing allowances and tax deductions.

Unpaid salaries go back months but allowances and remittances go back years.

Nigerian doctors strike over unpaid salaries

Medical doctors in Kogi state Nigeria are out on strike demanding the payment of salaries and the settling of other grievances.

The strike call by the Nigerian Medical Association has been met with an overwhelming response by doctors, paralysing public sector hospitals in the state.

Medical workers at the Federal Medical Centre in Yenagoa also struck last week over two months of unpaid wages, with most wards forced to close.

Nigerian teachers continue strike over unpaid wages

Nigeria teachers in Bayelsa state were set to strike over months of unpaid wages and several other non-instituted agreements, but the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) has once again called off a three-day warning strike.

The union accepted the state government's promises of "finding a solution" to unpaid wages and other grievances. Primary school teachers have continued the strike, demanding the union support them.

The state's teachers went out on a six-week strike last September, at the beginning of that year's school term, over the same unresolved demands.

Kenyan doctors strike continues

Kenyan doctors continue to stay away from work in many states as most of the agreement bringing the 100-day strike to end, over a month ago, have not been met.

At the same time, nurses resumed their strike in Nyeri County at the beginning of May, demanding the implementation of agreed promotions. Their actions have closed the public hospitals with only private hospitals functioning.

Doctors went back on strike on Friday in Nakuru County where they are demanding five months of salary arrears.

Emboldened by the capitulation of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union—the implementation of the 2013 collective bargaining agreement—state governors continue to deprive medical staff of their wages and increments.



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