

As French airport workers and Iranian lorry drivers strike, class struggle spreads in Africa

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## French airport workers' strike in Marseilles continues

May 26-27 was the third weekend this month when striking air traffic controllers grounded flights in and out of Marseilles airport. The long-running dispute began in January over staffing levels and working conditions. There have been three strike days in March, four in April, and seven in May.

Last week, BA, EasyJet, and Ryanair were among the airlines to cancel flights due to strikes within the public sector.

## German newspaper journalists strike over pay

German newspaper journalists staged a national strike on May 28. Workers rejected management's offer of 3 percent, demanding a 4.5 percent salary increase and a minimum €200 increase for young editors.

Two unions—the Deutscher Journalisten-Verband and Deutsche Journalisten Union—were involved in five rounds of negotiations with publishers. Another round will take place on June 4 in Berlin.

## Lift workers on strike in Norway

Seventeen workers have been on strike for 10 days at the Spanish-owned Orona elevator company in Oslo, Norway. The strikers are opposing the use of subcontractors to drive down costs. Management say a collective agreement could result in the closure of its Norwegian operations.

While the Building and Wood Workers' International union sent its "fraternal solidarity" to the strikers, neither it nor the strikers' union, the Trade Union for Energy, Electrical Engineering, Telecommunications and IT, mobilised other sections of workers affected by outsourcing.

## Portuguese dock workers impose two-week overtime ban

Portuguese dock workers at the port of Lisbon began an overtime ban on

May 24 over pay, the distribution of work, and dictatorial demands by management. The SEAL union is calling for further negotiations with management. Prior to a meeting with management the previous week, the union said the Yilport group had determined that a strike "would be an unwarranted absence and any worker in its staff or its 'pool' who did not arrive at work due to any workers' meeting the company considered unilaterally illegal would be prevented from resuming work in the following 24 hours."

## Door makers in Hartlepool, England strike to demand better pay

Door makers have gone on strike at Bridgman IBC, a maker of specialist doors in Hartlepool, northeast England. The 29 members of the General, Municipal and Boilermakers union (GMB) rejected a company offer of a 10 percent pay rise over three years because it fails to make up for income loss over previous years. According to the GMB, "Workers have had just a 70p an hour rise over the last ten years."

## UK fast food workers strike against cut in tips

Scores of fast food workers employed at the TGI Friday chain struck again on May 25 to oppose a cut of 40 percent in their tips. The Unite members are paid as little as £5.90 (US \$7.83) an hour. TGI Friday managers are taking 40 percent of the tips from the front-of-house staff to subsidise the poverty wages paid to kitchen workers.

The strike began on May 18 at two branches, joined by strikers the following Friday at branches in Piccadilly and Covent Garden, London, the Trafford Centre, Greater Manchester and Milton Keynes.

## Ukrainian rail workers strike

On May 23, rail workers at 10 locomotive depots in Kiev, Ukraine continued a sit-down strike against the state-owned rail enterprise, Ukrzaliznytsia.

The strikers demanded adherence to fire safety regulations and labour

safety, improvement of work conditions, increase of salaries to at least UAH 8,000 (US \$303) and the modernisation of the locomotive fleet.

### **Miners to launch strike at mining complex in Georgia**

Miners at the Chiatura mining complex in Imereti, Georgia plan to strike from June 4. Workers are demanding a 30 percent increase in their salaries, while management are offering five. Union officials, who have been holding talks with managers for a year and then submitted to mediation on April 17, were unable to hold back the anger of the workforce.

The mine is owned by Georgian Manganese Holding, a British subsidiary of Stemcor, along with the Zestaponi ferroalloy plant and the Vartzikha hydroelectric power station. Annual production is 1.18 million tons of manganese ore and 0.4 million tons of manganese concentrates.

### **Iranian lorry drivers continue strike**

Lorry drivers in Iran began a second week of strike action May 22 over pay and conditions. The drivers are angry over high commission fees, exorbitant road tolls, government removal of social insurance subsidies and low fees paid for their cargo. Drivers pay for the “spy in the cab” tracking device, whose data is used to police them.

The strike began in four provinces and spread widely, disrupting fuel distribution in several larger cities, including Shiraz and Esfahan. On Friday, a government minister announced that the cargo fees paid to drivers had increased by 10 to 20 percent. This was not enough to dampen the strikers’ anger and end the dispute.

### **Israeli health professionals on strike over staffing levels**

Around 5,000 speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and dieticians began an open-ended strike in Israel on May 27. They are angry over low staffing levels, the pressure of work and being unable to provide proper treatment. Successive governments have promised to investigate these grievances for years.

### **Nigeria’s medical workers defy court order**

Nigerian medical workers are continuing their six-week strike in defiance of a court order by the labour minister to return to work. The strike has closed federal public hospitals and state and local medical institutions across the country.

The members of the Joint Health Service Unions (JOHESU) are demanding implementation of a wages structure agreed with the government in 2014. The Nigerian Medical Association is opposing the strike and calling on its members to scab on the JOHESU members.

### **Nigerian aviation staff threaten strike over sacked colleagues**

Nigerian aviation staff have threatened to strike at Terminal 2 of the Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos against the sacking of 20 workers. The members of the Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the National Union of Air Transport Employees were sacked for joining the unions. The staff have given Bi-Courtney Aviation Services Limited a week’s strike notice.

### **Swaziland firefighters threaten strike over lack of equipment**

Swaziland firefighters are threatening to strike to demand necessary equipment. The members of the National Public Service and Allied Workers Union are not equipped with face masks against smoke inhalation, and it takes over a year to distribute poor quality fire retardant uniforms. The brigades buy their own work-ware, communicate with their own cell phones and supply facilities for the fire stations. Uniformed personnel are barred by law from industrial action.

### **Two thousand South African university workers protest wage offer**

A strike shut Walter Sisulu University (WSU) campuses in South Africa on Wednesday, with university workers demanding an 8 percent pay raise. The employers are offering 6.3 percent. The dispute affects 31,000 students.

On Tuesday, 2,000 protested in towns in Eastern Cape province as negotiations broke down and the unions received a certificate of dispute from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. The vice chancellor (VC) of WSU threatened strikers, saying they would receive no pay if they continued their strike.

Members of the National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union and the National Tertiary Education Union are calling for the VC’s resignation following four months of wage negotiations. Management called in extra security, encouraging those who “don’t want to strike” to cross picket lines.

### **South African water workers scapegoated for collapsing supply**

South African water authorities in Ugu district municipality have locked out employees. They blame the collapsing infrastructure leading to water shortages on workers not attending to burst pipes. Members of the South African Municipal Workers Union are accusing management of incompetence and corruption.

Large parts of the municipality are without water, with limited provision from tankers. KwaZulu province, including Ugu, has had a water crisis for the last two years. Township residents are dying from hepatitis A, infected from polluted water drawn from boreholes or open water sources.

### **Chad civil servants strike over wage cuts**

Much of Chad's education, health and administration systems came to a halt Monday as civil servants began an indefinite strike. Workers struck over a 50 percent reduction in allowances and bonuses. Minimal services were provided in hospitals while schools were closed in the major cities.

Idriss Deby, president since 1990, has reneged on promises that ended a seven-week strike earlier this year. He is aiming to more than double earlier cuts.

Chad has been severely affected by the oil price fall since 2015 and the International Monetary Fund is demanding wage cuts in the public sector. Six million out of a population of 15 million live in poverty, including many civil servants.

### **Mozambique bus workers strike over poor wages**

Mozambique bus workers struck this week at the Municipal Bus Company in Beira city. Two hundred bus workers walked out on Tuesday to protest low wages, with 14,000 passengers affected.

The employers said the union representing bus workers had already accepted new contracts that reduced wages. Both union and the government agreed that wages are too high at this recently privatised service.



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