

Further strikes in Greece over anti-labour laws; CaixaBank workers in Spain strike against job losses; General strike in Lebanon as economy in freefall; Lesotho garment workers' pay 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.

Further one-day strikes in Greece as new anti-labour law is approved by parliament

Greek workers joined another one-day strike and major protest in Athens on Wednesday against a new labour law restricting the right to strike and attacking the eight-hour day. The law was approved by the Greek Parliament that day.

Two separate one-day strikes took place in May against the proposed bill, and separate strikes were called by Greece's two largest trade union confederations this month. Wednesday was the first time both the General Confederation of Employees of Greece (GSEE) and the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY) arranged their strikes against the proposed law for the same day. The two unions have a total membership of 730,000.

The strike was also joined by seamen, public transport workers, and journalists, reports *ANA-MPA*.

A court ruled that public transport workers and teachers could not join a 24-hour strike due to university entrance exams, which the unions accepted. ADEDY prevented teacher members involved with exams joining Wednesday's strike. The transport unions ordered their members to hold only partial stoppages.

The opposition parties, led by the pseudo-left SYRIZA, all voted against the bill, but the right-wing New Democracy (ND) government holds an absolute majority in parliament. The opposition parties posture as opponents of ND's attacks on the working class, safe in the knowledge their gesture would have no effect, and despite their own record of attacking workers when in power. While in power in 2018, SYRIZA restricted the right to strike. The second-largest opposition party, PASOK, allowed 10-hour days to be written into collective contracts in 2011.

CaixaBank workers in Spain join strikes as unions negotiate thousands of job losses

Over 30,000 employees of CaixaBank, Spain took part in partial strikes

to oppose plans to cut 7,400 jobs. In 2018, the staff employed 37,440 people. On June 6, a one-hour strike involved 86.7 percent of staff, *Europa Press* reports. A 24-hour strike is scheduled for June 22, called by all the unions at the company.

While calling limited strike action, the unions have accepted CaixaBank's plan for job losses in a restructuring plan for which the bank has budgeted billions of euros. Negotiations with the company have focused on slightly reducing the company's original proposal of 8,291 job losses, and on demanding the cuts be made via "voluntary" redundancies.

The Workers Commissions and other unions accepted over 2,700 jobs cuts this month at another major Spanish bank BBVA, having negotiated somewhat improved redundancy terms, and will do the same at CaixaBank. As a show of "good faith" the unions called off a strike planned at CaixaBank for June 9.

French municipal workers continue strikes against working time reform

Workers providing municipal services in many French cities joined strikes and protests against laws which increase their total working hours.

The five unions represented in municipal services in Toulouse called a walkout of 13,000 workers on Thursday, reports *France Bleu*. They condemned the implementation of a 2019 law which mandated a minimum of 1,607 hours of work. The union has reportedly stated the protest could last several days, comparing it with a three-day strike in 2009. *Ouest France* also reported a strike on Thursday, in Hennebont, Brittany against implementation of the same law, which the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) says will cost workers a week of leave. The CGT called a protest of 200 workers in Le Mans on Thursday.

In Paris, cleaning workers protested against a further increase in their working time. Workers dumped paper inside the town hall of the capital's 13th arrondissement on June 9, according to *France Bleu*.

Strikes continue in French and Belgian health and social care sectors

This week, numerous protests and stoppages took place in French

hospitals and care facilities, often due to the lack of improvement in pay and conditions contained in the “Ségur” healthcare review.

France Bleu reports a stoppage in a specialist private care home in Varetz on Tuesday, by workers who were completely left out of the Ségur’s recommendations, as well as protests by laboratory staff, many nurses and nursing assistants, and non-medical workers in public hospitals. Many protestors demanded an extra act to include the remaining workers in the healthcare sector. A second bill, passed in May, extended the report’s recommendations to social care workers.

Last week also saw strikes among mental health workers, with psychologists stopping work on June 10 to protest government changes in the sector. Employees of a mental health clinic in Thessa walked out on June 8, to denounce low staffing levels and unattractive salaries. The Jeunes Médecins organisation for young doctors announced it will join a coming strike of medical interns this Saturday.

Healthcare workers in southern Belgium also took part in strikes and protests on Monday. The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions called the protest to denounce changes to pay scales, which supposedly equalise pay between the public and private sector but leave many workers no better off than before.

Polish miners protest against mine closure and elimination of coal mining

On June 9, four thousand coal miners gathered in the Polish capital Warsaw to protest moves to shut down the coal industry, reports *AP*. The EU ordered that the government must immediately close down the Turow brown coal mine, which provides seven percent of Poland’s energy.

A spokesman for the Solidarity union told the agency the move away from coal power threatened tens of thousands of jobs. The union complained of a loss of “energy sovereignty,” as Germany would not allow construction of nuclear power plants to replace the coal energy on its borders.

Four-hour strike in Italian air transport sector against privatisation and redundancies

Workers in the airline industry in Italy are to take part in a four-hour strike this afternoon, called by four unions. Workers will walk out from 1pm to 5pm, and there will be a protest at Italy’s main airport in Fiumicino.

ANSA reported that the stoppage was called to defend workers in the state-owned airline Alitalia, which the government is planning to break up and privatise, to defend workers at companies in liquidation, like Ernest Airlines and at Norwegian, and over numerous other issues.

Alitalia workers took part in another four-hour strike in April, and protested this month after the company failed to pay half of their salaries, claiming it was waiting for funds from the government.

German bus drivers strike for pay demands

Thousands of bus drivers in Rhineland-Palatinate took part in a seven-day strike last week, to demand a pay increase and extra vacation days.

The United Services Union (Verdi) began the strike of 2,600 drivers on June 7, mainly to demand that drivers are paid for time spent at work when they are not driving, such as the wait between trips, reports *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Bosnia and Herzegovina healthcare workers in Sarajevo on strike to demand collective agreement

Healthcare workers in Sarajevo Canton (KS), Bosnia and Herzegovina walked out on Monday, to demand a collective agreement containing a salary increase.

The Sarajevo Canton Health Workers’ Union called the walkout after several protests last week, and denounced the KS government for failing to procure vaccines and shifting responsibility to striking workers, reports *Nezavisne*.

Norwegian unions end strikes of nurses and teachers, while parliament approves forced arbitration in municipal strike

Strikes involving around 500 nurses and 44 teachers in Norway were called off by the unions this week, after the government ended a major strike of over 22,600 municipal employees last week.

The Confederation of Unions for Professionals (Unio), which called the municipal strike, agreed this week to end the nurses’ strike and accept “voluntary” arbitration in its dispute with employers’ organisation *Spekter*. *FriFagbevegelse* reported that Unio was summoned to a meeting by the Minister of Labour, where it was made clear that the government would intervene to end the nurses’ strike if the union did not.

A strike of 44 teachers in two secondary schools also ends today, with the Norwegian Teachers’ Association complaining the walkout was isolated following the end of the municipal strike.

The Norwegian government frequently intervenes to send industrial disputes to compulsory arbitration when there is a “danger to life and health,” and was condemned by the International Labour Organisation for infringing on the right to strike. The municipal strike of 22,600 workers was shut down under the flimsy pretext that a single recycling plant was at risk of catching fire, and that patients in Oslo care homes were at potential risk of missing out on medication.

The Norwegian parliament voted to ratify the government’s decision to force the municipal strike into arbitration, and the National Wages Board will decide what wage deal is imposed. The Labour Party opposition voted in favour of the decision, protesting it was left with no choice and the decision should be made by courts rather than the parliament.

The unions accepted the corporatist framework under which the government decides whether workers have the right to strike. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, Confederation of Vocational Unions, and Federation of Norwegian Professional Associations kept their members from joining the municipal strike, having already signed a deal with the employers’ organisations. Unio made it clear it will abide by the government’s anti-democratic intervention in the municipal strike, and agreed to a ban on further strikes as part of the “voluntary” arbitration in the nurses’ strike.

Workers acting independently from the unions in Georgian flour mill

win demands for pay rise and improved conditions

Workers at the Guria Express flour mill in the town of Ozurgeti, Georgia will return to work on Monday, after ending their 36-day strike in which they demanded a pay rise, health insurance and improved working conditions. *First Channel* reported that all the demands of the workers were met by the company, although no details were made available.

Although the Georgian Trade Union Confederation and Union of Agrarian Economy, Trade and Industry made gestures of verbal and financial support for the strike, this is another major strike which began by workers engaging a lawyer themselves rather than acting through the unions. Three thousand miners in Chiatura also hired a lawyer in April for their strike, which ended with a 25 percent wage increase.

Serbian teachers protest to demand reduced class sizes

On Wednesday, teachers in Serbia protested in front of the government in Belgrade to demand class sizes be reduced since the total number of pupils has been falling every year.

The Union of Education Workers of Serbia (SPRS) told *Tanjug* that class sizes were regularly 30 to 33 students, and this should be reduced to 18 to 20. A petition launched by the SPRS in support of its demands received over 1,000 signatures. The SPRS said that if the Ministry of Education ignores its demands, it will organise another protest at the end of August.

Biomedical scientists at Lancashire hospital trust in England to extend strike over pay

Twenty-one biomedical scientists at the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust in Burnley and Blackburn, England who launched an all-out strike from May 31 to June 21, will extend the action. The walkout will now continue until July 28. The all-out strikes follow a programme of partial strikes.

The Unite union members, who voted by an 85 percent majority for the stoppages, are in a long-running dispute over the hospital trust reneging on a 2019 agreement to upgrade their pay. They are seeking a lump sum payment to cover the pay loss. The workers are owed up to £8,000. The scientists are responsible for analysing patient blood samples.

Unite complain that management refuse to involve the Acas government mediation service in the dispute. The hospital trust spent £150,000 covering strikers' work, three times the back pay the biomedics are claiming. If not settled by the end of July, Unite says it will reballot the workers for further possible walkouts in autumn.

Strike by rail workers on UK London to Scotland sleeper rail service over pay freeze goes ahead

UK rail workers on the Serco Caledonian Sleeper rail service began an eleven-day strike Tuesday, on an 85 percent majority vote, to be followed by a ban on overtime and rest day working.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members oppose a pay

freeze imposed by rail company Serco.

The sleeper service runs overnight rail services between London and Scotland, providing sleeping berths for passengers

UK school strikes over conditions, jobs and victimisations

UK teachers at Islington Sixth Form College in London undertook six days of strikes to oppose the college's proposal that teachers work an additional 13 evenings interviewing potential new students. This is an additional 30 hours of duties, but following the walkouts it was reduced to six hours.

The National Education Union (NEU) members also opposed the grading of lessons observed by management during the pandemic, which management agreed to. The teachers face possible redundancies as a result of ongoing restructuring.

Teachers at the Pimlico Academy in the UK capital were to walk out Tuesday and Wednesday. They held a one-day strike Tuesday last week, and picketed the school gates, supported by parents.

The NEU members are protesting the chaotic management at the school, who fail to communicate with staff over serious incidents, and say the school does not provide a safe working environment.

The school headmaster, Daniel Smith, was forced to resign in May after imposing a strict school uniform code, which some pupils and parents described as racist. It led to walkouts by some pupils. The trust running the academy backed the former headmaster up to his resignation. Teachers are seeking an apology from the trust. They demand an independent inquiry into the running of the school, which has led to safety and safeguarding issues.

Teachers and support staff at Oaks Park High School in Redbridge, east London walked out on Tuesday, and held a picket at the school gate. A two-day strike is planned for June 22, and a three-day one for June 29.

The NEU members are supporting four teachers victimised for raising safety concerns over COVID-19. The four used the Section 44 health and safety legislation to ask to work from home. They were not given jobs after being interviewed for permanent posts. According to NEU regional officer, Glenn Kelly, one of the four was already dismissed, with the others scheduled to go in July.

Teachers at the Shrewsbury Colleges group were to begin a three-day strike Tuesday. They are involved in a long running campaign of stoppages. The NEU members are opposed to the victimisation of NEU representative John Boken, begun in December last year, for raising concerns with management around bullying, racism and discrimination. His colleagues are fighting to overturn charges of gross misconduct and a final warning against him.

Strike by council staff in Aberdeen, Scotland over job role merger

Around 40 city council staff in Aberdeen, Scotland began a programme of stoppages each Friday and Monday until the end of July. The first took place June 11.

The Unite union members oppose council plans to merge the roles of housing and support officer as part of cost cutting measures. The workload is already high, having increased threefold over the course of the pandemic. Nearly 80 staff are affected, but the Unison union has not balloted its members.

The strikers are picketing outside the council HQ of Marischal College.

“Industrial action can still be prevented if Weetabix withdraws its fire and rehire threats and engages in constructive negotiations with Unite’s representatives.”

Further strike by logistics workers at Long Eaton, England over redundancy terms

UK staff at DHL logistics Long Eaton in Derbyshire were to hold a 24-hour strike beginning at 10pm Wednesday. This follows a 24-hour stoppage last week. They voted by over 90 percent for industrial action for improved redundancy pay. The warehouse supplies retailer, Marks & Spencer.

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers members are demanding higher payments for long-serving staff, who will be redundant at the end of July when the site closes.

Guards at UK rail company to strike over contracts

Rail guards working for East Midland Railways, serving the route between London and the midlands, are to strike on eight consecutive Sundays, beginning June 27.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) members are opposing attempts by the company to impose inferior contracts on some guards.

The last scheduled strike would be held Sunday August 15. The round of stoppages follows three 24-hour stoppages in May.

Tyne and Wear light rail maintenance staff in England to strike over pay freeze

Around 120 UK workers maintaining the Tyne and Wear Metro light rail system will begin a week-long strike on June 28, followed by an overtime ban.

The RMT and Unite union members are opposed to a pay freeze imposed by Swiss-based train building company Stadler, responsible for maintaining the Metro system. Stadler took over the maintenance of the Metro in October last year.

The 120 workers at the public body Nexus were transferred to Stadler under a TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) arrangement. Stadler, which signed a 35-year contract to maintain the Metro saw its profits rise by eight percent last year.

Cereal production engineers in Northamptonshire, England set dates to strike against “fire and rehire”

Around 80 UK engineers working for breakfast cereal producer Weetabix in Corby and Kettering, the Midlands, are to strike on Wednesday June 23 and then each Wednesday until mid-September.

The Unite members oppose plans by the company to “fire and rehire” them on inferior contracts. The contracts would mean changes in work patterns with cuts in shift payments and less night shift work, resulting in a loss of pay up to £5,000 a year.

Unite said it is willing to negotiate changes with the company:

Planned strikes over pay by Sunrise Medical workers in Dudley, England called off by Unite union for talks

Strikes by workers at electric wheelchair maker Sunrise Medical at the Brierley Hill factory in Dudley, England to have taken place Monday and Friday were called off by the Unite union. Unite said this was to allow fresh talks under the auspices of Acas. Previous talks broke down.

Strikes planned for June 21 and 25 may go ahead if no progress is made. The Unite members are seeking a three percent pay increase and an additional holiday on Christmas Eve.

Ballot of college staff at several English colleges begins over conditions, pay and redundancies

A ballot began on Monday of lecturers at 10 further education (FE) colleges across England and a separate ballot of lecturers at Capital City Colleges in London, over pay and against compulsory redundancies and poor working conditions. The closing date for the ballots is July 14.

The University and College Union (UCU) members oppose the one percent pay rise offer made by the Association of Colleges employers’ body. They are seeking a five percent rise.

FE lecturers have seen their pay decline over the last decade. The UCU estimates FE lecturers have suffered a real term pay cut of around 30 percent in that time, leaving them around £9,000 worse off compared to teachers.

Lebanese general strike amidst economic collapse

Lebanese food workers, bakers, transport and taxi drivers joined a general strike on Thursday called by the General Labour Confederation. Workers at the Zahrani oil facility near the port of Sidon also walked out.

The strike demanded a functioning government. Fuel is in short supply, power outages are increasing, and there is a lack of medicines. Hospitals are closed to outpatients, and the value of wages has plummeted along with the currency. The World Bank described the economic and financial crisis in the Lebanon as the world’s worst in 150 years.

Last Friday, Lebanese pharmacies closed their doors in a two-day strike to protest the severe shortages of medicines, baby food and gasoline. On Friday, pharmacists, doctors, nurses and hospital lab staff joined street demonstrations over the state of the health service.

Strike at Israeli airport

Around 300 staff at the Israeli international airport, Ben Gurion, were on strike from Monday night at 10pm until 6am Tuesday. The staff raised several issues with senior management that were not resolved. Passengers

arriving overnight waited until 6am to have their passport and COVID-19 status checked.

Pay strike by Lesotho garment workers enters fourth week

Nearly 38,000 of the roughly 40,000 workers in Lesotho's garment and textile sector are continuing their pay strike. Begun May 14, it is now into its fourth week. The strike began in response to the government's refusal to increase the minimum wage for two consecutive years, leaving workers unable to pay their bills.

The unions requested police permission to hold a rally on May 14 to submit a petition to the prime minister and labour minister. When permission was denied, workers demonstrated outside the gates of companies in the industrial areas of the capital city Maseru and Maputsoe.

The demonstrators were attacked by baton-wielding police using tear gas and rubber bullets. Two workers were killed.

"One worker has lost an eye. Another needed surgery for her injured knee. She remains in hospital to date. One more comrade was hit by a truck while being chased by the police. He died later that day at hospital," said Solong Senohe, secretary general of the United Textile Employees.

With the government acting in the interests of the garment companies, looting increased. A woman was shot dead May 25, by police firing indiscriminately at a crowd of angry workers.

The unions admit they cannot secure a return to work without an increase in the minimum wage.

Chevron oil workers in Nigeria plan strike over dismissals and pay

Chevron oil workers in Nigeria planned to begin a national strike from June 16 called by the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN).

The oil industry regulator recently imposed a fine of \$250,000 on employer National Oilwell Varco (NOV) for its anti-labour practices, including the dismissal of 23 employees without proper procedures. The unions are calling for further sanctions to be made.

The unions refer to "what the company did in other countries, such as Angola, Congo, Ghana and Cameroon, among others," but rather than promoting unity with all oil workers, they pit workers against each other for jobs and call only for the protection of Nigerian oil workers.

Other issues raised by PENGASSAN and NUPENG include the dismissal of three Nigerian workers, Bukola Sola-Adebawo, James Ukachukwu and John Ayeni; deductions from workers' pay since 2012; and the company's failure to return improper deductions in terminal benefits.

As of writing, there were no reports the strike went ahead.

Doctors in Ondo State, Nigeria, begin two-week strike over salary arrears

On June 11, doctors in Ondo State, Nigeria began a two-week "warning" strike to demand payment of salary arrears for several months. This caused a flight of doctors and other professionals away from the state

sector.

The state government failed to address the widening pay disparity between public and private hospitals.

The National Association of Government General Medical and Dental Practitioners wrote to the state government of its intention to call a strike, hoping State Governor Akeredolu would address their demands.

Nigerian telecom workers strike for three days to oppose arbitrary sackings

On June 16, Nigerian telecom service workers planned a three-day walkout to oppose arbitrary sackings of workers and casualisation. The strike will impact on both data and telephone services.

The General Secretary of the Private Telecommunications and Communications Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, Okonu Abdullahi said, "We have tried speaking to the telecommunications companies at different times, but we met with a brick wall."

The union reports that telecom companies carried out victimisation of union members, denial of the right to organise, intimidation, harassment and verbal assaults on employees.

Strike by Nigerian judicial workers over corruption suspended by union

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) has suspended a strike by judicial and parliamentary workers in Nigeria after two months. The government gave instructions to "urgently" end the strike or face a "no work, no pay" policy, as dictated by the Trade Disputes Acts.

JUSUN members walked out on April 6, calling for financial autonomy of the judicial arm of government to end corruption. Courts at both the state and federal levels were closed.

Labour minister Chris Ngige said state governors "are desirous that the State Assemblies be opened so that they can enact the laws meant to give effect to the autonomy as enshrined in the MoA [Memorandum of Action]."

African National Congress staff picket offices throughout South Africa in pay protest

Staff employed by South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) party walked out in protest Tuesday, and picketed Luthala House, ANC headquarters in Johannesburg, and other provincial and regional ANC offices.

The workers are protesting the late payment of wages, insurance fund arrears, and the lack of a pay increase, all due to the ANC's ongoing financial problems.

Workers to strike over conditions at land trust in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

South African workers at Kwazulu-Natal's Ingonyama Trust Board (ITB) began lunchtime pickets at the trust offices, Pietermaritzburg June 7. They are threatening further stoppages and a full strike if their demands over pay and conditions are not met.

The ITB was created to administer land traditionally owned by the Zulu people, supposedly for their benefit. It is the subject of much controversy. Zulu lands cover almost 30 percent of Kwazulu-Natal province.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union members are demanding management treat them fairly, recognise their union, pay staff on time and give permanent appointments to workers on short term contracts. One worker said, "We are threatened with retrenchment every time we raise issues."

South African shop workers protest job losses at Johannesburg wholesalers

Workers at Africa Cash and Carry, Africa's biggest independent wholesaler, picketed its store in Crown Mines, Johannesburg June 8, over threatened job losses due to tax evasion by the business.

A South African Revenue Services official and an appointed receiver told workers that unless a new owner can be found the store would go into liquidation within six weeks. Staff, some of whom have worked there for 20 years, claim the store was profitable and making "millions."



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