

Widespread stoppages in Belgian public sector day of action over work conditions; National strike against “dismantling” of national post office in Spain; South African Sibanye-Stillwater gold miners’ pay strike continues but unions obstruct joint action with platinum miners; nationwide strike planned in Tunisia against rising cost of living

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 June 2022

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

There was a large response to calls for a public sector day of action protesting working conditions in Belgium on Tuesday.

The day was called by unions to denounce the “general malaise” in the sector. Along with falling purchasing power, the unions are calling for greater investment, better social dialogue and an improved pension policy.

The unions did not however coordinate actions, with the result that strike action was regionalised and dispersed.

The biggest impact was in transport, with many bus and tram lines closed and international trains disrupted. Three quarters of the train network, and all but one of Brussels’ metro lines, were stopped. No trains ran at all in the provinces of Liège, Luxembourg and Namur.

Ferry services in Ostend were stopped in the morning, joined later in the day by workers on the Linkeroever-Steen ferry in Antwerp. Some 75 ships were blocked in northern Flanders by striking lockkeepers, and shipping was disrupted in Antwerp and Zeebrugge.

Public broadcaster VRT workers also joined the strike, protesting proposed job cuts and privatisation. Radio stations broadcast only music, and television showed only pre-recorded programmes. A strike banner outside the VRT buildings in Brussels said, “We will stop the demolition of VRT.”

Education was also affected. In Antwerp there were no lessons in 14 percent of primary schools, although emergency care was provided. Of the city’s 16 nurseries, six were closed and the remainder only part open. Four of Ghent’s urban day care centres were closed, with 28 reporting limited opening. Refuse collectors in Brussels and Wallonia also joined the strike.

Much of the postal service was closed, particularly in the south, and many prison officers took part in the action.

Prime Minister Alexander de Croo indicated the government would take a hard line, saying “Inflation is a difficulty that everyone must deal with ... I understand that there are concerns but if you compare us to other countries, we have good protection here.”

Inflation has hit a 40-year high of 8.97 percent. Public sector unions are

preparing another day of action on June 20 and have called on private sector workers to join them.

Wildcat strike of baggage handlers at Brussels airport in Belgium over work conditions

Baggage handlers working for Aviapartner at Brussels Airport in Belgium walked out on a spontaneous wildcat strike on Thursday over working conditions. Aviapartner handles around half the flights at the airport.

Workers complain of mounting pressure caused by job vacancies not being filled. Along with baggage handling, tarmac operations, aircraft cleaning and pushbacks of planes were also affected.

The action delayed some flights by more than two hours. The airport said it was possible some flights could be cancelled or depart without luggage.

As in other recent wildcat airport strikes, the strike which began at 6am was called off about 9am after the unions intervened with management. Kurt Callaerts of the ACV union tweeted, “Measures to reduce workloads are being looked at,” with an extra meeting planned for next week. “Hopefully management will keep their word.”

National strike against “dismantling” of national post office in Spain

More than 20,000 people joined a national demonstration in Madrid on June 1 at the beginning of three-day strike at Correos, the national Post Office. The demonstration showed massive support for a public postal service.

The CCOO and UGT unions report 80 percent of the night shift and 90

percent of the morning shift coming out on strike on the first day. The CCOO report delivery paralysed in 22 centres across the country.

The strike was called to oppose the “dismantling” of the service and to denounce the imminent risk of its “technical bankruptcy.” Correos was 264.2 million euros in debt in 2020.

Between 2011 and 2020, Correos shed almost 10,000 jobs. Company chair Juan Manuel Serrano, appointed by the PSOE in 2020, is pushing what is described as a transformation of its business model. Correos, the largest public company in Spain, denies that this is a privatisation programme, but the unions denounced the “Serrano model” for its “aversion to public service.” They accuse it of threatening service to remoter parts of the country.

The UGT, CCOO and CSIF unions called off earlier strikes in December last year to evaluate negotiations with Serrano.

Spanish air traffic controllers consider strike action over staff shortages

Spanish air traffic controllers are to decide on strike action. The decision will be announced at an assembly of union USCA, which represents more than 90 percent of the air traffic controllers, to be held in Barcelona at the end of June.

USCA spokesman Susana Romero told *Diario de Mallorca* that a strike was possible. Air traffic controllers complained that staffing levels remain “insufficient” to deal with the number of passengers, which is returning to pre-pandemic levels.

The union points to the non-replacement of retiring staff, and the cancellation of training courses for new controllers under the pandemic.

Canary Islands airport fuel workers present strike notice over pay and conditions

Workers at CMD Aeropuertos Canaria SL, which supplies fuel to 70 percent of aircraft using Canary Islands airports, last week issued a strike notice over pay and conditions.

The SITCA union members saw their wages frozen for the last three years, and some wage levels have not changed in eight years. The company has a turnover of millions of euros each year, according to SITCA, none of which is used to improve wages or conditions.

Among the breaches of conditions raised by the union are the company’s failure to honour consecutive days off, its requirement for split shifts, which affect home life, and its imposition of consecutive shifts that often do not allow 12 hours’ rest between them.

SITCA is seeking urgent negotiations and has warned of “enormous conflict” at Canary Islands airports if the demands are not met.

One-day transport strike in The Hague, Netherlands over pay

Public transport workers for carrier HTM in the Dutch administrative centre The Hague were on 24-hour strike today over pay. All buses and trams stopped, as did the RandstadRail light rail service to Zoetermeer.

HTM proposed a pay rise of 3.1 percent. The FNV and CNV unions are calling for a rise of 5 percent. Inflation is currently at 9.6 percent. The

unions previously agreed to a temporary wage freeze in response to the pandemic.

During the pandemic, HTM temporarily closed thirteen stops and a service office. The company says passenger numbers are still only at 80 percent of pre-pandemic levels and did not say whether it was considering revising its pay offer.

French transport workers in Paris call for new strike June 3 over pay and staff shortages

Workers on the RER B train line through the French capital will strike again June 3. They are protesting understaffing and demanding a 1,500 euro bonus for having worked through the pandemic.

The line is a major north-south Paris artery, much used for access to the Stade de France sports stadium. Workers on the line held a strike last Saturday, during the Champions League football final. The new strike was called to coincide with a France-Denmark match in the UEFA Nations League.

Bus drivers in Châtelleraut, France continue extended pay strike

Strike action by drivers employed by Kéolis on the Châtelleraut bus network in France has been extended into June. A series of strikes over pay, mostly affecting morning commuter traffic, began in April.

Management presented a revised pay offer last month, which the workers rejected, extending the action by another month. Workers are striking 7-9am on June 2, 8, 10, and 14-17.

French healthcare workers continue protests over Ségur review bonus

Healthcare workers across France came out on strike on Wednesday to protest their exclusion from the 2019 Ségur healthcare review’s bonus. While the government extended the €183 bonus to medico-social staff in private institutions, it is still not available for administrative and support staff.

More than 300 social workers from Vienne marked their second day of strike by marching through Poitiers city centre, demanding payment of the bonus to all and denouncing the deterioration of conditions. Special educator and departmental secretary Marie-Laure Noël told *Centre Presse* that mobilisation across the sector was unusual, because of the different size of the institutions involved, but “the state of our professional sector is so catastrophic that we no longer have a choice.”

Two administrative workers, who protested in Niort last week, explained that without their roles, the institution “would not work.” Their exclusion from the bonus would lead, in the long term, to growing divisions and inequality between workers, as administrative staff are only paid minimum wage as starting salary.

Around 40 strikers protested outside the offices of the Association Marie-Hélène in Evreux, Normandy. The Association is a private sector organisation supporting children and adults with multiple disabilities or autism.

Guillaume Eloy of the CFTC union said “We want there to be fairness” for support and administrative workers. Eloy said “there is a small hope.

In any case, it is now or never for us to mobilise.”

At Aubergenville in Yvelines, two-thirds of the workers of the La Plaine medicalised reception centre came out on strike. A strike in November 2021 had enabled the release of funds equivalent to the Ségur bonus, but management ceased applying this stopgap in February.

A nurse told press that La Plaine is understaffed. That is likely to worsen, with staff leaving for establishments that do pay the bonus.

Around 50 workers protested in Aube on Tuesday. Xavier Meignin, director of Aube Youth Action (AJA), said that of the AJA’s 54 workers, six will not receive the bonus, even though they are among the lowest paid.

This comes on top of long wage freezes, as inflation hit 5.2 percent. Despite the nationwide response, local CGT union delegate Bruno Rossi said he opposed negotiation “en bloc.”

Teachers in Nantes, France strike over resources, understaffing

Around 150 striking teachers protested outside prefecture buildings in Nantes, France, on Tuesday. The strike and protest were called by five unions demanding additional resources in education, particularly around staffing and precariousness.

Strikers pointed to the lack of specialised support for students with disabilities, and management pressure on staff. They demanded reductions in class size, saying that the non-replacement of staff was “becoming a scourge.”

Finland: collective bargaining agreement talks break down after nurses reject settlement

Ongoing collective bargaining negotiations over the terms and conditions of public sector workers in Finland broke down last week, after nurses’ unions rejected the latest settlement offer.

When the two nurses’ unions, Tehy and SuPer, rejected the offer, talks continued between the Local and County Government Employers body (KT) and the other main unions involved, public sector union Jau and public sector professionals’ union Juko.

The nurses’ unions are seeking a 3.6 percent rise each year for five years. This is well below inflation, which hit a 30-year high of 5.8 percent in March. Tehy and SuPer walked out of the talks at the beginning of last week, making it unlikely other municipal workers would accept the deal.

Jau and Juko, however, were prepared to accept the settlement proposals, but wanted to safeguard themselves against hostility from municipal workers unhappy at such a deal. Jau and Juko therefore wanted a security clause guaranteeing parity with any wage increase awarded independently to nurses. Management rejected this clause, wanting to implement it only in some cases.

Olli Luukkainen, chair of Juko, criticised KT for dividing occupational groups into “important and less important ones,” but also blamed the nurses’ unions for not accepting the deal.

Luukkainen made clear the unions’ real concern is pegging wages back, rather than raising them. He appealed to KT’s pledges that nurses would not receive more than any other group of workers, saying, “If that’s really the case” the security clause would be irrelevant and cost nothing. “if KT is prepared to give security clauses to some groups and not to others, it shows that it doesn’t even believe it itself.”

Luukkainen also pointed to comments by Aki Lindén, Minister of

Family Affairs and Social Services, that the nursing sector needs its own wage programme. “If a politician says that, do we trust that nursing unions won’t get more than others? No, we don’t,” said Luukkainen.

He said the result would be that no wage increase would be received this year, and that further strikes are possible.

Scotland’s fishing fleet workers walkout over pay

Workers at Marine Scotland walked out last week protesting a 2 percent pay offer. Marine Scotland ensures that fishing fleets comply with the law.

Strikes took place on vessels based at Aberdeen harbour, on Marine Protection Vessel Hirta on May 26 and 27, and on Jura, June 1 and 2.

Cleaners strike over unpaid wages at London’s St George’s hospital

Outsourced cleaners employed by Mitie at St George’s hospital, Tooting in the UK capital walked out on Monday over pay and conditions. They held a protest outside the hospital.

The 24-hour stoppage is the first of three days of strike action. The GMB members, who have worked throughout the pandemic, had their wages withheld for seven weeks while the company restructured pay cycles. They demand compensation for hardship and to be employed directly by the National Health Service. The next strikes are due June 6 and 7.

Mitie just acquired Telecom company 8 point 8 for £10 million.

Teachers and support staff continue stoppages at London school over pay and restructuring

Teachers and support staff at Pyrigo Priory School in Harold Hill in the UK capital walked out on May 17 and May 25, protesting outside the school.

The NEU members oppose employer Drapers’ Multi Academy Trust’s cuts to hours and pay grades and restructuring, which will impact the safeguarding of pupils. The NEU complains of lack of consultation with them.

Disputes at London schools over pay and conditions

After 17 days of strikes at Walthamstow Primary Academy in the UK capital over 49 issues related to workload, bullying, equality and pay, the dispute continues. Management made some concessions to the NEU members but not on pay.

Workers at Holland Park School walked out for three days from Tuesday to oppose the school joining United Learning, which runs Walthamstow Primary.

Staff are balloting at Hornbeam Academy over redundancies and restructuring, and at Gwyn Jones Primary School over job cuts, pay and workload. At Our Lady and St George, there is a ballot against

restructuring.

Students at Leeds university, England in solidarity action with academics boycotting marking

Students at Leeds university, England began occupying a room at Leeds university May 23 to show their support for lecturers in dispute with management.

The “Occupy Leeds Uni” group are occupying the university’s council chamber in the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building. The University and College Union lecturers began a marking boycott, after striking in Leeds and across the country over pensions and workload. The university is threatening to withhold their pay. The students say they will continue their action until the threat is lifted.

A pinned tweet on OccupyLeeds Uni notes the Vice Chancellor is on a £336,000 salary, while some Unison members “work second jobs and rely on foodbanks to survive.”

Undergraduate supervisors at UK’s Cambridge University protest “gig economy” work conditions

A rally took place May 27 outside Great St Mary’s Church in Cambridge, England organised by “Justice4College Supervisors” over the pay and conditions of undergraduate supervisors.

The University and College Union (UCU) members are demanding fair pay, secure contracts and paid training. Four in 10 do not earn a living wage and many are on zero-hours contracts.

The protest was planned outside a meeting of the senior tutors committee that has the authority to meet the supervisors’ demands. The meeting was moved online.

The supervisors take small group student tutorials. The University of Cambridge and colleges have total assets over £11 billion.

Lecturers at Richmond upon Thames College, London vote for further strikes against “fire and rehire”

Staff at Richmond upon Thames College in southwest London voted for further stoppages over plans to sack every tutor at the college and force them to reapply for their jobs on inferior terms and conditions. The strike dates are to be announced.

The 127 UCU members walked out for five days from May 23 after the college announced plans to sack and rehire them on new contracts under which they lose 10 days holiday. The college pays them on average £26,000, lower than other colleges and schools in London.

The UCU offered to suspend action if management withdraws dismissal notices on those who refuse to sign the new contract.

Earlier in the month, workers voted 97 percent in an 88 percent turnout to walkout.

The UCU leadership recently ended strikes in opposition to university employers’ attacks on lecturers’ pay, pensions and conditions in Higher Education.

Autumn strike threat at Further Education colleges in England over pay

Five unions representing further Education (FE) staff in England rejected a non-binding 2.5 percent pay offer from the Association of Colleges (AOC). The retail price index (RPI) inflation rate is 11.1 percent and rising.

The UCU, National Education Union (NEU), UNISON, UNITE and GMB submitted a counteroffer of 10 percent with a minimum uplift of £2,000.

On the issue of heavy workload, the AOC only said it would set up a working party to investigate. Also, the government funding increase to colleges was not used to address poor pay, leading to staff shortages. Lecturers’ pay fell 35 percent in real terms the last decade and slipped behind the pay of teachers by £9,000 a year.

Lecturers at five FE colleges in northwest England walked out for 24 hours on May 20. On the eve of the strike, the UCU at Bury College pulled out of the action and agreed a well below inflation 3 percent rise and £1,000 lump sum. UCU President Jo Grady welcomed the deal as a victory. Further strikes are planned for June 7 and 10, but the union is negotiating on a college by college basis.

Threat of strike action at University of Wolverhampton, England against cuts to courses

Workers at the University of Wolverhampton, England may ballot for strike action if the university does not withdraw plans to stop enrolling students onto 146 courses. The UCU members could face 40 redundancies.

The UCU threatened the university with legal action. The courses under threat are in performing arts, fashion, social sciences, interior design and fine art.

UK Hugh Baird College lecturers on Merseyside strike ballot against pay offer

Hugh Baird College lecturers on Merseyside, England began a strike ballot on May 30 against a 1 percent pay offer plus a one-off payment of £500. A consultative ballot was 89 percent in favour of a strike ballot in an 81 percent turnout.

The ballot closes June 20, so any walkouts would begin in Autumn.

Further walkouts are due June 8 and 9.

Teachers in pay dispute on Isle of Man, England

The latest pay offer by the Isle of Man government, England, was rejected by the NASUWT union.

In early April, teachers voted by an 84 percent majority on a 66 percent turnout to strike against a two percent pay offer backdated to September. According to the NASUWT, the value in real terms of teachers’ pay has fallen 30 percent since 2010. They are also protesting unsustainable workloads.

Instead of organizing a walkout, the union went into negotiations that since broke down. Rather than organizing a unified pay struggle with teachers on mainland England, the union is calling for an end to linking pay with England, saying without the link teachers' pay is higher in Jersey and Guernsey.

Delivery drivers protest in London over work conditions and police intimidation

Delivery drivers and supporters demonstrated outside Hackney town hall in the UK capital May 25 to protest work conditions and police intimidation. Drivers temporarily blocked the streets.

On May 14, police had harassed drivers and tried to arrest one for "immigration offences." The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain members complain police do random checks and ask for their immigration status.

Strikes planned at Exxon refinery, England over pay

UK workers at Exxon's Fawley refinery, near Southampton plan to walkout on June 9,10,16,17 and 20 over pay.

This follows three-day stoppages in April and May against a 2.5 percent pay offer and lack of sick pay.

The whole plant could shut, as some workers are essential for safety services.

Planned pay strikes at engineering company could hit Hinkley Point nuclear power plant

Workers at Darchem Engineering in Stockton on Tees are due to begin an overtime ban June 6, followed by three 48-hour strikes from June 13, June 20 and June 27.

Welders pay increased £2 an hour, but not that of platers and sheet metal workers.

The Unite members' action could hit Hinkley Point nuclear plant, for whom the company manufactures industrial pond liners in a contract worth £200 million.

Arriva bus drivers in Yorkshire, England to walkout over pay

Bus drivers at Arriva in Yorkshire, England, are to walk out June 6 for an undisclosed time, after 96 percent strike vote.

The Unite members rejected a 4.1 percent pay offer. Services in York, Selby and Goole will be affected.

Unite has negotiated below inflation pay deals on a company by company basis up and down the country.

British Airways workers ballot for strike action over pay amid staff

shortages

Around 500 check-in staff employed in the A Scales division at London's Heathrow airport are balloting for strike action over pay. The ballot opens June 7 until June 27, with industrial action expected to begin in July when demand for flights is high.

The GMB union is balloting over the same issue.

The Unite members are angry the company restored management pay to pre- pandemic levels, whilst refusing to reverse a 10 percent pay cut imposed on other workers during the pandemic.

Workers are under enormous pressure and passengers face long delays as airports across the country struggle to deal with the chaos of flight cancellations. British Airways have cancelled over 100 flights a day in recent weeks.

In 2020, 10,000 jobs were cut at British Airways after deals with various unions and staff were not replaced. Staff shortages are exacerbated due to workers absent with COVID.

Baggage handlers and check-in staff employed by Blue Handling, which provides services for Ryanair at London's Stansted airport, may also ballot for strike action. The 750 Unite members rejected a 4 percent offer.

UK cleaners and security staff protest outside Downing Street against unacceptable treatment during Partygate

On May 27, UK government cleaners and security staff protested outside Downing Street against "unacceptable treatment" revealed by the Sue Gray report into Partygate.

Organised by the United Voices of the World, the workers felt unable to raise concerns after witnessing evidence of law-breaking parties during lockdown at the Prime Minister's (PM) residence. The demonstrators pointed to the culture of disrespect they suffered in government buildings and offices across London. Prime Minister Boris Johnson was forced to issue an apology to them.

Also highlighted was the tragic death of outsourced cleaner for the Ministry of Justice, Emanuel Gomez who died in April 2020 from COVID. He worked for five days with symptoms, fearing to lose income.

UK Royal Mail workers to ballot for strike action over manager job cuts

Managers at Royal Mail are to ballot for strike action and action short of a strike from June 6 to 29.

According to Unite, 2,400 managers across 1,000 workplaces will ballot against proposals to cut 542 frontline manager posts with redeployment on inferior terms and conditions. Royal Mail already cut 450 jobs. The company recently recorded profits of £416 million.

Unite said the six-day delivery service is also under threat.

Strike vote by workers at forklift giant in Northern Ireland against pay offer

Workers at forklift company Hyster-Yale in Northern Ireland voted by

85.3 percent majority to walkout over pay.

The 300 Unite members, including engineering and office staff, rejected a 5.5 percent pay offer.

Instead of announcing strike dates, Unite Deputy Regional Secretary Davey Thompson said, “The ball is squarely in the court of management, they need to return to the negotiating table with a pay increase offer that reflects the cost-of-living pressures...”

Poultry feed workers in Northern Ireland to strike over pay parity

Workers at Moy Park Mill, including drivers, mill operators and engineers voted by 78 percent to walkout over pay parity at the company’s sites in Northern Ireland. The stoppage commences June 6.

The 40 Unite members at Moneynick Road feed mill are paid less than at other Moy Park sites. To concede parity, the company wants changes in terms and conditions, including holiday and special day premiums workers have at the other sites.

Moy Park made profits of £86 million last year, and the highest paid director raked in £924,000.

Workers to strike over pay at only ink manufacturer in the UK

Nearly 200 workers plan strike action at the UK’s only ink manufacturer, Sun Chemical over a 3 percent pay offer.

The Unite members begin an overtime ban on June 6 and 24 hour walkout June 9 at seven sites, with further strikes to follow. The sites are in Heywood, Milnrow and Urmston in Greater Manchester, Alfreton in Derbyshire, Workington in Cumbria, Midsomer Norton in Somerset, and Bristol.

Sun Chemical is owned by global corporation DIC, which made £2.5 million profits in 2021. Sun Chemicals made £60 million. The strike will affect the *Daily Mail*, Amcor, Schweizer and Multi-Colour Corp. The last few years have seen redundancies and site closures at the company.

Bin strike threat in Rhondda, Wales over wage cuts and restructuring

Around 130 workers at the waste and recycling department in Rhondda, Wales voted to walk out in a majority vote of 95 percent.

The GMB members have seen wage cuts of 25 percent the last decade, since a job evaluation in 2011 by the Labour party run council. The union is currently in talks with the council, and no dates for action have been announced.

Public sector workers in Scotland to ballot over pay

Public sector workers in Scotland’s 32 local authorities are to ballot from June 10 to July 26 over pay.

The Unite members in schools and cleansing rejected by 91 percent in a consultative ballot a 2 percent pay offer from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. GMB members are also balloting for strike action.

More than half of Scotland’s local authority workers earn less than £25,000 for a 37-hour week.

Train drivers at ScotRail to ballot over pay

Train drivers at ScotRail, which runs train services across Scotland are to ballot for strike action after Aslef, the drivers’ union rejected a 4.2 percent pay offer.

Drivers are also refusing to work rest days, which the company expects because of staff shortages. In response the recently renationalised company announced it was slashing services.

Dispute at UK Health Security Agency over job losses due to “Covid ramp down”

Workers at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) face job losses as the government winds down all attempts to monitor COVID, in line with its fiction that the pandemic is over.

The Public and Commercial Services Union bemoaned that “the UKHSA should have initiated collective consultations under the organisational change policy for the ‘ramp down job cuts’.”

The UKHSA is the government agency with responsibility for public health and infectious disease control.

Union suspends London tube strike at two stations over bullying

The RMT suspended a stoppage planned for June 3 at Euston and Green Park stations. Workers accuse management of bullying. After negotiations, the union and tube bosses agreed a joint review into the issue.

Pay strike of street cleaners and refuse collectors in Rugby, England ends

Striking refuse lorry drivers, loaders and street cleaning staff in Rugby, England, working for Conservative-controlled Rugby council, will return to work May 31.

Unite called off the strike begun April 26 after agreeing, according to the union’s press release, a new offer of “pay increases of up to 12 percent.” The retail price index inflation rate has already hit 11.1 and is expected to rise.

Street cleaners started on £17,100 a year rising to £19,200 after five years, while loaders began at £19,200 rising to £21,300 after five years. The HGV drivers started at £21,300, reaching £23,400 after five years.

Lebanese doctors and nurses declare two-day strike against cuts

Lebanese doctors and nurses walked out on May 26 and 27 to protest the cuts made by the country's Central Bank.

Within a few years, the Lebanese health system has gone from being one of the best in the Middle East to the brink of collapse. The Lebanese currency lost 95 percent of its value since October 2019, and thousands of highly trained medical staff, including doctors, nurses and pharmacists, emigrated. There is also a severe shortage of medicines and equipment. The value of the Lebanese pound fell by over 20 percent since a new Parliament was elected May 15.

"Hospitals will close because there is no way they can continue. We have to pay cash when we have no access to cash," said Suleiman Haroun, leader of the private hospitals' union. Several hundred staged a protest outside the Central Bank in Beirut on May 26.

Protests have also been staged by bakers and lorry drivers independent of the unions. Bakers are concerned that the government will remove subsidies on bread, which would lead to major upheavals.

Bassem Tleiss, president of the Confederation of Transport Syndicates, said the roadblocks were not organised by any of the transport unions. A protestor explained he was taking action because of "the dollar rate, the economic situation, fuel prices, shortages."

Israeli teachers protest low pay and understaffing

Israeli teachers finished their classes early on May 30 and walked out in protest over pay and staff shortages. A protest took place outside the Tel Aviv Museum.

The Israel Teachers Union (ITU) declared a dispute with the Ministry of Finance over delays in teachers getting a pay rise.

ITU Secretary-General Yaffa Ben-David spoke to the press about the 'horrific' consequences of the decline in teachers' pay and the 'battle to save the education system', while calling on government ministers to intervene.

South African Sibanye-Stillwater gold miners' pay strike continues but unions obstruct joint action with platinum miners

The three-month strike by 25,000 to 30,000 gold miners at Sibanye-Stillwater, South Africa is now mired in deadlocked negotiations between unions and management, mediated by the government's Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA).

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) refused to unite the gold miners' struggle with that of platinum miners, keeping their pay negotiations entirely separate.

While the NUM and AMCU agreed a deal with Anglo American Platinum of R1,100 a month rising to R1,500 after five years, they negotiated the gold miners initial demand from a flat R1,000 a month down to R800 a month in the first year, R1,000 in year two and R900 in year three with a 5.5 percent increase for artisans and officials. This is in line to a similar proposal suggested by the supposedly neutral CCMA for R700 rising to R1,000 and then R900 with 5 percent for artisans and officials.

The strike is having an immense financial impact on the miners, who are fighting for their livelihoods and face intense pressure to accept the company's offers.

The CCMA intends to appoint an independent panel to make a decision

binding on both employer and unions if both agree to this process. Meanwhile, the NUM and AMCU are soon to enter further separate negotiations on behalf of workers at Sibanye-Stillwater's own platinum mines.

In 2019, AMCU ended a five-month stoppage at Sibanye-Stillwater, accepting a deal they previously called "slave labour" when it was first agreed by the NUM and Solidarity unions.

South African ArcelorMittal foundry workers' strike off as union negotiates sell-out pay deal

More than 3,500 workers at ArcelorMittal South Africa, employed at plants, blast furnaces and coke batteries across the country ended their two-week strike when the union negotiated a sellout deal 0.5 percent above the company's latest offer.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members walked out May 11 to demand an across-the-board 10 percent pay increase and other benefits. ArcelorMittal offered 5 percent with a 2 percent cash payment. The union dropped their demand to 7 percent with R5,000 in cash and, after the company offered 6 percent plus R5,000 cash, NUMSA accepted 6.5 percent.

The company produces 60 percent of the steel in South Africa, and internationally made a gross profit of \$21 billion for the financial year to March 2022. The company was criticised for its poor health and safety record and, only last year, three workers died in an explosion at a South African plant.

In October 2021, NUMSA called off a nationwide strike by 155,000 steel and metalworkers just as it entered its third week and was beginning to have a serious impact on the country's auto industry and economy.

Nationwide strike planned in Tunisia against rising cost of living

The Tunisian General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) announced a nationwide strike by public sector workers to begin on June 16 to protest spiraling prices and the privatisation of state-owned companies.

The UGTT said 'all the staff' of the 159 institutions and public enterprises will stop work on June 16, to pressure the government for 'immediate negotiations'. The union is trying to diffuse anger on the streets, while collaborating with the government.

An article by Rédaction Africanews said the government was 'counting on the support' of the UGTT in carrying out 'reforms' as demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) before giving any new loans.

The union asked the government for 'guarantees' it can advise on what to privatise and what to leave out, saying cereals, electricity, fuel and phosphates must be excluded.

The government IMF 'reform' plan includes a freeze on the civil service wage bill, reductions of state subsidies and restructuring of the state sector. The IMF responded that the UGTT's agreement needs to be secured in advance to ensure the changes are not blocked.

The rating agency Fitch also pointed out that it would be 'very difficult' for the government to ram through the changes without getting the backing of the UGTT.

Ugandan health workers' strike continues despite government

threats and union sabotage

Ugandan health workers are continuing their strike begun May 26 due to the government's failure to implement a pay increase agreed in 2017.

Near the end of May, the government issued a three-day ultimatum to strikers to return to work or get sacked. Ignoring the failure to pay an agreed pay increase, the government accused the strikers of going against the Public Service Negotiating, Consultative and Disputes Settlement Machinery Act 2008 by not giving 90 days strike notice.

The Allied Health Professionals Alliance (an umbrella of health professional unions) on May 28/29 said, 'We were also shocked to see the minister of Public Services asking health workers to report back to work within three days without formal engagement of the leadership of Allied Alliance.'

Workers also ignored attempts by the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Union to call off the strike. The government claimed to be planning to increase pay in the financial year 2022/23.

Protesting Zimbabwean civil servants face armed anti-riot police

On May 26, Zimbabwean civil servants and teachers, angered by the government's refusal to pay them in US dollars, planned a peaceful march and petition of the labour and public service ministries. However, they faced armed squads of anti-riot police in both Bulawayo and Masvingo.

The protests were planned by Zimbabwe Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (ZCPSTU) members.

The day before the protest, Bulawayo was crawling with anti-riot police, placed at 'strategic' locations in the city, ready to prevent, harass or fire upon the march the following day. In Masvingo paramilitary units were deployed.

Nigerian Uber and Bolt private hire drivers in Abuja hold three-day strike to demand pay increase

Drivers of Uber and Bolt e-cab services in Abuja, Nigeria began a three-day warning strike on May 30 to protest exploitation by the companies.

The strike slowed down commercial activities in the federal capital.

The National Coalition of Ridesharing Professionals (NACORP) members demand an immediate increase in fares in line with increasing prices. The NACORP Deputy Coordinator, Administration called on the government to intervene in the strike.



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