

Italy: 30,000 protest against labour laws and the Ukraine war; UK: strike wave continues over pay and conditions; Nigeria: doctors' week-long strike at University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital over underfunded, failing healthcare

## 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.*

### **30,000 demonstrate in Bologna, Italy against government's new labour decree, with calls for general strike**

Around 30,000 workers demonstrated in Bologna on Saturday, the first of three regional demonstrations covering the whole country called by unions under the slogan, "For a new season of work and rights." Further demonstrations were called for May 13 in Milan and May 20 in Naples. Banners also opposed the war.

The demonstrations were called by the CGIL, CISL and UIL unions in response to the far-right Meloni government's new labour decree, announced May 1. The decree slashes welfare provision and relaxes the rules on short-term contracts. The government claims the measures will raise wages, but they will cut benefits and force poorer workers into precarious casual work.

Reuters report that welfare subsidies will be cut from their current monthly average of around 550 euros per family to 350 euros, limited to 12 months and subject to workers joining job training schemes. Families with minors, pensioners or disabled members will be eligible for a higher rate, but only for 30 months.

The decree also offers tax breaks to entrepreneurs who hire young people who are neither working nor studying. Italy heads the EU in this category.

The unions are seeking to control the evident anger of workers. Saturday saw repeated calls for a general strike from the crowd. The union leaders have not been able to overtly rule out such action but are telling their members not to get ahead of themselves.

CGIL general secretary Maurizio Landini said, "We do not exclude anything, general strikes are threatened but are carried out when the time is right."

### **National four-hour strike of Italian transport workers over pay and safety**

On May 2, transport workers across Italy joined a walkout over pay and conditions. The Faisa-Confail union had called only a four-hour stoppage, with different timings for each city. In Rome and Lazio, the strike was called for 08.30-12.30, Milan 08.45-12.45, and Naples 11.00-15.00.

In Naples, Line 1 of the underground and the Mergellina Funicular were suspended, with reduced service reported on buses and trams. Delays and reduced services were reported elsewhere.

The strike was called to demand a cost-of-living increase, improved safety at work and better working hours.

### **Flights cancelled as Italian air transport workers strike**

Various groups of air traffic workers in Italy came out on a four-hour strike May 3, resulting in the cancellation of many flights.

Air traffic controllers at Rome airport walked out over conditions. The COBAS union members work for ENAV, the company managing Italian air space, handling all traffic covered by the Rome control centre. They are protesting "disrespectful" rotas, holiday arrangements and a bad new healthcare insurance programme.

Flight attendants working for Air Dolomiti and Vueling also came out on strike at the same time, as did USB union members at Genoa Airport.

Even the limited action demonstrates the power of this group of workers. ITA Airways cancelled 47 domestic flights, while Air Serbia reported delays of three and a half hours in flights between Rome and Belgrade.

However, ENAV had advised the airlines five days earlier to allow the possibility of rescheduling. Because of the partial character of the stoppage, ITA were claiming they would be able to rebook "90 percent" of travellers affected later that same day.

### **Ambulance staff walk out in southeast England over pay**

UK ambulance staff employed by the South Central Ambulance and the South East Coast NHS ambulance trusts began a 10-hour strike on

Tuesday.

The Unite union members rejected the government's pay offer to NHS staff of a lump sum for 2022/23 and a five percent pay rise for 2023/24. Most of the NHS unions have accepted the one-off payment of between £1,655 and £3,789 for last year on top of the previous £1,400 lump sum and a five percent consolidated offer for this year. The Royal College of Nursing and Unite are the only two major unions to reject the offer.

### **Further strike by UK offshore oil and gas platform workers over pay and conditions**

Around 1,200 North Sea oil and gas offshore platform workers began a 48-hour strike Wednesday for improved pay and working conditions.

The Unite union members work for contractors Bilfinger UK Limited, Petrofac Facilities Management, Stork Technical Services, Sparrows Offshore Services and Wood Group. They work in various roles as technicians, engineers and deck hands as well as crane operators, pipefitters, platers, and riggers. They held a 48-hour strike at the end of April over the same issue.

The action hit big oil producing companies such as BP, Shell and TAQA. The big oil companies all recorded enormous profits in the last period.

### **Further strikes by UK civil servants over pay and conditions**

Civil servants working for His Majesties Revenue & Customs (tax) at its offices in East Kilbride, Scotland and Benton Park View in Newcastle upon Tyne, England began a three-day strike Wednesday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are involved in ongoing industrial action, begun in November, over pay, conditions, job cuts and the dilution of redundancy terms. They are also set to strike May 15-19, May 22-26, May 29-31 and June 1-2.

They are among the 130,000 PCS members who voted overwhelmingly in support of strikes. Rather than sanction all-out action, the PCS union bureaucracy limited action this week to sporadic strikes by a few thousand members. Only three one-day stoppages by all PCS members have taken place so far, on February 1, March 15 and April 28.

### **UK civil servants' big vote in favour of renewing their strike mandate over pay, job cuts and attacks on redundancy terms**

The UK civil servants strike mandate for their current programme of strikes expired for most departments in early May.

The around 130,000 civil servants represented by the PCS union returned an 88 percent majority on an overall 52 percent turnout to renew their strike ballot. Under anti-strike legislation requiring a 50 percent threshold be reached, it was met in 106 government departments/bodies.

The PCS press release announcing the rebalot result indicated it will call "sustained action in targeted areas" with only occasional full stoppages by the entire membership. It also noted that the PCS conference later this month in Brighton "will decide on the next steps in the campaign".

### **Lecturers at Kirklees college, England strike over derisory pay award as other college staff take action over pay**

Around 150 lecturers working for Kirklees College at its sites in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, England began a four-day strike on Tuesday.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted by a 94 percent majority for the action. They oppose a one percent pay rise imposed for 2022/23 and 2.5 percent pay rise for 2023/24 with minor tweaks to pay scales to encourage scarce skills lecturers. The UCU accused the college, which has over £10 million in its accounts, of being miserly. Strikes are also scheduled for June 5 and 7 if no improved offer is received.

Staff at Bradford college belonging to the UCU were on strike May 4, with further strikes planned for May 16, 19 and 24-25. They are protesting a 3.2 percent pay offer. Nine days of strikes are also planned for June.

Staff at City College Norwich were on strike Tuesday, following a walkout on May 5. They previously held two days of stoppages after UCU members voted by an 88 percent majority to strike. They want a 14 percent pay rise. The college offered the lowest-paid staff at the college just 5.1 percent, while lecturers were offered four percent and some other staff just 2.5 percent. According to the UCU, the college holds over £16 million in cash and more than £54 million in reserves.

In a consultative vote of UCU members at Barnsley College, 97 percent were prepared to strike in opposition to a two percent pay offer. They are currently balloting for strike action, with the ballot closing June 12.

A recent UCU report highlighted that 80 percent of college lecturing staff were suffering mental health problems brought on by worries over money, with many missing meals or hot showers to get by.

### **London Heathrow airport security staff continue strike over pay/subhead]**

Parking wardens in the London borough of Westminster have walked out and taken action short of strike action over pay.

The GMB members are employed by contractor NSL to provide civil enforcement services on behalf of Westminster borough council. NSL failed to award a cost of living pay increase following a forced restructuring that has meant drastic changes in terms and conditions.

The workers took action short of a strike May 1-8, and held stoppages on May 2, 4 and 6. The May 6 walkout coincided with the coronation of King Charles III, which took place within the borough. An NSL manager blocked pickets from using a toilet in a building near their picket line, even though NSL do not own the building.

### **UK rail workers plan further strike over pay in long-running dispute**

Train drivers belonging to the train drivers' union, Aslef at 16 train operating companies (TOCs) will walk out on Friday. Further stoppages are planned on May 31 and June 4. Train drivers have seen no increase in pay since 2019, while RPI inflation is currently running at 13.5 percent.

Around 20,000 Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members at 14 TOCs will strike on Saturday. They have been involved in a long-running dispute over pay, having walked out for 11 days between December and January this year. Scheduled strikes on March 30 and April 1 were cancelled.

Initially 40,000 rail workers were involved in the dispute, with 20,000 signallers and maintenance workers employed by Network Rail (NR) joining their TOC colleagues. However, the dispute involving NR staff was brought to an end with the RMT collaborating in imposing a sell-out deal on them in March.

### **Rail workers on the London Elizabeth Line to walk out over pay parity**

Train line managers working on the cross-London Elizabeth Line are to strike on May 24, seeking pay parity with other Transport for London (TfL) staff.

The Transport Salaried Staff's Association (TSSA) members are striking on the first anniversary of the opening of the new line, which has become one of the busiest London lines. They work as line managers controlling the signalling and safety systems on the highly sophisticated system.

They work for Rail for London Infrastructure, a subsidiary of TfL. They were offered a two-year pay deal of four percent for 2022 and 4.4 percent for 2023. They are seeking pay parity with train line managers working for London Underground (the Tube underground rail system) and Docklands Light Railway who carry out similar roles.

Following the strike, the TSSA members will impose an overtime ban and withdrawal of goodwill between May 27 and June 4.

Around 10,000 RMT union members working on the Tube are currently balloting to renew their strike mandate. They are involved in an ongoing dispute over job cuts, pay and pension provision. The ballot result is due May 23.

### **Amazon workers at two UK fulfilment sites to ballot for strikes over pay**

Amazon workers at the Rugeley centre in Staffordshire and Mansfield in Nottinghamshire, England are to ballot for strike action over pay.

The GMB members will begin balloting on Friday, with the ballot closing June 9. Around 700 workers at Amazon's Coventry site recently held 14 days of stoppages over pay, the first official strike by UK Amazon staff. Unofficial walkouts took place at several Amazon sites in August last year, after the company announced a derisory 50 pence an hour rise.

### **Ballots for strikes over pay at two major Scottish airports**

Around 275 workers at Scotland's Edinburgh airport are balloting for strike action for an improved pay offer.

The Unite union members work for Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP). They deal directly with passengers, as well as providing security and other terminal operations. The ballot runs until May 23.

Unite announced Tuesday that its over 400 members working for five companies at Glasgow airport are to ballot for strike action. The five companies are Glasgow Airport Ltd, ICTS General Search, OCS, ABM and Falck Fire Services UK. They work in cleaning, security, airport operations and fire safety. The workers rejected the pay offer made by four of the companies, while the fifth has not even made an offer.

### **Verdi union in Germany reaches substandard collective agreement with local transport employers after strikes**

After calling two warning strikes, on May 8 the Verdi union announced a new collective agreement for local transport workers with the Employers' Association of German Railways which is below what workers demanded.

The workers, who are not covered by the collective agreement made with federal government and the local authorities, wanted a monthly pay increase of 550 euros and an increase in training allowances. Verdi agreed a one-off payment of 1,500 euros in June and a 300 euros increase from October until September 2024.

Verdi union members were called out in Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, around 2,000 of the 5,000 employees of 40 local companies. Services, for example in Hanover, Cologne, Minden and the Oberberg and Pion districts were affected. In Bremen, buses and trams stopped running from May 2-4, as Verdi members demanded pay parity with other companies and a pay increase of 600 euros.

The Railway and Transport Workers union is currently negotiating for around 230,000 employees at Deutsche Bahn and 50 other rail companies.

### **Hospital doctors' stoppages in many hospitals in Germany over pay and crisis in healthcare**

Doctors at some municipal hospitals went on a warning strike on May 9, after four rounds of collective bargaining between the Marburger Bund and Association of Municipal Employers failed.

The Ernst von Bergmann Clinic in Potsdam and the University Clinic in Brandenburg an der Havel were affected, along with hospitals in Hesse and Hanover among others. A rally in Frankfurt attracted 5,000 doctors, according to the union.

The Marburger Bund members want a 2.5 percent increase in salaries and compensation for inflation from employers for approximately 55,000 doctors.

The chairman of the Schleswig-Holstein Pharmacists' Association, Hans-Günter Lund and the chairman of the board of directors of the North Medical Association, Svante Gehring, highlighted the crisis in healthcare, calling on the government to intervene. According to Gehring, a quarter of general practitioners (GPs) in Schleswig-Holstein will retire in the next five to ten years, while inadequate fees for medical services are leading to a shortage of GPs and pharmacists.

### **School students protest in Hungary in support of teachers suffering increases in workload and poor pay**

Thousands including school students protested in Hungary's capital Budapest on May 3, some facing police attacks with teargas.

This follows protests the week before against the status law imposed by the government of Viktor Orban, under which teachers cease to be classed as civil servants and can work longer hours, while schools lose their autonomy. The government has responded to teachers' year long struggle

against minimum service levels during strikes, poor wages and teacher shortages by introducing the so-called “revenge laws.” There is a teacher shortage of 10 percent of the workforce, 15,000 teachers.

Protesters demand the withdrawal of the legislation and resignation of the Minister of the Interior and Education, and a Ministry dedicated to education.

### **Workers at Mentos factory in Breda, Netherlands strike over wages**

Workers at the sweet manufacturer Perfetti Van Melle in the Dutch city Breda walked out for three days from Sunday for a wage increase to offset inflation. Around 100 of the factory’s 600 workers were involved.

It was the first action since a collective labour agreement demand for higher wages in the confectionery sector from the largest Dutch union, the FNV, was rejected by employers. The union says workers are “restless” across the sector.

The FNV said the Breda stoppage marks the beginning of relay strike action in the confectionery sector. Approximately 11,000 workers in 200 companies, including Mars and Verkade, are covered by the same collective agreement.

FNV food industry director Eric Brouwer said that 80 percent of members did not agree with the final offer from the employers. Employers’ association VBZ said it no longer wants to make agreements with FNV, having reached two-year agreements instead with the smaller CNV and De Unie unions.

The FNV called off a strike over “meagre” increases at the Mars plant in Veghel on Monday when the company agreed to negotiate. The Veghel plant employs around 1,200 workers, 900 of them covered by the confectionery collective agreement.

The FNV will present its new agreements to members on May 16. Brouwer expressed satisfaction that “Mars has come to meet us.”

### **Dutch dairy workers at FrieslandCampina strike over pay and conditions**

Workers at the Borculor milk-powder plant of dairy cooperative FrieslandCampina walked out on May 8, after rejecting an eight percent wage increase offer. Around half the 365 workers were involved.

A second strike began at 10pm Tuesday at the company’s distribution site in Meppel, which employs 235. This followed a 24-hour strike at the company’s cheese factory in Steenderen on Saturday.

Members of the CNV and FNV unions demanded wages increases of 10 and 14.3 percent respectively. They are also seeking wages in line with inflation and an early retirement scheme. FrieslandCampina described the demands as “unrealistic” and offered only eight percent.

FrieslandCampina complained of the “considerable” economic impact of strikes at the “highest peak” of seasonal supply of farm milk. The company denied responsibility for tackling the consequences of inflation, but Ron Vos of the FNV noted that they had increased their own profit by raising prices last year.

Although FrieslandCampina is the only company facing strikes at present, the dairy producers’ association NZO warned its members “it is possible that there will be more strikes at other companies” ahead.

### **Swedish train drivers to strike over work schedules**

The first of three planned strike actions by Swedish train drivers was due to begin today. The strikes were called after the rail companies refused to enter negotiations on regularising timetables and shift schedules.

The strike involves workers in various operational and maintenance roles at Transdev, SJ, Green Cargo, and MTR metro in Stockholm.

The union Seko said the strike would go ahead if no deal was reached. Seko had already postponed the first action. At the time of writing, the mediators had not replied to press inquiries about progress.

The planned actions are staggered across the network, with each due to begin at 3pm. Today’s strike will mostly involve drivers in Malmö and Alvsjö, south of Stockholm. The Öresund trains to Denmark and some commuter traffic in the capital will be affected, with national rail operator SJ anticipating disruption to regional and sleeper services from Gothenburg on May 12.

The subsequent stages of the action will begin May 15 and 18, extending the action across the country.

### **Finnish private social care sector workers to strike over pay**

Workers in the Finnish private social care sector announced strike action 23-27 May, after failing to reach a wage agreement last month. More than 70,000 workers who provide assisted living and day care services at several companies could be involved.

The assisted living carers will strike 23-27 May. Providers affected include Attendo, Esperio Care and Mehiläinen. Day care workers at kindergarten units run by Norlandia, Pilke Daycare and Touhula will walk out 23-24 May.

The JHL union, which represents workers in the public and welfare sectors, called for employers to “start negotiating seriously.” They are demanding private sector pay rises in line with the public sector.

Before the strike warnings were issued, unions had called a two-week ban on overtime and shift swaps.

### **Spanish pilots at Air Europa to strike again over pay and conditions**

Spanish Union of Airline Pilots (Sepla) announced eight new strike dates at Air Europa over wages. Pilots will strike on May 22-23, 25-26, 29-30, and June 1-2 at all the company’s Spanish bases and work centres.

The pilots have already held a four-day strike last week, and the company has not moved on the pilots’ wages and conditions demands. Sepla said it “regrets” having to take the action and warned that further dates may follow if there is no progress.

Workers have also denounced the government’s “abusive” application of 90 percent minimum service levels to the airline during the strikes. Sepla filed an appeal against the decision. When the courts agreed to hear the appeal, Sepla’s Raquel Sánchez said this confirmed their complaint that it was an attack on the constitutional right to strike and a defence of the interests of Air Europa executives.

### **Families of Tempi rail crash victims protest in Larissa, Greece to**

## **demand justice**

On May 6, families of the victims of the February rail crash in Tempi, Greece held a protest in nearby Larissa to demand to demand justice for the dead.

Holding black candles, they marched through the town with a banner declaring: "I do not forget—57 souls seek justice." Many of the victims were students returning to university after the Greek Orthodox holiday.

The families blame government cuts to the rail infrastructure for the tragedy, and demand the Supreme Court oversees the inquiry to ensure those responsible are brought to justice.

While the authorities tried to blame the Tempi station master, the public responded with rail strikes and mass protests, pointing to the antiquated manual signalling system not being updated as successive governments put profits before safety and lives.

## **Mass resignation of science journal's international editorial board to protest publisher greed**

The entire board of over 40 scientists at the *Neuroimage* journal have resigned, accusing the Dutch-based Elsevier publisher of greed.

The 40 scientists include professors from Oxford, Kings College London and Cardiff universities. While the online magazine has no paywall, it charges researchers over £2,700 to publish research papers. According to the *Guardian*, Elsevier claims to publish a quarter of the world's scientific papers. Its revenues for last year were up by 10 percent to £2.9 billion, with profit margins of nearly 40 percent.

One board member who resigned was Professor Chris Chambers, head of brain stimulation at Cardiff University in Wales. He told the paper, "Elsevier preys on the academic community, claiming huge profits while adding little value to science."

## **Pay strike by UNRWA staff on the West Bank continues**

A stoppage by United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff on the Palestinian West Bank, begun March 4, is continuing.

The UNRWA staff want a pay increase. UNRWA is responsible for providing support to around 900,000 Palestinian refugees, including health, educational and welfare provision. UNRWA faces severe financial strictures and had debts of \$75 million at the start of the year. The European Union recently expressed concern over the impact of the ongoing strike on provision of services to refugees. It noted the recent appointment of new mediators by the PLO authority would hopefully help to resolve the dispute.

## **One-day strike observed in Palestinian village after Israeli settler shoots young man**

A one-day strike of business and shops took place in the Palestinian village of Sandala on Sunday. It followed the shooting of a 20-year-old Palestinian, Deyar Omari. He was shot dead in his car by an Israeli settler following an altercation.

## **Israeli bus drivers strike to protest attacks by passengers**

Bus drivers working for the Egged Bus company held a three-hour strike Sunday morning.

It affected bus services in Jerusalem, Haifa and Rehovot. The drivers were protesting attacks on them by passengers, some of which have been provoked by rising bus fares.

Israeli Transport Minister, Miri Regev recently announced the provision of security glass partitions, but these would only apply to new vehicles and not the thousands of existing buses currently on the road.

## **Protests by teachers in Iran**

On Tuesday, teachers in Iran held protests in around 20 cities.

It was organised by the Coordination Council of Teachers' Trade Union Organisations. Cities taking part included Isfahan, Jolfa, Kermanshah and Shush. The protesting teachers condemned repressive measures taken by the Iranian government and held photos of imprisoned teachers and placards demanding the right to free education.

## **Doctors at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital strike over lack of provisions**

Resident doctors at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Enugu State began a one-week "warning" strike on May 3, to protest the lack of basic provisions at the public hospital.

The Association of Resident Doctors stated there had been "growing agitation" over the current payroll software. "At that EGM [Emergency General Meeting] our demands for payment of January salary, hazard allowance arrears and migration to IPPIS [new payroll software] for these our members were made and the initial ultimatum for strike was pegged at 21 February, 2023."

The union continued by saying that its members would "proceed on a one-week warning strike beginning 3 May, with only provision of skeletal services at the Accident and Emergency unit of the hospital."

Doctors complain of:

- non-functional Intensive Care Units
- inconsistent supply of food to those on call with no food supply for several weeks and members being on call for 24-hour shifts or more without food
- leaking and dilapidated call rooms
- staff burnout due to being on call every other day in poor conditions
- intermittent power and water supplies.

## **Nigerian public sector workers in Abia State walk out**

Public sector workers in Abia State began a strike on May 9 to protest months of unpaid salaries and years of unpaid pension payments.

The state chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) Pascal Nweke gave a list of the amounts owed to Abia State workers, including for senior secondary school teachers, 28 months' salary arrears and 14 and half months' salary arrears for junior secondary school teachers.

Joint National Public Service members in Plateau State also expect to strike over unpaid salaries and lack of promotions.

### **Kenyan intern doctors strike over low pay and lack of medicines**

Around 1,000 intern doctors in Kenya held a one-day strike on May 8 to protest three months of salary arrears, lack of postings and poor working conditions.

Kenya Medical practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists (KMPDU) secretary general, Davji Bhimji Atellah, said, "The public hospitals are a shell. The shelves you see have no drugs and are just mounted for a show. Our members are overworked, are poorly resourced and put their lives at risk all the time. Interns are the ones running those facilities. This must stop." At least 46 hospitals will be unable to function on the day of the strike.

The doctors were due to strike in October last year, but the union called off the strike and went into talks with the government instead.

### **Crimson Loo chemical workers in South Africa strike for pay increases**

South African workers at Crimson Loo in Louis Trichardt, Limpopo Province have been striking for pay increases since April 25.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers members are demanding a minimum wage of R8,500 and overtime pay for bank holidays and weekends. They also demand a milk allowance of R250 a month, as their job involves mixing hazardous powders.

### **University of Technology workers in South Africa to walk out over pay and allowances**

Workers at Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa are planning strike action across four campuses over pay increases. These include administration and technical staff and lecturers.

They are demanding a 12 percent increase, R700 housing allowance increase plus medical benefits, which have all been refused.



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