

Nationwide protests by French emergency medical staff; First strike by German pencil workers; University of Lebanon strike continues

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.

Nationwide protests by French emergency medical staff

On Tuesday, emergency room medical workers protested against staff and resource shortages at ER facilities in hospitals across France. The protest was part of a series of symbolic strikes which began in Paris in March. Since then protests have taken place at 95 facilities across France, involving doctors, paramedics, nurses and other staff.

Under French law, ER staff are prohibited from taking full strike action. ER workers say 10,000 new staff are needed to make up for staff shortages. They are also demanding a €300 a month pay rise.

Warning strike by German pencil workers

Workers employed by five pencil manufacturing companies in Germany, including Faber-Castell and Schwan-Stabilo, held a warning strike on June 5.

The IG Metall union members are seeking a five percent pay rise over the next year, with a minimum €150 a month for lower paid workers. The employers have offered 1.8 percent for 12 months followed by a further 1.6 percent over the following 24 months.

The strike was the first ever taken by pencil workers.

Strike threat by Norwegian oil workers

Last week, Norwegian offshore oil workers threatened to strike over a wage claim. Talks broke down after pay offers by the oil companies fell short of the workers' demands.

The Industri Energi union has nearly 1,000 members on 20 offshore sites while the SAFE union has more than 600 members on 12 sites. Any decision to strike awaits the outcome of mediation talks sponsored by the Norwegian government, set for June 27.

Protest by Ukrainian Lvivvugillia miners over wage arrears

On Monday, miners employed at the Ukrainian state-owned Lvivvugillia mine held a protest by blocking a road in the Lviv region near the Polish/Ukrainian border. They were protesting arrears of wages. They continued their protest outside the offices of the mine company.

Miners raised the issue and other problems at the state-owned enterprise when newly elected Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, visited the mine on June 7 following the deaths of two miners at work.

Ryanair UK airline pilots ready to strike over pay

According to a Reuters report, airline pilots working for budget airline Ryanair UK are prepared to take strike action over pay and working conditions. The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) organised an indicative vote in which over 90 percent of its members said they were prepared to strike.

Pilots working for British Airways (BA) rejected a pay offer by a more than 95 percent majority from BA's parent company IAG. The BALPA members called on the union to hold a ballot for strike action over the offer.

UK teachers at Harrogate school in England strike over budget cuts

UK teachers at the Grove Academy in Harrogate in North Yorkshire walked out on strike Thursday. They were protesting a budget cut of 65 percent imposed by North Yorkshire County Council last February. The teachers fear the budget cuts would lead to the closure of the school.

Staff at the school voted in May to hold the one-day strike. The school takes pupils excluded from mainstream school and has a reputation for working with difficult pupils.

Speaking to local radio station StrayFM, English teacher Alex Boyce said, "The cuts are so quick and so deep that the three times outstanding Grove PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) will close at Christmas unless the financial situation changes. With hardly any alternatives in place, schools will be left with nowhere to go with the most needy, most challenging students in the Harrogate area."

Strike by Portuguese ferry workers postponed

A planned strike by Portuguese workers employed by the Soflusa ferry company in Lisbon due Thursday has been postponed until June 18. The ferry workers are demanding a pay rise.

Strike by Lebanese academics continues

The strike by professors at the University of Lebanon begun on May 6 is continuing. Students are unable to attend classes. The academics are protesting the Lebanese government's plans to cut their wages and slash funding to the country's only public university.

Firefighters in Sheffield, UK protest job cuts

Firefighters in Sheffield, England held a protest outside a meeting of the South Yorkshire Fire Authority at the town hall on Wednesday. The authority plans to cut over 80 firefighter posts to make annual savings of £4 million. The authority wants to reduce the number of crew on a fire engine from five to four.

Currently, 17 fire authorities throughout the UK operate with a four-person crew configuration, but only Tyne and Wear is a metropolitan area like Sheffield. The fire brigades' union organised the protest saying reducing crew numbers from five to four is unsafe.

Hospital in Bradford, England vote to strike over back-door privatization

More than 200 hospital workers at the Bradford Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation in England, voted by a more than 95 percent majority to strike against privatization.

The foundation is made up of Bradford Royal Infirmary and St Luke's Hospital. The foundation plans to set up a separate company, Bradford Healthcare Facilities Management Limited, to employ around 600 hospital workers. Workers from the hospital estate, facilities and clinical engineering departments would be transferred to the new company.

A strike is planned for early July but Unison union regional organiser, Natalie Ratcliffe, told the *Telegraph and Argus* newspaper, "We are open to talks, even at this late stage."

Unions call off pay strike at Drax power station in northern England

Unions representing workers at the Drax power station in Yorkshire, England have called off a strike planned for June 16.

The members of the Unite and GMB unions had voted to strike in support of a pay claim after rejecting the company's proposed offer. However, following a meeting between Drax management and the unions, the company came up with a new offer of 2.8 percent for this year and next year. The members of the two unions are voting on the new offer. The strike will go ahead if the offer is rejected.

Strike by staff at UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

UK workers for the outsourcing company, Interserve, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London, began a five-day strike on Monday. They are striking over low pay and against Interserve's rescheduling of its pay date, meaning they have not been paid since April 28.

The low-paid staff have had to resort to using food banks. The Public and Commercial Services union members provide cleaning and maintenance services at the FCO office.

Moroccan medical students boycott final exams

Moroccan medical students boycotted their final examinations on Monday. The students have been protesting since March against poor teaching conditions and plans by the government to privatise medical education and services.

In addition, Moroccan nurses and health staff began a five-day strike on Monday over staff and resources shortages in the health service.

South African airline workers picket over wages

Employees at South African Airways (SAA) and South African Airways Technical mounted a picket on Tuesday at airports across the country. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and South African Cabin Crew Association members are protesting the precarious payment of wages and corruption.

SAA was given 5 billion rand (more than \$335 million) by the government, supposedly to assist a turnaround strategy, but it was used to pay off debts leaving the payment of wages in doubt. The airline has not made a profit since 2011 and needs an estimated R21.7 billion (\$1.46 billion) bail-out.

The union leaders are protesting the resignation of "our CEO," whose rescue plan involving redundancies was rejected by the government.

South African Vaal university workers strike

Workers at the South Africa's Vaal University of Technology (VUT) went on strike June 5 for a 10 percent wage increase. The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members are also demanding permanent employment for contract workers.

The university management refused to negotiate with the union despite a government arbitration services directive last November. NEHAWU then obtained a certificate to strike.

South African rail workers prepare to strike while union drags its heels

Workers on the South African railway system are ready to strike to protest the dilapidated condition of the 60-year-old railway system.

In 2017-18 there were 1,027 accidents—an increase of two percent on the previous year. Parts of the signaling system are broken through theft and/or neglect, and communication with train drivers is intermittent, making it impossible for manual instructions to be conveyed when signals don't work. In the most recent incident, a signaling system out of action for two years caused a collision in which 59 commuters and two staff were injured.

Passenger numbers declined by 50 percent in the last four years in response to breakdowns and high crime levels.

The United National Transport Union (UNTU) members were given the go-ahead to strike last Friday under National Economic Development and Labour Council rule 77. UNTU however says they may organise a stoppage in July, but only as a last resort.

The union is calling for the deployment of the South African National Defense Force to impose increased penalties for crimes on the railways.

Zimbabwe medical workers give strike notice over working conditions

Zimbabwean doctors, therapists and nurses have given employers 14 days' strike notice from last Saturday. Negotiations broke down over working conditions.

The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association, the Zimbabwe Nurses Association, the Zimbabwe Environmental Health Practitioners Association and the Government Therapists Association members say they will not accept further austerity cuts.

Zimbabwe education workers return to work with no resolution to pay demands

Education workers in Zimbabwe returned to work last week after a three-day strike. The wages of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) members are worthless because of skyrocketing inflation and payment with a universally rejected currency, RTGS dollars. Health workers are threatening to strike for the same reasons.

ARTUZ leader Obert Masaraure was abducted from his home by masked men on June 5 as the strike ended. He was reportedly dumped naked after being tortured and was only able to return home after somebody provided clothing and finance.

Seventeen workers were murdered by President Emmerson Mnangagwa's armed forces, and many others went missing after public sector employees took industrial action in January.

ARTUZ split from the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions last month.

Zimbabwe miners take employer to court over unpaid wages and sackings

Zimbabwe miners at Progress Mines in Filabusi have taken mine owner Farai Taruvinga to the National Employment Council over unpaid wages and sackings. Taruvinga is also the member of parliament for the area.

The Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers Union (ZDAMWU) members are owed US \$212,000 for wages, overtime and protective gear, plus \$82,00 for illegal termination of contracts.

ZDAMWU claims the company is not remitting union dues to them.

Kenyan doctors' strike barred by labour court

A doctor's strike in the Kenyan county of Laikipia has been suspended by the Employment and Labour Relations Court.

The Medical Parishioners and Dentist Union members came out on June 3 over the refusal of the county government to deal with the demand for the categorization of their profession. They also demand the implementation of a collective bargaining agreement and promotion arrears.



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