

Greece: public sector strike over work contracts; Sweden: three-day wildcat train drivers' strike on Stockholm commuter network; Nigeria: aviation workers and ExxonMobil oil workers walk out over pay

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.

Public sector workers strike in Greece to demand permanent contracts for part-time workers

On April 10, public sector workers in Greece walked out for 24 hours in all the municipalities. The POE-OTA members are demanding permanent contracts for part-time workers, among other issues.

A protest march in Athens was met by police barriers and teargas, according to *efsyn*.

Bus and trolley bus workers walk out in Athens, Greece

Bus and trolley bus workers walked out in Athens, Greece on April 11. Workers at the Athens Transport Organisation and the trolley bus company also held stoppages the previous week, to demand "safe, quality transport".

Amazon workers at Sevilla warehouse in Spain stoppage over pay and safety conditions

Workers at Amazon's fulfilment centre in Sevilla, Spain walked out on April 16 over pay and health and safety.

The 1,500 General Union of Workers members are protesting excessive workload and long hours, which result in injuries, and changes to overtime and holiday pay that mean workers could be 2,000 euros a year worse off.

Health workers at Basque Centre for Transfusion and Human Tissues

and doctors in Galicia, Spain strike

Workers at the Basque Centre for Transfusion and Human Tissues announced further stoppages in their ongoing dispute for pay parity with other health workers.

The SATSE, ELA, LAB, CCOO, UGT and UTESE union members planned a walkout from April 18 for two weeks. The unions complain the Department of Health will not negotiate with them.

Doctors in Galicia began strike action on April 11, leading to the cancellation of over a thousand surgeries and 20,000 consultations after four days, according to *quincemil*.

The CESM union members demand improvements in patient care and more labour rights. The CESM were to meet the Ministry of Health April 19 to resolve the dispute if "minimal agreement is reached."

Justice officials in Spain begin partial strikes over pay

On April 17, 45,000 justice officials in Spain began daily strikes between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to demand the same pay rise as was awarded lawyers of the Administration of Justice.

The members of judicial associations APM, AJFV, FJI and JJpD planned to walk out all day on April 19. Tens of thousands of trials are affected.

Wildcat strike by train drivers in support of guards on Stockholm commuter network

More than 150 drivers on the pendeltåg commuter rail network around Stockholm, Sweden, began a three-day wildcat strike on Monday. The action, against the removal of train attendants (guards) from trains, brought large parts of the rail network to a halt, with services running at 20-30 percent of normal.

Guards are responsible for onboard service and safety, including

operating train doors and making announcements in the event of disruption. In 2021, Stockholm's traffic committee called for their replacement with cameras. Drivers opposed this attack on safety, which would leave them working alone on a train.

At a rally outside Stockholm's Central Station, driver Camilla Wrände told *Dagens Nyheter* "We're not demanding higher wages or more time off, we focus on safety."

After a pause, operating company MTR this year renewed the phase-out of guards under a new Social Democrat authority. There are around 350 guards on the pendeltåg, and since last month half of all Stockholm commuter services operated without one.

MTR has taken to Sweden's Labour Court to force strikers back to work, and emailed drivers warning of dismissal if the strike continues.

MTR is suing strikers through the Labour Court, issuing a demand that 73 named drivers pay around SEK6,000 each in compensation. There has been widespread support for the strike, with a Swish strike fund having already raised some SEK1.5m.

The Seko union has rejected and disowned the strike. Seko's Jonas Pettersson said the union's message was not to participate in illegal actions. The union insisted that wildcat strikes have no place in the Swedish labour market. Pettersson opposed the strike for interrupting Seko's negotiations for a new collective agreement on the railways.

Local official Susann Högye-Bäckman claimed the union was fighting "for the same thing, but we do it in different ways... Seko can call a strike of its own," but strikers are unconvinced. Driver Mattias Söder told press, "Our view is that the union does not take the issue of train attendants seriously, we do not trust them."

Truck drivers' strike over unpaid wages continues in Germany despite first payment

A strike of mostly Georgian and Uzbek truck drivers is continuing in Germany. More than 60 drivers employed by haulier Łukasz Mazur have been protesting at the Gräfenhausen-West services, near Darmstadt, for nearly four weeks, demanding wages unpaid for two months.

Mazur claimed he paid the drivers everything they were owed, although he failed to produce any evidence of this. He falsely called the drivers self-employed, a common tactic for avoiding wages in haulage and delivery.

Mazur has now admitted publicly that he owes the workers the money withheld on this basis. Drivers report seeing the first payments of their outstanding money, but these are still only partial. One driver told *taz* he received 2,300 of his outstanding wage of 4,300 euros.

The strike is continuing until the wages are paid in full. Anna Weirich, of the Fair Mobility Network of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), said workers had had enough experience of Mazur's false promises not to fall for his announcements.

On Good Friday, Mazur attempted to seize the lorries using 18 thugs from a private militia in an armoured vehicle. The Rutkowski Patrol thugs attacked the strikers, hospitalising one striker. Mazur has now also filed a legal complaint alleging the embezzlement of 39 trucks.

Warning strikes called at several IKEA stores in Germany

The service union Verdi has called a two-day warning strike on Friday and Saturday at IKEA furniture stores in Magdeburg and Günthersdorf, Germany. Workers at both stores have been on strike in recent weeks.

Around 40 strikers protested outside the Günthersdorf store during the last strike, and protesters are being called to Magdeburg for the latest strike.

Workers at the Altona, Moorfleet and Schnelsen stores have also been called to join them.

The workers are facing heavier workloads, with customer numbers rising and no increase in staff numbers. The union is seeking a "future collective agreement" with the company, although there have been no negotiations yet. IKEA made it clear that it would rather negotiate a general agreement with a works council.

Lieferando delivery drivers strike for the first time in Germany

Last Friday, around 100 drivers for the restaurant delivery service Lieferando answered a strike call issued Thursday by the NGG union. Their protest for better conditions outside the company's Frankfurt-am-Main branch was the first strike at the company.

They are calling for improved wages and conditions for around 6,500 workers, including a starting wage of 15 euros an hour, a 13-month salary plan and better rates for holiday shifts.

The company had initially showed no willingness to negotiate, claiming the majority of drivers are satisfied and earn around 14 euros an hour, more than workers in the food industry.

The NGG's Mark Baumeister said Lieferando and its parent company Takeaway Express are international players, "not some charmingly chaotic backyard start-up." He said that action would spread if Lieferando did not negotiate, and strikes are being planned for other cities.

Emergency doctors in Cyprus hospital strike over understaffing

Doctors in the emergency department at Paphos General Hospital in Cyprus walked out for three hours on Thursday over understaffing.

The Pasyki union said the department needs three more doctors and the strike could go nationwide, according to the *Cyprus Mail*.

HIP Petrohemija workers in Serbia hold warning strike for permanent wages

On 13 April, workers staged a one-hour warning strike outside the headquarters of petrochemical company Petrohemija in Pančevo, Serbia. They are calling for an increase in their permanent salaries, rather than the irregular and unreliable allowance system of payments at present.

Basic salaries at the company are around 37,000 dinars. Wages were halved during the 2009 financial crisis. Since then, they have only been increased once, an 8.6 percent rise last year.

Salaries are supplemented with allowances, meaning income is around 70-100,000 dinars. Zoran Obradović of the Nezavisnost union said, "The problem is that these allowances are not permanent... not all employees have night and overtime work."

Savings are being made across the board, said Obradović, but "they started with us." A request was made for a permanent rise in December, but it was ignored. "It's not a pay rise," said Branko Rašeta of the Pravda union, "It's just an adjustment to the inflation that has hit everyone."

It has also been announced that an earlier “COVID allowance” will be used as a means of providing bonus payments. The workers demand that this be incorporated into their permanent salary.

Among their other complaints are that staff are not replaced quickly enough when workers retire. They have also called for 120 workers on agency contracts to be made permanent. This had not happened “because their work is cheaper this way,” said Rašeta.

Unless the changes are implemented, the unions have threatened to “continue the fight.”

Petrohemija is currently managed by the state, which owns 80 percent of the company. The balance is held by Oil Industry of Serbia (NIS), which became co-owner in 2017 by converting debts into equity. According to a strategic partnership agreement with the Ministry of Economy, NIS will move to 90 percent ownership of the company, but the deadline for this has been postponed.

UK civil servants continue partial strikes over pay, pensions and jobs

Monday was the final day of a five-week strike by UK civil servants working for Ofgem, the government body monitoring domestic gas and electricity suppliers.

The action was part of an ongoing series of partial strikes by Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members. Around 1,000 PCS members working in the UK passports service began a five-week strike on April 3. The strikes are part of a programme of stoppages by around 130,000 civil servants, who voted for action last November in a dispute over pay, conditions, job cuts and the dilution of redundancy terms.

Other PCS members working for the British Library have also taken strike action. On Monday, PCS members including driving test examiners working for the Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency began a series of regional strikes.

On Tuesday, the PCS announced its members working for the Department of Works and Pensions based at 13 job centres in Liverpool and Glasgow will begin a five-day walkout on May 2.

Rather than sanction all-out action, the PCS union bureaucracy limited action to sporadic strikes by a few thousand members. Only two one-day stoppages by the entire civil service PCS membership were held, with one more due April 28.

Further strikes by Amazon workers at Coventry, UK site

Around 600 workers at Amazon’s fulfilment centre in Coventry, England began a three-day strike Sunday, and planned a further three-day strike beginning April 20.

The GMB members demand the £11 an hour wage rate be raised to £15 an hour. The walkout follows a week-long stoppage last month. Workers at the site held the first official UK Amazon strike in January. The GMB is holding recruitment drives at five other Amazon UK sites.

Unofficial walkouts took place at several Amazon sites in August last year, after the company announced a 50p an hour pay rise.

Staff at London sixth form college begin series of strikes over cuts

Around 25 teaching staff at London’s biggest sixth form college (teaching 16 to 18-year-olds), NewVic in Newham, began a series of 10 three-day strikes Tuesday with a mass meeting.

This is the third dispute involving National Education Union (NEU) members in the last 12 months. They plan to strike Tuesday-Thursday each week throughout the summer term. They are opposed to college management plans to cut administration and security posts. In January, they passed a vote of no confidence in the college headmaster. They previously took strike action to prevent academisation plans.

Construction workers at Scottish food plant strike over bonus payments

Around 50 contract construction maintenance workers at DSM’s plant in the town of Dalry in Ayrshire, Scotland began a three-week strike Tuesday.

The Unite and GMB members are employed by contracting firms Altrad Babcock and Kaefer. The workers are striking after the two contractors failed to negotiate over a £2.37 an hour bonus the workers are entitled to under a National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry agreement.

DSM produces vitamins for human and animal nutrition and recently set up a multi-million-pound facility at its site with support from the SNP’s Scottish Enterprise finance. The facility is to produce a food additive for animal foods to help reduce the production of biological methane.

Northern Ireland Department of Infrastructure workers begin week-long strike over pay

Workers employed by the Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland began a week-long strike Thursday.

The Unite and GMB members voted by 91 percent and 80 percent majorities respectively for the action after rejecting a two percent pay offer. The workers are responsible for road maintenance and responding to spillages, floods and other incidents. They also run the Portaferry to Strangford ferry service across Strangford Loch, which will not operate throughout the week-long stoppage.

Refuse collection workers in Workington, UK set to walk out over low pay

Around 60 workers employed by Allerdale Waste Services in Workington, England will hold a 72-hour strike beginning April 27.

The Unite union members are responsible for waste collection in the town of Workington in northwest England. Allerdale Waste Services is a private company wholly owned by the recently formed Cumberland Council. The workers want a pay rise, with loaders currently on only £10.90 an hour and drivers, who must possess an HGV licence, on £11.89 an hour.

These rates are among the lowest in the country, even after a recent 10 percent pay increase.

Workers at paper plant in Greater Manchester, UK strike over pay

Forty workers at the Saica Paper UK factory in Trafford, Greater Manchester, are to begin a series of strikes from Friday. The factory produces corrugated cardboard using recycled paper.

The Unite union members voted by a 97 percent majority to walk out. They turned down a below-inflation 9.5 percent pay rise of which a third was unconsolidated. The stoppage will take the form of six 12- and 24-hour strikes. After Friday, further stoppages will take place on April 25 and 29, and May 1, 5 and 8.

School support staff at Suffolk primary school to walk out over job cuts

Teaching assistants and lunchtime supervising staff at the Pot Kiln primary school in Suffolk are to walk out this Thursday, and again on April 24.

The Unison union members are protesting the school management's plans to cut 10 jobs to deal with a £75,000 budget deficit.

UK pharmaceutical workers at GSK to strike over pay offer

Around 750 workers employed by pharmaceutical giant GSK at six of its UK plants are to strike after rejecting a six percent pay increase plus a one-off £1,300 lump sum.

The Unite union members at Barnard Castle, Irvine, Montrose, Ulverston, Ware and Worthing will hold partial strikes throughout the month of May. The stoppages will take place at different dates for the six sites.

GSK returned profits of £8 billion last year, a 26 percent increase on the previous year.

Refuse workers in Wealden, England to strike over harassment

Workers employed by waste management company, Biffa, providing domestic waste management services to Wealden council in Sussex have voted by a 90 percent majority to strike.

The GMB members accuse Biffa management of bullying and harassment since their seven-week strike over pay last year. According to the GMB, the workers won an up to 27 percent pay rise. Police arrested three GMB officials at a picket line in the dispute.

GMB stated a two-week strike could begin in mid-May, but officials were due to meet with members on Wednesday evening to report back on meetings with management over the harassment issues. Depending on the outcome, the GMB may then issue a strike notice.

Teachers at London school vote to strike over workloads

Teachers at Wanstead High School in the UK capital are to strike over

workload and morale.

The NEU members voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out. The teachers say the problems with workload and low morale followed the appointment of a new headmaster in September of last year.

UK offshore oil platform workers ballot for strikes over pay and work rosters

Around 70 UK workers employed by TotalEnergies at the offshore oil platforms Elgin Franklin and North Alwyn and on the onshore Shetland Gas Plant are balloting for strike action.

The Unite union members are seeking a higher pay offer for 2023 and for work rosters to be changed to lessen the number of days worked before going onshore. The ballots close May 5. TotalEnergies posted a net profit for 2022 of over \$20 billion.

Meanwhile, around 1,350 UK offshore oil platform workers are due to begin a 48-hour strike on Monday.

The Unite union members work for oil contracting firms Bilfinger UK Limited, Petrofac Facilities Management, Stork Technical Services, Sparrows Offshore Services and Worley Services UK Limited. These companies provide offshore services to big oil producing companies such as BP, Shell and Total.

The electricians, engineers, pipefitters, scaffolders and other workers demand higher pay and better working conditions, as well as having issues related to the three-on/three-off shift pattern. They voted by big majorities—100 percent at Petrofac and Worley—for the action, which Unite says will bring dozens of platforms to a standstill. The GMB and RMT unions have balloted their members working on the offshore platforms.

Waste management workers in Canterbury, UK to ballot for strikes over pay

Waste management workers employed by Canenco in the Kent city of Canterbury are balloting for possible strike action.

The GMB members want a 30 percent pay rise to make up for historically low pay. Canenco is a subsidiary company owned by Canterbury council providing waste collection, recycling services and street cleaning services. The ballot runs from Friday for two weeks. According to the GMB, should the workers vote to strike, action will begin in May and continue in June and July.

Latvian teachers to strike over pay and workload

On April 24, more than 26,000 Latvian teachers are due to begin a three-day strike over wages with a rally, expected to attract 7,500. Staff at universities and scientific institutions will also take part, as the demands apply equally to them.

The strike was called to demand fulfilment of an agreement on wages reached in September but not implemented.

The Latvian Association of Education and Science Workers union (LIZDA) members are demanding implementation of an agreement that was reached in September on wage increases and workload balance.

LIZDA's Inga Vanaga said the demand is for additional funding, not a redistribution of the existing budget.

It is estimated that 2.8 million euros would be needed to raise teachers' salaries in higher education this year, and 9 million in 2024.

Vanaga appealed to the government to intervene, saying the union could call off the strike right up to the last minute. The rally will go ahead in any case, and she called on politicians to attend and discuss with the teachers.

On Tuesday, the government approved a pay increase, although at present the strike is still due.

The increase sets the lowest hourly rate for all teachers except kindergarten teachers at 8.50 euros from 1 September 2023. The lowest rate will rise to 9.54 euros on 1 January 2024, and 10.35 the following year. For pre-school teachers the rate is 7.75 euros from September, 9.04 in 2024, and 10.35 in 2025.

Nigerian aviation workers strike over pay and conditions

Nigerian aviation workers held a strike and protest over low wages and poor working conditions. On April 17, workers in Lagos blocked roads to the Murtala Mohammed International Airport to begin a two-day strike.

Protests also affected other major airports across Nigeria. Similar disruption was only prevented the following day by the government's use of police and security agencies.

Union leaders threatened to shut down the aviation sector if the demands were not met. The CEO of Centurion Security and Safety Consults, Captain John Ojikutu, appealed to them saying 80 percent of commercial aviation earnings are from foreign airlines whose activities would be affected by the strike.

Aviation agencies in Lagos were shut the following day, as office staff embarked on a warning strike that shut the offices of the Ministry of Aviation, the Nigeria Airspace Management Agency, the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria and the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority.

Airport workers held a further stoppage on April 19. The unions involved include the National Union of Air Transport Employees, Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, Nigerian Association of Nigeria Aviation Professionals, National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE), and the Engineers Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employers.

Nigerian ExxonMobil workers shut down oil export terminals in Niger Delta over pay

Nigerian ExxonMobil workers held strikes that halted crude oil exports from four oil terminals in the Niger Delta—Erha, Qua Iboe, Usan and Yoho. Oil workers are striking for higher wages.

ExxonMobil exports about 300,000 barrels per day of crude oil and condensates from its Qua Iboe terminal in southern Akwa Ibom state, as well as exporting natural gas.

Workers in Plateau State, Nigeria protest 45 months' unpaid salaries

Temporary workers brought activities to a halt at the Plateau State

College of Health Technology on April 13, in Pankshin, Nigeria, over 45 months of unpaid salaries.

The workers blocked the main gate with a barricade, displaying placards about the suffering due to lack of pay.

South African steel workers' national strike over cuts in pay and hours suspended

The national strike by steelworkers at Macsteel over changes to working hours has been suspended by the union until the Labour Court considers the company's claim on April 28.

Macsteel workers are currently guaranteed a 40-hour week with weekend and public holiday work paid at higher rates. The company has reduced the working week and is trying to impose weekend work without overtime rates.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa said the law does not allow a change in shift hours without consultation.

Non-profit organisation workers in South Africa strike over budget cuts

South African non-profit organisation (NPO) workers in Ekurheleni, Gauteng, began strike action last Wednesday, picketing departmental offices over budget cuts of more than 60 percent.

Alinah Ngcobo, a cook, told *City Press* that her monthly wage was cut from R2000 to R800. The NPOs work with HIV-positive people, the elderly, vulnerable children and people with disabilities.



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