

French rail and public sector workers strike, Nigerian health workers defy strikebreaking order

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Week of action by French workers ends with railworkers vote to reject privatisation

French National Rail workers voted 94.97 percent to reject the Macron-led government's privatisation plans after a two-day strike beginning Wednesday.

On Tuesday, French public-sector workers walked out against "reforms" to cut sick pay, end lifetime employment and step up the use of temporary workers. 120,000 public sector jobs are threatened.

Workers in nine unions, covering 5.7 million workers, took part in 130 demonstrations. At least 15,000 marched in Paris—including teachers, air traffic control staff, postal workers and employment center staff.

The trade unions are opposed to general strike action uniting the public and private sector to bring down the government. The New Anti-Capitalist Party, Workers Struggle and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France party are calling for a "new Popular Front" protest on May 26 to help the unions pressure Macron for concessions.

Walkout by Spanish Amazon staff

Over 1,000 staff at Amazon's San Fernando fulfillment centre in Madrid walked out on May 18 to oppose the use of zero hour contracts and exploitation of temporary workers. Workers accuse the company of imposing more punitive working conditions since a two-day strike at the site in March.

Unions head off Norwegian public sector strike

Three of the four public employee unions agreed to a contract proposal by a state mediator Thursday and have called off plans for a strike by Norway's 77,000 public sector workers. The strike would hit social security and tax offices, universities and colleges along with prisons.

Further strikes by UK Northern Rail staff over driver only operated trains

Guards working for the UK Northern Rail franchise held a 24-hour strike on Thursday followed by a 24-hour strike today. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) are taking the ongoing action over plans by the company to introduce driver only operated trains. (DOO). Extending the use of DOO has safety implications and would eventually result in 6,000 job losses among train guards.

The RMT has limited workers' action in the two-year dispute to regional, short-term strikes to isolate and dissipate struggles, while not fundamentally impacting rail operations.

Notice of London underground rail strike

The RMT announced two 24-hour strikes for June 6 and 14 by drivers operating the London Underground Jubilee line. The line serves the Canary Wharf financial quarter. The strikes are against a new timetable and rostering arrangement without consultation.

Strike by UK restaurant staff

Serving staff at TGI Friday's restaurant and drinks outlets at Trafford, in Greater Manchester and Haymarket Piccadilly, in London, are to strike today. The Unite union members are opposing the changes to tipping policy brought in by TGI Friday's in February. Under the changes, 40 percent of tips intended for waiting staff received on payment cards are given to kitchen backroom staff.

TGI Friday is using this to subsidise the low pay of kitchen staff and avoid paying them more. Waiting staff argue they will lose up to £250 a month. Last Friday staff at London and Milton Keynes TGI Friday restaurants took one-day strike action over the same issue.

Union calls off strike at UK college over job cuts

The University and College Union (UCU) called off a strike due Wednesday at Bradford College against plans to cut 75 jobs following "constructive" talks. The college announced it will extend the period for

considering voluntary redundancy to the end of this week and will redeploy staff threatened with the sack.

Colleges throughout the country are facing threats of job cuts and low pay. Lecturers at Epping Forest College in Essex walked out for one day last week after receiving only a one percent pay increase in five years. Lecturers at the Hull College group, which has colleges in Hull, Goole and Harrogate, took 48-hour strike action last Friday over the threat to cut over 230 jobs. The UCU is keeping these disputes separate.

Northern Irish food production workers win pay rise following unofficial walkout

Workers at Moy Park's chicken plants in Craigavon and Dungannon in Northern Ireland have won a four percent pay increase after a wildcat strike.

The action by 3,000 Unite members led the union to threaten to ballot for an official strike.

Work to rule by Ukrainian rail staff

Ukrainian rail workers, including drivers at depots across the country at the state-owned rail company, began a work to rule protest on May 9. They are opposing the dilapidated state of the rolling stock that can lead to accidents. They were joined by workers at the ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih steel plant railway workshop on May 16.

Strike by refuse workers in Strovolos, Cyprus

Refuse workers in the Municipality of Strovolos struck Monday to protest the use of private contractors to collect refuse. The members of Peo and Sek unions say the use of private contractors will undermine their jobs and conditions.

Protest planned at Irish hospital over staffing levels

Staff working as Multi Task Attendants at Tullamore hospital in the Irish Midlands were due to hold an hour's protest at lunchtime on Thursday at the hospital. The members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union want to highlight low staffing levels at the hospital that threaten safety.

Planned strike by UN relief agency staff in Jordan called off

Workers at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) based in Amman, Jordan were to strike on Monday. They were calling for a restoration of work agreements covering salary increases, leave and early retirement and improved working and living conditions. Ten

employees had participated in a hunger strike over the same issue. The unions called off the action, saying UNRWA was prepared to negotiate.

Iranian lorry drivers strike

Lorry drivers in four Iranian provinces came out on strike Tuesday over low pay. The drivers say they do not earn enough to cover their expenses and that costs, including the price of replacing tyres, are rising.

Ethiopian factory workers strike over pay and conditions

Workers in four factories in Ethiopia's first industrial park, Bole Lemi, went on strike on Monday, May 14, spreading to three others by Wednesday. Workers have 56 demands, including improved pay and conditions. The struck factories were the South Korean-owned Shints Garment Solution, Arvin Garment and Ashetn Apparel (both Indian owned) and the Taiwanese-owned George Shoe.

Employees complain of being mistreated and abused. A female worker said the maximum wage at her leather factory is 1,500 Br (US \$54) while the minimum is no more than 750 Br (\$27). Shints Garment Solution, where the strike began, pays between 900 Br (\$32.38) and 1,600 Br (\$57.57) to its employees.

Management say any pay rises must be bound up with increases in productivity.

Many of the factories in the park do not have any unions to police the workforce. "The main problem is the absence of workers associations," according to Muluneh Dessalegn, Industrial Associations & Communications head at the Confederation of Trade Unions. "If they [workers] are not allowed to be organized in associations, the problems will persist."

The industrial park began operating in 2014 with around 14,200 workers—13,000 of whom are female. Most of the factories produce clothing while nine of the factories produce shoes and gloves.

Kenya lecturers' strike ended by union with no pay increase

The 78-day strike by university lecturers in Kenya has been called off by the University Academic Staff Union. Striking non-academic staff in the Kenya University Staff Union will be left isolated.

The sell-out agreement states that lecturers will work extra days to make up for the days lost during the strike "to compensate learners." The agreed annual pay increase of 0.43 percent over four years amounts to 1.75 percent. Average inflation for this year is around 5.4 percent, with 6.3 percent projected for 2019.

Workers began the strike to implement the 2017-2021 Collective Bargaining Agreement, including a pay increase for the lowest paid lecturer from Sh82,037 (\$807.50) to Sh195,000 (\$1,920).

Cane cutters in Malawi protest against low wages

Cane cutters in Chikwawa, Malawi burned some of the Illovo Cane Fields and blocked the M1 road in protest at their low wages. Each worker currently gets a payment of around K1,150 (\$2) for the 3.5 tons produced per day, but the workers want an increase to K2,000 (\$2.74). Management played down the scale and impact of the action, fearing it could spread.

Striking Nigerian health workers defy court's back-to-work order

Nigerian health workers are continuing their strike, now in its fifth week. The workers are defying the National Industrial Court in Abuja, which has ordered them back to work. They are demanding the implementation of a salary structure, which the government agreed to in 2017.

Following the order, the Joint Health Sector Union and the Assembly of Healthcare Professionals urged their members "in Lagos, Yobe and Kano to relax the strike to accommodate emergency services in those states as a measure of goodwill."

Liberian doctors' union suspends strike

Doctors on strike in Liberia since May 13 have been told to return to work by the Liberia Medical and Dental Association and the Liberia Medical and Dental Council. The doctors walked out over back pay owed to interned doctors, low wages for doctors and poor conditions.

South African wholesale and retail workers threatens strike over pay and victimizations

Members of the South African National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union are threatening strikes against the Wholesale and Retail chain SETA. This follows the revoking of their contracts, the non-payment of performance bonuses and suspension of two union officials. Some workers had their salaries cut after raising concerns about corruption and bad administration



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