

Greece: national strikes mark May Day; Iran: continuing protests and strikes against poverty pay and cost of living crisis; Nigeria: communication workers strike against Huawei over unpaid wages

## 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.*

### National strikes across Greece mark International Workers Day

On May 1, workers across Greece in most sectors walked out for 24 hours to commemorate International Workers Day. At rallies in major cities including Athens and Thessaloniki workers raised many demands over pay and conditions.

Buses and trolleys stopped in Athens from 9am to 9pm. The Stasy union members called for the minimum wage to be implemented. Athens Metro workers joined the action for 24 hours. The Selma union members demanded universal, public health care, as well as the right to organise.

GSEE union members on the Panhellenic Federation of Railways (POS) called for safety at work and the eight-hour day among other demands. All ferries and ships were docked as PNO union members struck, demanding the end to temporary employment.

### Museum workers strike in Greece against privatisation

Employees of the Greek Culture and Sports Ministry walked out on April 25 to protest the creeping privatisation of the following museums: the National Archaeological Museum, the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki and the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion.

The museums will continue to receive state funding but will have to raise funds independently.

Union of Employees of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Attica, Mainland and Islands and the Panhellenic Federation of Culture and Sports Ministry Employees members held a protest outside the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

### Healthcare workers' strikes and protests in Spain in defence of public

#### health

Doctors' daily protests begun over a month ago continue outside the Regional Hospital in Melilla, Spain with a rally planned for May 7.

The Melilla Medical Union members cannot deliver adequate healthcare due to staff shortages. According to *Europa Press*, a government spokesman has said that a cardiologist, a surgeon, a radiologist, a rheumatologist and a primary care doctor will join Melilla, and an oncologist will join in July, and the dispute should end.

On April 27, SATSE, SME, ESK, LAB, UGT, CCOO and SAE union members walked out for labour rights and more funding in primary care in the rural area of Álava.

In Andalusia, health workers planned to strike and protest on May 4 to demand more resources for healthcare, with a further protest in Grenada on May 10. The CSIF, CCOO, UGT, SMA and SATSE unions entered further negotiations on May 2 with the Andalusian Health Service (SAS). The SAS promised a new document outlining improved healthcare, but the unions said they suspected SAS are spinning out negotiations until the regional elections on May 28.

Across the Canary Islands, 6,500 health workers in primary and hospital care plan to strike on May 8. The Professional Union of Doctors criticised the Ministry of Health for setting "ambiguous and imprecise" minimum service levels during the stoppage against temporary contracts.

Primary care emergency services workers in Cantabria plan stoppages on May 13, 14, 20, 21, and 24-27. The CSIF union members demand an end to long working hours and guaranteed holiday time. On May 9, a demonstration and rally will take place outside the Cantabrian Health Service.

Doctors and nurses plan walkouts May 10-12 in Asturias over allowances and career issues.

While health workers want to fight, there is no attempt by the different unions to unify their struggles, which instead negotiate deals to sell to their members on a regional basis while the health service collapses.

### Strikes continue at Delhaize supermarket chain in Belgium as company sends in police and bailiffs

Strikes begun in March against plans by Belgian supermarket chain

Delhaize to convert its 128 directly operated stores into franchises are continuing, despite an escalation of legal action by the company against strike action. Delhaize last week obtained a court order allowing it to break strikes across the whole country, rather than in restricted regions.

The company has sent in bailiffs and police to reopen stores, with six strikers arrested last weekend. Delhaize has also been accused of using scab labour to keep stores open during busy periods.

Around 9,000 workers are affected by the proposed changes, which would see a massive assault on wages and conditions. The existing franchises pay less than the self-managed stores, and workers fear losses of 25-30 percent of salary travel expenses and other benefits, as well as having to work Sundays and bank holidays. The company claimed workers would be able to keep their current pay and working conditions, but only for six months.

The dispute has been bitter from the outset. The BBTK union filed a legal complaint against Delhaize for “not respecting” the “Renault law” legislation on procedures to be followed if a decision could lead to collective redundancy. BBTK said Delhaize’s proposals were “presented as a *fait accompli*.”

The company took to the courts to get strikes banned at many stores, sending in bailiffs and police to force reopening. Despite this, strikers still threatened to close a dozen stores during the busy extended May holiday weekend. By 10am, seven of the stores remained closed.

Strikers blocked access to the Ghent Watersportbaan store early Saturday morning. Bailiffs called the police, who detained six strikers for refusing to show their identity cards. The six were later released and rejoined the picket.

Ahead of the weekend, workers again took sympathetic action at the company’s Zellik distribution centre. They imposed a partial blockade, allowing only four vehicles per hour to exit the centre with goods for the stores, rather than the usual 20. The manager of one affected store told press this meant, “We are in deep shit because customers are going to find empty shelves.”

When Delhaize forced stores to reopen with court orders, activists from the “dHELLaize” collective poured motor oil in front of five Brussels shops last week to make them inaccessible. “If strikes are banned, then the entrances become unusable,” they said.

The four unions involved accuse Delhaize of sabotaging the works’ councils, “treating the unions like terrorists” and deploying security guards in the negotiations. They fear a widespread “Delhaize-like” scenario, with companies putting “commercial law before the right to collective action.”

Under the call “Today Delhaize, tomorrow who’s next?”, the unions have called a demonstration in Brussels on 22 May. While they are calling for the Renault law to be observed, the ABVV union has also called for a “Delhaize law” obliging companies intending to franchise stores to hold social consultations.

### **Dutch supermarket workers continue strike over pay**

The strike of workers at the distribution centres for Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn over pay is continuing. Having begun in Zwolle and Pijnacker it spread to centres in Zaandam, Geldermalsen and Tilburg. Around a hundred temporary workers have now also joined the strike, begun by permanent workers, despite attempted intimidation by managers.

The FNV union members are demanding a wage increase of 10 percent and no deterioration in employment terms. The FNV has also called for new workers to be paid double on Sundays, while the company wants to halve its Sunday bonus.

The unions stated there is no basis for negotiation yet. “Those are the preconditions,” said the FNV’s Levin Zühlke-van Hulzen, but “Albert Heijn does not meet them. So, a conversation is of little use.”

Zühlke-van Hulzen said the union had been “very lenient,” having reduced its demand from 14 percent. Last year, when AH workers received only a 2.75 percent rise, inflation stood at 10.6 percent.

The unions report that permanent workers have been intimidated, and temporary workers threatened with poorer work schedules. It is alleged that some temporary workers were told to promise not to join a union when signing their contract, although the company denies this.

### **Court staff in Portugal stoppage over work conditions and allowances**

Portuguese court workers may extend their 10-day strike, due to end May 5, until July 15, because the Ministry of Justice is ignoring their demands.

The demands of the Union of Judicial Employees members include filling vacancies, career advancement and pension issues.

### **Nurses cheated of agreed pay increments in North Region, Portugal walkout**

On April 28, nurses who work for the North Region Administration in Portugal went on strike over pay.

Portuguese Nurses Union spokesman Rui Marroni explained the minimum wage for these nurses “is 1,268 euros” because they were not given salary points as agreed in 2018, which would “mean an additional 200 or 400 euros in salary” per month, *FolhaNational* reports.

A national strike is planned for May 12, Nurses’ Day.

### **Union workers in wage strike against the FNV union in the Netherlands**

Workers employed by the FNV union in the Netherlands have begun strike action against the union’s proposals for a three-year collective agreement over wages. Around 1,700 workers are affected.

The FNV claims to be calling for wage rises to counteract the effects of high inflation. Its proposal for its own workers is for pay rises between three and seven percent from May 1, with subsequent adjustments “linked to inflation” but capped at five percent.

Judith Westhoek, the negotiator, insisted the union should “lead by example... correcting inflation and introducing automatic price compensation.” She called for the union to “put its money where its mouth is,” although they have proved willing to reduce their demands elsewhere.

The FNV employers’ delegation defended its proposal on the grounds that “as employers, we have a responsibility to manage members’ funds carefully and maintain a balanced budget.”

### **Public sector workers in Oulu, Finland strike over outsourcing plan**

Public sector workers in the city of Oulu, Finland began a four-day strike on May 2. The JHL union members are opposing plans to outsource Infra, the city's business infrastructure facility, which oversees the urban environment and municipal technology, among other things.

The city administration was due to begin discussing the outsourcing proposal on Tuesday.

Infra has more than 200 employees, and JHL says that around 600 subcontractors are also threatened by the plan. There are no guarantees of job preservation in the transfer to the private sector. The union said that outsourcing inevitably leads to a deterioration of the quality and reliability of services.

On Wednesday, the city administration announced that it considered the strike illegal, as it was directed at a collective agreement under conditions of industrial peace. The city's human resources director said the strike was directed at their right to manage, and they are not entering negotiations on the dispute.

### **Montenegro broadcast workers hold first ever strike over wages**

Workers at Radio Television of Montenegro (RTCG) held a one-hour warning strike last week, after months of wage negotiations stalled. This is the first strike in the history of the public service.

The workers want a wage increase in line with government recommendations for rises to offset inflation. At the Trade Union Assembly last month, RTCG General Director Boris Raonic publicly promised that management had set aside one million euros for this purpose, and it was broadcast on RTCG that a final agreement and salary rise had been accepted.

Jadranka Drobnjak, president of the union of RTCG workers, however, said that as soon as the cameras were switched off the negotiations went back to their starting point. She said, "on behalf of the workers who create a programme for salaries that range from 450 euros to below the average Montenegrin salary, we ask a simple question: Why is our proposal not acceptable to the management that... receives four-digit salaries every month." She pointed out that Raonic's salary was almost seven times the average Montenegrin salary.

When the strike was announced, management stated that they were offering 28 percent, which, Drobnjak said, "We responsibly claim is not true." She accused management of unbalanced and misleading reporting of the dispute and pointed to media freedom as a pillar of a democratic society.

### **Belgian teachers protest for fifth time in a year against conditions**

Some 5,000 teachers demonstrated in the Belgian capital, Brussels on April 27 against conditions in the education system.

The protestors denounced administrative overload and unsustainable student-teacher ratios, with overcrowded classes, as well as teacher evaluations. Nathalie Brousniche, a third-grade teacher from Charleroi, told press, "We are so busy with administration, management and everything else that is not pedagogical, that it is no longer possible to do a proper job."

The unions that called the protest have also criticised a draft coalition on education in French-speaking Wallonia, which they say will further worsen teachers' rights without solving the prevailing problems.

### **Further strike by teachers in England over pay**

Tens of thousands of teachers in England walked out on Tuesday.

The National Education Union (NEU) members also walked out on Thursday last week. It is the last industrial action covered by their current strike ballot mandate. They are seeking a 12 percent pay rise with a lower workload and measures to increase the recruitment and retention of teachers.

In the ballot, 98 percent of teachers voted for stoppages in response to an offer of a £1,000 unconsolidated wage rise this year and an average of 4.5 percent for next year, of which four percent would be funded from already depleted existing school budgets. Other school unions similarly rejected the offers with big votes against.

The NEU gave a "special dispensation" for teachers of pupils in years 11 and 13 who are preparing for external exams. Around 22,000 schools were affected by the action, which was the fifth tranche of action by teachers.

Adriana Gonzalez, a sixth form (16-18 years) maths teacher in Cambridge, spoke to WSWS reporters on the picket line. "I am striking because education isn't valued at the moment," she said. "The inherent value of education has declined and declined and if we don't value teachers, we don't value education.

"There are a number of imminent things that we need. We need more time to do our job properly, smaller classes; there are a lot of other issues but fundamentally it is the value of education. We need to go back to basics.

"It is really sad that the negotiations can't get back to that simple focus. The offer was very poor and it's not enough, it's not recognising that teachers are really struggling and there are many teachers leaving the profession. You know my kids have had six teachers in a year and the recruitment is really terrible, so the offer did nothing to recognise this. There is money but the [government] just give out excuses."

Three other unions, the NASUWT, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Leaders, although posting big majorities in favour of strikes to oppose the Conservative government pay offer, failed to pass the necessary legal restriction of 50 percent participation .

The four unions are due to ballot for possible action in the autumn term and have mooted coordinated stoppages should the votes go in favour. If such action does go ahead, it would mean between 300,000 and 400,000 teachers taking part. The leadership of the unions, however, have indicated they are prepared to drop all action and recommend acceptance of below-inflation deals if only the government will enter negotiations with them.

### **UK pharmaceutical workers at GSK strike over pay offer**

Around 160 workers employed by pharmaceutical giant GSK at six of its UK plants are taking part in a rolling programme of strikes throughout May, after rejecting a six percent pay increase plus a one-off £1,300 lump sum.

The Unite union members in Montrose walked out on Tuesday until Thursday. Workers at the other GSK sites of Barnard Castle, Irvine, Ulverston, Ware and Worthing will then hold partial strikes throughout 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.

## **Workers at UK engineering firm hold four-day strike over pay**

Around 200 workers employed by Swedish-based Trelleborg AB at its sites in Tewkesbury and Bridgwater, England began a four-day strike Tuesday.

The Unite union members rejected a below-inflation pay offer of 5.2 percent. The Trelleborg factories produce polymer seals used in aerospace, auto, energy, food and medical production. The company's latest published profits figure was £28.8 million.

## **Workers manufacturing agricultural products in Northern Ireland set to walk out over pay**

Workers employed by MM Bangor in Northern Ireland are set to walk out Thursday over pay.

The Unite union members are seeking a pay rise in line with inflation. They currently earn just above the legal national minimum wage figure. MM Bangor manufactures sacks and bags for agricultural use. They voted by 91 percent to walk out, on a 100 percent turnout. The company's new owner is Mayr Melnhof Karton AG, one of the world's biggest agricultural suppliers, which made an operating profit of around 467 million euros last year.

## **Security staff at Heathrow Airport, London set to walk out over pay**

Around 1,400 security staff working for Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) at terminal 5 in the UK capital planned to walk out Thursday over pay.

The Unite union members will be on strike until May 10 and will strike again May 25-27. These dates cover bank holidays including the King's coronation. Terminal 5 deals exclusively with British Airways flights including cargo.

They are seeking a substantial pay rise. Security staff with three years' experience are on only £30,000 a year. Unite says they have seen a 24 percent pay cut in real terms since 2017. HAL has paid out over £2 billion in dividends between 2017 and 2019 and its CEO's pay nearly doubled to £1.5 million a year.

The workers held 10 days of strikes over the Easter period over the same issue.

## **Workers at UK white goods manufacturer to strike over 1p pay increase**

Around 70 workers employed by white goods manufacturer Whirlpool at its Peterborough facility, England plan to strike on Friday over a 1p pay offer. This will be followed by a 17-day strike May 9-26, and then from May 30 to June 2.

The Unite union members are on the national minimum wage of £10.42 an hour. When Whirlpool offered a 1p an hour rise, workers voted by a 98 percent majority to walk out. The US based company is expected to announce annual revenue of \$20 billion in its upcoming financial announcement.

## **UK Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health administrative staff to strike over pay**

Administrative staff at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health based in London are to walk out May 15-17, and again May 23-25, coinciding with the dates of the college's annual conference.

The Unite union members voted by a 96 percent majority in favour of the stoppages. The workers voted to strike after rejecting a four percent pay offer. The Royal College of Paediatrics acts as the membership body for paediatricians in the UK and around the world, playing a major role in postgraduate medical education, professional standards, research and policy.

## **Soft drink manufacturing workers in Wakefield, England to ballot over pay**

UK workers at the Coca Cola soft drinks plant in Wakefield are to ballot over a six percent pay offer, when RPI inflation is running at 13.5 percent.

The Unite union members work at Europe's biggest soft drinks bottling and canning factory. It packs Coca Cola, Sprite and Fanta among other brands. The facility can produce 360,000 cans and 132,000 bottles an hour. It is highly profitable, with its latest reported profit figures being £1.85 billion.

## **Continuing protests and strikes in Iran against poverty pay and cost of living crisis**

The strike by thousands of Iranian petrochemical workers at over 110 facilities begun April 21 is continuing. They are demanding a 79 percent pay increase and a working rota of 20 days on/10 days off.

The Iranian government recently increased the minimum wage by 27 percent, but the official inflation rate is 53 percent, with some economists claiming the actual rate is over 100 percent.

The CEO of the special petrochemical zone in Bushehr province has threatened to dismiss striking workers and replace them, according to *Iranwire*.

*Alarabiya* reports that the Iranian authorities arrested managers at the South Pars project for supporting striking petrochemical workers. The offshore South Pars field is the world's largest natural gas reserve, employing around 40,000 workers.

Retired workers in Ahvaz, Dezful, Kerman, Kermanshah, Rasht, Sanandaj, Sari and Shush held protests outside Labour and Social Security offices on Monday to protest increasing poverty.

## **General strike in Palestinian territories following hunger strike death**

A general strike was observed on Tuesday in the Palestinian territories, Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

It was in response to the death of Palestinian Khader Adnan, who had been on hunger strike in prison for 86 days since his arrest and detention without trial in February this year.

Adnan from Jenin was a senior figure in Islamic Jihad. The Israeli authorities say his death was because he refused medical care, but a lawyer representing him accused the authorities of medical negligence and the Palestinian Prime Minister accused the Israeli government of “deliberate assassination.”

### **Strike by Israeli academics over erosion of pay**

Academics in Israel at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, University of Haifa, the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, Bar Ilan University and the Weizmann Institute of Science were on strike on Monday.

This was to be followed by strikes at two or three universities each day for the rest of the week. The stoppages are to protest the failure of the universities and Ministry of Finance to sign a new collective agreement since the old contract expired in 2019. The academics say their pay has been eroded by around nine percent since then through inflation and are asking for their pay to be restored.

### **Israeli Labour Court rules against teacher strike**

On Monday, the Israeli Labour Court ruled against a scheduled strike of Israeli high school teachers due to take place Tuesday.

The teachers are demanding the basic monthly teacher’s salary of NIS 8,500 be raised to NIS 12,000. The court ruled against the teachers’ union claim that there was a lack of response from the Education Ministry, saying a meeting between the union and ministry officials was scheduled.

### **Nigerian communication workers strike against Huawei for unpaid wages**

Nigerian telecom workers began a three-day “warning” strike against Huawei Technologies Company Limited on May 2.

The strike was called by the Private Telecommunications and Communications Senior Staff Association of Nigeria. The union put the emphasis on getting “immediate remittance of membership dues into the union’s account” and “recognition of the union as negotiating body” before the demand for immediate payment of March salary for its unpaid members.

### **Workers in Imo State, Nigeria walk out after state forces disrupt May Day demonstration**

Workers in Imo State, Nigeria began strike action on May 3 to protest the “violent disruption” of their May Day celebrations by the state government. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) said it would direct its members to ensure that “no flight leaves the Lagos Airport to Owerri, Imo

state starting from 12 midnight” on May 3.

An NLC letter said, “It was resolved that we embark on a comprehensive industrial action against the [Imo] state government” from Wednesday May 3. Members of the Trade Union Congress also took part in the strike.

### **Ugandan doctors strike over non-payment of allowances**

Nearly 700 specialist doctors in Uganda walked out in a nationwide strike on May 1 over non-payment of their allowances.

The doctors complained their allowances have not been paid since February, and some had six months of allowances owing. They are expected to go to classes while also attending to patients. The doctors say this is why they rely on the allowances to “meet their basic needs.”

The action by doctors takes place alongside protests by pre-medical interns who have not been deployed. Some protesters were arrested by Ugandan police.

### **LFC Milling Food workers in Free State South Africa on strike since 2021**

Food workers in Wesselsbron, Free State, South Africa who have been on strike against LFC Milling Company since 2021, may return to work as their families and children are being forced to live off children’s social grants.

The National Emancipated and Allied Workers Union of South Africa members are fighting for equal rights at their workplace, as black workers get paid less than their white counterparts despite doing the same job.

### **Hundreds of Community Work Programme workers in Johannesburg, South Africa protest for higher wages**

On Monday, hundreds of Community Work Programme (CWP) workers protested outside the ANC headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa. They are fighting for higher wages, more working days and permanent contracts.

Last week, CWP workers employed by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs protested outside the head office in Pretoria for two days, demanding their April wages.

Nomsa Magangane, a single mother with five children, told *Groundup* that “the R880 payments onlybuys basic food then it’s finished. Electricity is also needed.”

Palesa Motloiwa said, “I have been working as a CWP worker since 2010. This R880 is very little. I cover funeral policies and food on this money. My policies lapse every month because I cannot afford them. We feel enslaved. All we ask is for the government to think for us as well.”



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