

## Further two-day strike by French rail workers

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

### Further two-day strike by French rail workers

Tens of thousands of French rail workers held a further two-day strike Wednesday and Thursday this week. This is part of strikes to be held two days out of every five until June. The stoppages again led to widespread disruption of rail services.

The employees of the state-owned SNCF rail network are resisting French president Emmanuel Macron's attacks on their jobs and conditions and privatization. The lower house of the French parliament voted by an overwhelming majority to back Macron's plans on Tuesday.

The CGT trade union are restricting strike action until the legislation goes to the Senate. On Thursday, public sector members of the CGT were to strike nationally to protest public sector reforms. Students have also protested against austerity and proposals for a military draft.

### Strikes by Air France employees

Thousands of Air France cabin crew, pilots and ground crew held a further 48-hour strike Tuesday in pursuit of their claim for a 6 percent pay increase. Air France was forced to cancel around a third of planned flights.

### Strike threat by Scottish local government workers and teachers

Local government workers in Scotland have rejected a 3 percent pay rise offered by the Scottish National Party government. The GMB union said it could lead to a strike of refuse collectors across Scotland during the summer.

Teachers represented by the Educational Institute of Scotland are calling for a 10 percent claim.

### Strikes at two London schools against academization and pay

Teachers began a three-day strike at Avenue primary school in the east London borough of Newham on Tuesday. The strike by the National Education Union (NEU) members is part of a series in opposition to management plans to turn the school into a state funded but privately run academy, the equivalent of a charter school in the US. Parents joined picket lines in support of the teachers' action.

NEU members at Connaught School for Girls in Waltham Forest in northeast London also began a three-day walkout Tuesday, demanding to be paid the inner London pay rate. They have taken six days of strike action over the issue.

### London Docklands rail strike

Several hundred staff working for the Docklands Light Railway in London are to begin a four-day strike today. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union are in a long-running dispute over outsourcing and claims of management bullying.

### Workers strike vote against new care model in Greater Manchester

Over 200 council and National Health Service (NHS) workers have voted to strike on April 27. The members of Unison work for Stockport Together Vanguard. Vanguards are a new model of delivering care comprising health staff employed by the NHS and care staff employed by the local authority. To date 50 Vanguard bodies have been set up throughout the country.

The workers are concerned that unqualified staff would carry out tasks such as administering controlled drugs. The government conciliation service Acas is due to chair meetings with Unison and employers on Monday to avert the strike.

### Danish public sector strike threat

Danish public sector workers plan to strike on April 22 in what would be one of the country's biggest industrial disputes. The employers are seeking to abolish customary paid holidays, paid lunch breaks, and rights for seniors. Talks have been taking place between unions and management

under the auspices of the Danish conciliation service FI. The FI has already pushed back the strike start date by two weeks.

Employers' lead negotiator Michael Ziegler said, "I still view the risk of large-scale conflict as being very high...we have not moved a huge amount overall, even though there has been some positive development."

### **German public sector union pay sell-out**

The Verdi union representing around 2.3 million German public sector staff accepted a deal giving workers a 3.19 percent pay rise this year, 3.09 percent next year and 1.06 percent in 2020.

Last week, around 150,000 Verdi members came out on strike to demand a 6 percent rise this year. The rise will be partly financed by workers contributing an additional €7.5 billion in community charges (taxes).

### **Dutch primary school teachers strike**

Thousands of primary school teachers in the Dutch provinces of Limburg and Noord-Brabant struck on April 13. Teachers are campaigning for a pay increase and for more staff to be recruited. The numbers entering the profession has halved over the last 10 years.

National strikes took place in October and December last year followed by provincial strikes in central Holland last month and in northern provinces in February. More strikes are planned by teachers in eastern provinces of the country on May 30.

### **Protest by Romanian health workers**

Around 200 health workers including nurses and doctors protested outside the regional emergency hospital in the city of Craiova on Monday. Tax changes increasing the tax burden on employees away from employers have led to wage cuts. Late last year autoworkers at the Ford plant in Craiova rebelled against management and the union and walked out.

Middle East

### **Strike by Lebanese university professors**

A strike by professors at the Lebanese university has entered its second week. They are demanding an increase in salaries in line with that given to judges in March and a limit to working time.

Africa

### **15,000 Zimbabwe striking nurses sacked**

Zimbabwe's vice president, Constantine Chiwenga, sacked 15,000

striking nurses on Wednesday, as their walkout was gaining momentum.

Nurses took national action Monday because they are paid less than unskilled workers, and the government failed to honour a Collective Bargaining Agreement and pay promised allowance increases. The members of the Zimbabwe Nurses Association struck a month ago but returned to work on government assurances they would deal with their grievances.

The government has ordered the sacked nurses to reapply for their jobs.

### **Kenyan university strikers defy Labour Court**

Striking Kenyan university staff at 31 universities continued to defy last week's orders by the Labour Court to return to work. University Vice Chancellors have refused to negotiate on workers' demands for a N38 billion (US\$105.64 million) package. They insist on a Salary and Remunerations Commission job evaluation before new negotiations can begin.

The court also gave the Inter Public Universities Council Consultative Forum (IPUCCF) 20 days to negotiate the 2017-21 Collective Bargaining Agreement. On April 14, IPUCCF made an offer to the University Academic Staff Union and the Kenya University Staff Union hierarchy for a five year period off work for union business, while increasing the retirement age to 72 years for academic staff, up from 70.

### **Nigerian health service workers strike to demand implementation of promised deal**

Nigerian health service workers began a national strike Monday for promised salary increases, back pay on promotions and improved working conditions. The action affected all hospitals and health centres.

The health service workers' unions, under the umbrella JOHESU, are not recognised by the government. The doctors' and dentists' union, NMA, which is recognised, refused to join the action and urged the government to not concede.

### **South African bus workers national strike over pay**

A South African national bus strike began on Wednesday, involving 17,000 workers at 15 bus companies and affecting over 80 percent of the country's travelling passengers.

Wage negotiations between five transport unions and the employer's organisation, the South African Road Passengers Bargaining Council, have been ongoing since January under the oversight of the Labour Ministry's arbitration services.

The unions have reduced their annual wage claim from 12 to 10 percent. They are calling for an increase in the minimum wage and a change in stand-by driver travel payments. The employers are offering an annual wage increase of around 7.25 percent for three years.

Golden Arrow, which transports around 220,000 passengers on weekdays, has threatened to lock out strikers.

### **South African medical depot workers strike over pay and conditions**

A month-long strike is continuing at South Africa's North West Province central medicine depot over pay increases, casualisation and to demand the removal of the area's health head.

The strike is affecting the distribution of drugs, leaving hospitals and clinics in the area in short supply, with some clinics shutting down. Negotiations between the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union and the provincial authorities have broken down.

An attempt is being made to bypass the action by the military who are delivering drugs from other areas of South Africa.

### **Ugandan nurses threaten pay strike**

Ugandan nurses and midwives are threatening to strike after the country's president, Yoweri Museveni, reneged on a pledged wage increase made last November. The president promised the members of the Nurses and Midwives Union an increase in pay from Shone 400,000 (US\$108) to Shone million (US\$270) a month.

### **Ethiopian air traffic controllers strike in Addis Ababa over pay and workloads**

Air traffic controllers went on strike Tuesday at Ethiopia's Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa over workloads and unpaid overtime. The airline abolished holiday and overtime payments in response to the minister of finance diktat to reduce expenses.

A spokesman for the Air Traffic Controllers Union said the Ethiopian Aviation Authority could be endangering the airline by taking professionals off their work to cover other jobs. Ethiopia is the most favoured investment location in Africa, with low wages and high poverty levels. The government is promising businesses an austerity package to cut costs and increase profits.



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