

National public sector strike in Portugal over pay; protests continue in Iran over cost of living and authoritarian rule; national doctors' strikes continue in Uganda over lack of funding

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 public sector strike in Portugal

Public sector workers in Portugal joined a three-day strike June 7-9, called by the National Federation of Independent Unions of Public Administration (Fesinap).

Workers, mainly in schools and hospitals, called for a pay rise in line with inflation, and a daily meal allowance of 9.60 euros. According to Fesinap, 90 percent of teaching assistants and administrative workers in schools joined the stoppage, while 60 percent of health workers did so.

Unions end Romanian teachers' strike after government passes emergency law on pay

Romanian teachers' unions this Monday called off an indefinite strike which has seen more than 150,000 teachers stop work since May 22. The government passed an emergency decree to raise teachers' salaries, which the unions accepted.

The Minister of Education claimed the salary for new teachers would increase by 31.7 percent, and more experienced teachers would receive a pay rise of 29.4 percent. The deal was not put to all union members. The strike was called off after 51 of 57 county union officials voted for the offer.

Spotmedia reported that teachers in several counties disagreed with the strike being suspended and accused the union of "betrayal." The president of one union in the county of Suceava said teachers there would remain on strike, and 50 percent were still on strike on Monday. The president of one of the two major teachers' union federations said, "If we were betrayed, it would mean that two national leaders go talk with the Government, make an agreement and put the fait accompli in front of the people."

As teachers were given no say in calling off the strike, this is exactly what happened.

The Minister of Education estimated the pay offer would cost a total of 700 million lei. In May, teachers rejected an offer which the government

estimated would be an additional 1.23 billion lei investment in education.

Romanian postal workers walk out against job losses from "digitisation"

Postal workers at the Romanian state-owned Poșta Română in the city of Constanța walked out on Wednesday, to demand pay rises and a guarantee that ongoing "digitisation" will not lead to job losses.

Antena3 reported that 80 percent of Poșta Română workers in Constanța are living at a subsistence level, enduring brutal working conditions for the minimum wage.

German pharmacists strike over collapsing system

Pharmacists throughout Germany walked out on Wednesday, with the media reporting that the majority of pharmacies were closed.

Striking pharmacists are demanding the flat rate paid by insurance companies for drug prescriptions be raised from 8.35 to 12 euros, to compensate for rising energy bills and other costs.

German pharmacists are self-employed, and figures from the Federal Association of Pharmacists' Associations reported in *taz* show that one of the 18,000 remaining pharmacists goes out of business every day.

Green Party politician Janosch Dahmen attacked striking pharmacists in the media, telling *Deutschlandfunk* "the strike is really the wrong medicine." He said there was no way pharmacists' demands would be met, due to the coalition government's plan to restrict spending.

While the government refuses to spend money on health, more than 100 billion euros have been allocated to a "Bundeswehr Special Fund" to build up the military.

Court workers continue indefinite strike in Croatia

Around 5,000 court workers in Croatia continue an indefinite strike

begun on June 5, following the government's unsuccessful attempt to obtain a court order banning the walkout.

The Union of State and Local Civil Servants and Employees (SDLSN) members initially called for monthly salaries to be increased by 400 euros, but have since said they would accept 300 euros.

The SDLSN accused the Supreme Court of attempting to limit the strike, after it issued a list of actions courts must carry out during the strike. In a press release, the union said many non-urgent procedures were included among these "necessary" services. It gave as an example the order that no hearing in the Labour Court could be postponed because all labour disputes are urgent.

Major protests throughout Poland against anti-abortion laws following pregnant woman's avoidable death

Thousands of people joined demonstrations in cities across Poland on Wednesday against oppressive anti-abortion laws, following the death of Dorota Lalik from sepsis. She was not informed by doctors that her life could be saved by terminating her pregnancy.

The patients' rights ombudsman ruled that the hospital in Nowy Tag, named after Pope John Paul II, violated Lalik's rights by withholding the information. Her widower told the media, "No one told us that we had practically no chance for a healthy baby... The entire time they were giving us false hope that everything will be OK... No one gave us the choice or the chance to save Dorota, because no one told us her life was at risk."

The leader of the ruling Law and Justice Party said the issue was "made up" and "propaganda," because abortions are legal when a woman's life is in danger. However, doctors are reluctant to perform legal abortions because of the risk of prosecution, and Catholic fundamentalist doctors and hospital managers are emboldened to block even legal abortions.

The Guardian reported the director of the Nowy Tag hospital saying in 2005 that no abortions would be performed there as it contradicted "God's law and the pope's teaching." No abortion has been carried out at the hospital since at least 2018.

Polish farmers block Ukrainian border to oppose grain imports

Between June 9 and 13, Polish farmers blocked the Yagodin-Dorogusk checkpoint on the Ukrainian border in a further protest against grain imports, which forced farmers to sell for a low price or even left them unable to sell their own grain.

According to *Unian*, this is the third border protest by Polish farmers. *Euronews* reported that the EU on Wednesday extended a ban on grain imports from Ukraine to Poland and four other countries.

Delhaize supermarket workers continue campaign against franchising in Belgium

Supermarket workers at Delhaize in Belgium continue their campaign against a franchising plan which will lead to cuts in pay and working conditions.

Delhaize, part of a giant supermarket chain in Belgium and the Netherlands, which made 2.5 billion euros in profits on 87 billion euros of

revenue in 2022, intends to convert all its 128 directly operated shops in Belgium into franchises.

Workers have been walking out and picketing shops and warehouses since the franchising plan was announced in March, while the company responded by sending bailiffs and police to break picket lines.

On June 9, workers picketed a Delhaize store in Waterloo, but this was quickly lifted, *RTL* reported. A bailiff arrived and demanded the end of picketing, brandishing an order from the Brussels courts banning all pickets until June 15. Workers pointed out that a Walloon Brabant court ruled in favour the unions earlier in the week in an appeal against the ban, but the company said this ruling only applied to one specific case and it intended to keep using the Brussels court order until it expired. Workers only lifted the picket line after police arrived and threatened them with fines.

Irish retained firefighters begin rolling strikes

Retained firefighters in Ireland began rolling strikes on Tuesday, closing 50 percent of stations, in a campaign against understaffing and pay which is falling behind inflation.

On June 6, around 2,000 retained firefighters began a work-to-rule, and will escalate further to all-out stoppage if their demands are not met by June 20.

Retained firefighters are on call 24/7 and cannot travel far from their fire stations, being paid 8,500 euros per year and hourly wages when they are called out. Because of understaffing, many retained firefighters are unable to take annual leave, and are campaigning for different working patterns, such as alternating weeks on call.

Supply teachers begin indefinite strike in Catalonia, Spain

Supply teachers in the Spanish autonomous community of Catalonia began an indefinite strike on Monday, demanding improvements to the system by which they move from temporary to permanent contracts.

The Platform of Supply Teachers of Catalonia reported that 150 supply teachers joined a protest in Barcelona on Monday and called the 35,000 supply teachers throughout Catalonia to walk out.

Striking supply teachers also demanded the resignation of the Minister of Education of the Catalan government, Josep González-Cambray, after he announced supply teachers would only be allowed to specify the region they are prepared to work in, rather than indicating their preferred municipalities. González-Cambray, despised by teachers who demanded his resignation during previous strikes, was dismissed on Monday.

Hungarian metal workers strike over wages

Around 800 workers at an aluminium factory in the Hungarian city of Székesfehérvár began an indefinite strike over wages on June 4, which ended on June 13 after the Hungarian Chemical, Energy and Related Trades Union (VDSZ) signed a pay agreement with the multinational Arconic.

According to *24.hu*, workers were opposed to the pay deal imposed by Arconic in March, which increased wages by only 10.8 percent, less than

half the inflation rate of 25.4 percent at the time. Workers demanded an additional 5.5 percent wage increase.

The VDSZ accepted a one-time payment of 340,000 forints, which it said would be a 5.5 percent increase “for many” but is not consolidated. The union said that together with the 10.8 percent pay rise from March “we can talk about a substantial increase.” But even the combined pay rise falls behind inflation, currently at 21.5 percent.

Russian miners hold strikes against mass layoffs

Miners in the only emerald mine in Russia, in the Sverdlovsk region, began a strike last week, and 100 miners refused to leave the mine, opposing job losses.

According to *E1.ru*, the mine’s management announced plans to stop underground mining and begin opencast mining to make the mine profitable. Strikers say this could lead to all 180 underground miners being dismissed. The mine is owned by state-owned Rostec.

Doctors in Greece stop work to protest “dystopian” conditions

Doctors in Greece joined a four-hour walkout on Wednesday called by the Athens-Piraeus Hospital Doctors Association (EINAP), *Kathimerini* reported.

The EINAP said, “Decades of degradation and neglect of the National Health System (ESY) has led to the creation of a dystopian environment that has a negative impact on the care provided.” It called for the reversal of pay cuts made in 2012, increased funding and staffing, and a reversal of privatisation measures.

Bus workers in Dundee, Scotland begin three-month strike over pay as other bus workers line up to take action

Around 200 workers employed by bus company Xplore Dundee in Scotland began a three-month strike on Monday.

The Unite union members who work as bus drivers, duty managers, platform staff and administrative workers voted by a 93 percent majority to walk out. They rejected a seven percent pay offer made by the company. Talks between the company and Unite under the auspices of the government reconciliation service Acas were unsuccessful in averting the strike.

Unite said revenues for the bus company increased by 10.4 percent since 2017, while the pay of the workers fell by 14 percent over the same period.

Around 800 Unite members at First Bus in Leeds are due to begin a continuous strike Sunday. They are angry at the company’s refusal to move back the pay anniversary date to April.

During the pandemic, Unite agreed to move the pay anniversary date to October to alleviate the company’s financial position. First Bus’s refusal to move it back to April means the drivers must forgo any pay increase for six months. Bus drivers were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, in which two Leeds First Bus drivers died.

Unite suspended planned strikes of around 1,700 bus drivers in London working for Arriva, which runs services in North and East London. The

drivers were due to walk out June 20-21, and again June 27-28.

The drivers had rejected a seven percent pay offer from the company, which represents a cut in real terms. However, the union suspended the threatened stoppage after Arriva came back with an improved offer, which is being put to the drivers in a ballot.

A ballot of around 360 bus drivers employed by First Bus Manchester ended on Wednesday. The Unite union members rejected a 7.4 percent pay offer backdated to April, with an additional 3.4 percent from October. They are seeking parity of pay with bus drivers working for other Manchester-based companies. While First Bus drivers are on £13.50 an hour, drivers at Go North West get £14.37, at Diamond Bus £14.30 and at Stagecoach £14.

Further strikes by UK health staff over pay offer

On Monday, around 1,000 Unite union members working for the West Midlands Ambulance Services in England walked out. Unite union members working at Birmingham City Hospital and Christie Hospital in Manchester walked out alongside BMA junior doctors on Wednesday.

Unite members employed by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service are scheduled to strike June 23 and 26 over pay.

Unison and GMB members working in the UK’s National Health Service accepted the government pay offer of a five percent rise plus a sum of at least £1,655. Nurses in the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) rejected the offer in April, but the RCN has called no action since.

UK university academic staff continue action over pay, pensions and conditions

Around 15,000 UK academics at 145 universities are continuing their ongoing dispute over pay, pensions and conditions by mounting a marking and assessment boycott (Mab).

The boycott is an attempt by the University and College Union (UCU) bureaucracy to demobilise national strike action by its members in universities. The last national stoppage was in March. In April, UCU members in the universities renewed the mandate for industrial action over both pay and pensions by majorities in excess of 85 percent.

Stoppages are planned at a local level. On Saturday, around 500 students and university workers marched in Brighton to protest the university plans for mass redundancies. They are set to strike from June 19 to 23 over deductions in their pay for taking part in the Mab.

Around 1,800 Leeds University academics are due to begin an indefinite stoppage Thursday over threats to deduct pay for those taking part in the Mab. Leicester University UCU members plan to walk out June 21, 26-29 and July 18-21 over the same issue.

Other universities planning days of stoppages in the immediate future include Bristol, Liverpool John Moores, Keele, Edinburgh and Durham.

Refuse workers in South Gloucestershire, UK, strike over pay

Around 150 refuse workers employed by outsourcing company Suez to provide refuse collection for part of South Gloucestershire council in England began a seven-day strike on Monday, to be followed by a 14-day

stoppage from June 26.

The Unite union members voted by an 89 percent majority to reject an eight percent pay offer from Suez. Refuse collection lorry loaders are currently paid only £11.53 an hour.

Refuse workers in Sandwell, UK, hold second week of strike over pay

Refuse workers employed by outsourcing company Serco to provide refuse services to Sandwell Council in England began a five-day strike Monday. This followed a four-day strike last week.

The GMB union members resumed their strikes after rejecting a revised pay offer from the employer which was a real-terms cut. As well as waste collection, they work at waste sites and in street cleaning. On Tuesday, the strikers protested outside the Council House in Oldbury, where a full council meeting was taking place.

Strike by teachers at oldest school in Britain over pension changes

UK teachers at the King's School, Canterbury, in Kent went on strike Tuesday. The independent school is Britain's oldest, with fees ranging from £3,040 to £16,650 a term. Originally founded in 597 AD, it was refounded under Henry VIII in 1541.

National Education Union (NEU) members held the stoppage over plans by school management to make detrimental changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme. Previous pupils include playwright Christopher Marlowe and *War Horse* author Michael Morpurgo.

Strikes by UK offshore oil platform workers over pay to continue

UK offshore oil and gas platform workers are to take further strike action over pay.

Around 80 Unite union members employed by the Wood Group UK Ltd on TAQA offshore platforms will hold a series of 48-hour strikes. The first one on to take place June 19, with further 48-hour stoppages on June 28, July 3 and July 12. The action by technicians, riggers, deck crew and others is to demand the reinstatement of a 10 percent cut in pay, worth around £7,000, made by the Wood Group in 2015. They are also seeking an enhanced redundancy and retention scheme.

In a separate dispute over working rotas, around 50 Unite union members working for Petrofac Ithaca on the FPF1 platform will hold 24-hour strikes beginning at 6 a.m. on June 21, 23, 26, 28, 30, July 10, 12 and 14.

UK train drivers vote to continue pay dispute

In the third ballot since last year, UK train drivers again voted to continue their dispute with the rail companies over pay.

Around 12,500 ASLEF members across 15 train operating companies voted by mostly over 90 percent majorities to continue their dispute. The train drivers have taken 11 days of action since the dispute began.

Unite union suspends scheduled stoppages at London's Heathrow Airport as employer makes new pay offer

Strikes by around 2,000 security staff working at Terminals 3 and 5 at Heathrow Airport in the UK capital, planned for June 24-25, have been called off by the Unite union.

Security staff at Terminals 3 and 5 make up 40 percent of Heathrow's security staff. They were due to begin 31 days of stoppages from June 24 for higher pay. Unite called off the two days of stoppages when the employer made a new offer for 10 percent backdated to January, followed by an additional 1.5 percent rise from October.

Unite recommended the offer to its members, who are currently balloting on the offer until June 23.

Unite union calls off strike of Coca-Cola workers in Wakefield, UK after workers accept new pay deal

A 14-day strike of hundreds of workers at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners' (CCEP) in Wakefield, England, due to begin Wednesday, was called off on Tuesday by Unite after the workers accepted a new offer.

The Unite members had voted 87 percent to reject a six percent pay offer. CCEP's latest profit figure rose 37 percent to £1.85 billion. The factory is the largest soft drinks factory in Europe. Apart from Coca-Cola, the plant also packs other products, including Fanta, Sprite and Dr Pepper.

According to a Unite union press release of June 13, "Union negotiated pay deal adds the fizz at Coca Cola," the deal offers a salary increase of "between £3,476 and £3,876 in the first 12 months, with further increases from April 1st, 2024.

"The deal will see the lowest paid technician receive a 16.6 percent increase to their salary, with the highest paid technician receiving a 10.2 percent increase. The lowest paid clerical worker will receive an 18.1 percent increase to salary, and the highest paid will receive a 12 percent increase."

The *Wakefield Express* quoted a CCEP spokesperson saying the company was "pleased" the negotiations are now concluded: "We can confirm that following Unite the Union's ballot of its members at our Wakefield site, our pay offer has been accepted and proposed strike action has been cancelled..."

"The agreed deal at Wakefield is very much in line with the approach we have adopted at other sites, with a six percent headline pay increase alongside other, locally negotiated, items that improve flexibility."

PCS union calls off strike of UK driving examiners as employer agrees lump sum payment

Strikes by around 1,000 workers employed by the UK Driving Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA), due to take place June 15-16, 19, and 22-23, were called off by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union.

DVSA workers are responsible for conducting examinations of drivers for cars and other vehicles. The PCS stated the planned stoppages were suspended following the UK government's Department for Transport confirming they will pay DVSA staff a £1,500 cost-of-living lump sum.

The PCS statement noted, “The decision to suspend the action does not mean an end to the national dispute, neither does it preclude DVSA members from taking further national and targeted strike action.”

The action by DVSA employees was part of the PCS’s partial series of strikes. Around 130,000 civil servants voted for action last November, in a dispute over pay, conditions, job cuts and the dilution of redundancy terms.

Rather than sanction all-out action, the PCS union bureaucracy limited action to sporadic strikes by a few thousand members. Only three one-day stoppages by the entire civil service PCS membership have been held.

Continuing protests in Iran over cost of living and authoritarian rule

Protests against poverty and social conditions are continuing in Iran. On Monday, telecom retirees protested in many cities against the low level of their pensions. On Tuesday, cement factory workers in the city of Dorud in Lorestan province protested a new bill to raise the retirement age.

Tuesday also saw local farmers in the town of Chenaran in northeast Iran protest against the authority’s restriction on the supply of electricity to four days a week, leaving them unable to pump water from their wells.

Bazaar merchants and storeowners in the city of Ardabil closed up their shops to protest high taxes. Farmers in the town of Dalfard in south central Iran protested against the shutting down of well pumps, denying them water for their crops.

The current unrest began with the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini by morality police on September 13. Around 50 percent of Iran’s population live beneath the poverty line due to punishing US economic sanctions, and Iran’s removal of price subsidies.

General strike in Arab towns across Israel to protest Israeli police inaction over murders of Palestinians

A general strike was called June 9-10, along with rallies across Arab towns and cities in Israel, by the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel. The strike was called to protest lack of Israeli police action against violent organised crime within the Arab Israeli Community.

Recent incidents include the murder of five people shot dead at a carwash near Nazareth and the murder of a 15-year-old at Kafr Qasim.

Lebanese electricity workers strike over pay and health provision

Clerical staff working for the state-owned power company Electricity of Lebanon (EDL) declared a strike Tuesday to Thursday, affecting the printing and delivery of invoices. They were protesting poor pay and inadequate health care for EDL employees.

BBC journalists in Cairo strike over pay

Journalists working for the BBC at their Cairo bureau in Egypt held a one-day stoppage Wednesday.

The National Union of Journalist members are demanding a review of their salaries, which have been affected by the devaluation of the Egyptian currency.

Ugandan doctors’ strike over lack of health funding continues after union and government talks break down

Ugandan doctors have been holding a nationwide strike since May 1 over pay and non-payment of their allowances.

The strike involves specialist doctors and senior house officers demanding between three and six months’ pay arrears, and interns waiting for nine months to become deployed to an internship centre.

The Ugandan Medical Association (UMA) met with government officials on June 9, but failed to reach an agreement. The UMA said the sticking point was the government’s refusal to commit the resolutions to print. The UMA was asking for “self-sponsored internships” and for the government to only “look” for funds to pay the doctors’ unpaid allowances.

The consequences of lack of health funding and staff, according to Dr. Othiniel Musana of the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, is that 191 mothers and babies die daily in Uganda, reported the *Monitor*.

Teachers at 13 government schools in Busia district have also been on strike since May 29 over unpaid salaries, affecting 10,000 students.

Uber and Bolt drivers’ strike in Lagos, Nigeria over low pay

Workers for online taxi services Uber and Bolt in Lagos, Nigeria walked out on June 7, to protest the high commission being taken per ride after the government removed fuel subsidies.

Negotiations between the union and the employers broke down without agreement on June 9. Chairman of the Media and Publicity Committee of the union, Jossy Olawale, said an indefinite strike would begin in seven days unless the companies met its demands.

Olawale said the union “requested for a 50 percent reduction of their 25 percent commission. They [the companies] didn’t even say anything about it. Though they said they would open the door of negotiation. Lastly, they still left the base fare at N800. We are asking that the base fare should be N2,000 flat.”

Workers at South Africa’s Sefako Makgatho University take indefinite strike action over pay

Academic staff and support workers including cleaners, security personnel and gardeners at Sefako Makgatho Health Services University in Gauteng Province, South Africa began strike action on June 9 over wages, as negotiations reached an impasse.

The University is sticking to an offer of 5.7 percent, which is below the current rate of inflation at 7.2 percent. The Academic and Professional Staff Association, National Education and Allied Workers Union, and South African Parastatal and Tertiary Institutions Union members are demanding a seven percent increase, a R3,000 one-off payment, and permission for five days paid annual leave. They said they will continue the strike until their demands are met.



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