

One-day general strike in Greece against low pay and austerity; striking autoworkers and other sectors protest mass layoffs in Turin, Italy; national five-week strike by doctors in Kenya continues over staff shortages, pay and conditions

## 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.*

### One-day national strike in Greece against low wages and austerity

Greek workers joined a one-day general strike on Wednesday called by the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), the country's largest private-sector federation.

Workers in shipping, ports, public transport, as well as doctors and teachers stopped work. The journalists' unions called their strike for Tuesday instead so they could cover Wednesday's strike. Thousands of people joined protests in Athens, and around 4,000 in Thessaloniki.

The GSEE demanded a reduction in VAT sales tax, an increase in wages and social security payments, and the reinstatement of sectoral collective agreements, among other measures. According to Reuters, average salaries in Greece are 20 percent lower than 15 years ago, and unemployment remains above 10 percent.

Massive cuts to wages, pensions and workers' rights were pushed through at the demand of the EU by the Syriza government from 2015-19, as well as by the previous PASOK government.

The GSEE said in 2010 it would accept "tough measures on the condition that they are just." Now that workers' anger has boiled over, it claims to be surprised that austerity measures it tolerated have not been reversed, with a spokesman telling a press conference, "We were told during the bailouts that [austerity] would only last for a few years until Greece gets back on its feet. That's not what's happening now," AP reported.

### Strike and protest against mass layoffs in the auto industry in Turin, Italy

Auto workers and workers affected by the massive international wave of job cuts implemented by manufacturers joined a protest of 12,000 in Turin, Italy on April 12, during an eight-hour strike called by the

manufacturing unions, ANSA reported.

Protesters and strikers demanded investment in production, particularly at the Stellantis Mirafiori complex in Turin, which supports thousands of jobs directly and indirectly.

Stellantis this week opened a redundancy scheme for 2,000 workers working on two of its models. It has already opened a scheme for 1,260 workers assembling the Fiat 500 Electric, and cut wages for 960 Maserati workers, according to ANSA. Bloomberg reported at the end of March that Stellantis had already dismissed around 8 percent of its workforce in Italy, also making mass layoffs in France, Austria and the US.

The cuts come as Stellantis shareholders approved a 36.5 million euros compensation package for CEO Carlos Tavares, up 60 percent on last year. Several investors opposed the massive pay hike, as it will be seen as a provocation by workers. *Fortune* reported that Glass Lewis, a company which advises shareholders how to vote, wrote that hiking executive pay while firing thousands of workers was "causing potential reputational risk for the company."

### Slovenian government introduces legal amendment to restrict ongoing doctors' strike

Slovenia's National Assembly adopted an amendment to the law on medical services on Wednesday, further restricting the right to strike. The amendment is aimed at the ongoing strike of doctors and dentists in the Fides union, begun January 15.

The bill almost completely abolishes the right to strike for doctors, requiring them to remain in the workplace during any strike and carry out any work required to prevent a risk to health of patients or to property, including issuing sick notes and other documents.

Fides appealed to the Constitutional Court to have the amendment struck down as violating the constitutional right to strike, which can only be restricted "[w]here required by the public interest."

There were already draconian minimum service requirements in place, with many areas of healthcare excluded from the strike. Many doctors and dentists refused to work overtime. Fides is calling for a separate pay deal for doctors and dentists, which it says the government promised in 2022.

## Resident doctors begin indefinite strike in North Macedonia

Around 400 resident doctors, medical graduates working in hospitals as the final part of their training in a specialist area of medicine, began an indefinite strike on Monday. Striking residents are demanding an increase in their wages to the level of an average hospital doctor, as well as health insurance coverage and legal regulation of their employment status, *MIA* reported.

Residents who spoke to *MIA* protested the government's announcement that it would only decide whether to meet these demands with new laws after the next election, scheduled for May 8.

## Local public transport warning strikes continue in Germany

Workers in local public transport companies in several German states held new warning strikes this week, after members of the Verdi union rejected an offer from the Local Transport Employers' Association (AVN), the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported.

Verdi called stoppages in Saxony from Wednesday until Sunday morning, in several south-western cities on Thursday and Friday, and in other states on other days.

According to the *SZ*, 93 percent of Verdi members voted in favour of indefinite strikes, after the union called a long series of warning strikes in its collective bargaining dispute with the AVN. The AVN reportedly offered a pay increase of 13.7 percent in three stages (an average of 4.4 percent each) and a non-consolidated bonus. Verdi is calling for a pay rise of either 22 percent or at least 750 euros per month, as well as a pay rise for trainees.

## Striking workers at poultry plant suffer brutal attack by Turkish police

Workers on strike at the Lezita poultry processing plant in the Turkish city of ?zmir were attacked by the police on Tuesday evening, according to *BirGün*. The paper reported that eight workers were hospitalised and 18 arrested in the raid on the workers' camp outside the workplace.

Lezita workers have been on strike since March 7, demanding the right to be represented by the Öz G?da-?? union and that 100 union members fired since 2021 be reinstated.

## Swedish union calls off municipal workers' strike at the last minute in exchange for mediation and a pay cut

The Kommunal union announced on Wednesday that it had accepted an offer of mediation with the Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR) employers' association, calling off a strike of 5,000 workers planned for the next day.

The accepted offer consists of a massive real-terms pay cut and establishes union-employer talking shops to "resolve" workers' other demands. The collective agreement applies to around 550,000 workers.

According to the *Göteborgs-Posten*, Kommunal accepted a pay rise in line with other deals made by Swedish unions for a 3.3 percent increase in

one year. The newspaper writes that pay "was not really a big issue in negotiations." The increase is below current 4.1 percent inflation, and far less than the 6.9 percent prices have risen by in the last six months.

Kommunal's main demands were reportedly around ensuring wages were paid on time and simplifying the process of applying for days off. The union wrote that now "the parties will together develop long-term solutions." SKR's top negotiator echoed the praise for this "joint work where the working time rules are reviewed," which commits the employers to nothing.

## Wildcat strike by lab technicians at dairy giant Arla in Denmark

Laboratory technicians employed by the multinational dairy company Arla Foods in Denmark held a three-day wildcat strike from Monday, after a 722 kroner monthly salary increase was offset by deductions from their bonuses.

According to *TV2 Nord*, 144 workers joined the strikes, demanding a new agreement which did not allow salary rises to be taken out of other pay. Arla responded that it "follows the wording" of an agreement signed with the white-collar union HK.

The Danish Employers' Association and Danish Trade Union Confederation reportedly both agreed on Tuesday that the strike was in breach of the collective agreement, and so striking workers would each have to pay a 56 kroner fine to the employers' association for every hour spent on strike.

After the workers returned to work on Thursday, facing the threat that even higher fines could be imposed by the Labour Court, their demands had not been met. HK said, "We look forward to once again contributing to Arla's production" and "it is liberating that we can finally look forward to a dialogue and real negotiations."

## Rail maintenance workers strike against poor management in Bilbao, Spain

On Monday, workers at a maintenance workshop of the Spanish rail company Renfe began a two-week strike, denouncing poor management of the Bilbao-Ollargan workshop.

According to *Europa Press*, workers complained of understaffing, a constant shortage of spare parts, theft and vandalism due to poor security, and even leaks which make it impossible to maintain electrical equipment when it rains.

## Train drivers' stoppages continue in England over pay and strikebreaking

Drivers at 16 train operators in England have continued their strike action over pay, begun earlier this month.

In a separate dispute at LNER, drivers will walk out on April 20 and observe an overtime ban April 19-21. Aslef union members at LNER are protesting managers driving trains on strike days, for which they are paid £500.

Aslef has pushed through an agreement over work conditions at London Underground.

## **Liverpool Museum strike over cost-of-living-bonus to continue until July**

The strike by almost 200 workers across cultural sites belonging to the National Museums Liverpool (NML), England is to continue until July.

The Public and Commercial Services Union members have taken 56 days of strike action over non-payment of a cost-of-living bonus. Workers will walk out on 11 weekends and half-term week, May 25-30.

The NML is withholding £1,500 per employee, while other employers covered by the civil service pay remit guidance have paid up.

## **Heating and ventilation workers on offshore rigs on strike over pay and rotas**

About 50 staff at IES Callenberg, who service heating and ventilation on offshore oil rig platforms off Scotland, have walked out for three days.

The Unite members are in dispute over pay and working rotas detrimental to work-life balance. They claim the employer is gagging them.

Also involved in the stoppage are 10 offshore chemists at SGS UK.

## **Teaching assistants at Yorkshire, England school walk out over pay**

Teaching assistants at St Anne's School and Sixth Form College, in Yorkshire, England, walked out demanding pay commensurate with the challenging conditions they face at work.

The National Education Union members work with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The previous pay structure which helped retain staff ended April 1.

## **Students at University of Manchester occupy building to demand an end to links with Israeli universities and arms manufacturer**

Around 50 students have occupied the University of Manchester's Roscoe Building demanding the university ends links with Israel and BAE Systems. On April 9, demonstrators supported the occupation, which has at times involved up to 300.

The University of Manchester has links with Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and with arms manufacturer BAE Systems, which is supplying parts for fighter jets used to slaughter Palestinians in Gaza. Students are also demanding the administration takes no action against protesters.

After a previous occupation of the Simon Building March 19-22 over the same issues, a fourth-year student was suspended.

## **Kenyan health workers continue strike facing down threats and intimidation**

Kenyan doctors are continuing their national stoppage begun March 14, to protest the government's broken promises made to end a 100-day strike in 2017.

Their demands include hiring trainee doctors, improved working conditions, and equal pay for equal work. The strikers are determined to continue their stoppage until their grievances are addressed, despite being told it is illegal and that they could face the sack.

The strikers are holding demonstrations every Tuesday at the Ministry of Health and Parliament, before marching to the Council of Governors' offices.

The three unions involved—the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union; Kenya Union of Clinical Officers; and Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers—are appealing to President William Ruto to intervene and provide a solution.

Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome issued a directive on April 14 ordering firm action against the strikers, calling their protests a nuisance. Doctors responded by threatening to stop post mortems and other duties if the police interfere with their stoppage.

On April 15, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) called on the government to stop threatening and intimidating striking doctors. The KNCHR statement said doctors have the right to protest, demonstrate and protest, as enshrined in the constitution.

## **South African Emergency Medical Service workers in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality protest over safety at work**

Over 100 Emergency Medical Service workers in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, South Africa protested outside the local City Hall April 10 to demand safe working conditions.

Workers told *GroundUp* they were robbed whilst responding to emergencies. The most recent incident was the previous Monday, when their cellphones and personal belongings were robbed. They demanded police escorts on call-outs. A memorandum of demands was handed in.

## **College students protest over non-payment at TVET College in uMgungundlovu, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa**

Classes at the Northdale Campus at TVET College in uMgungundlovu, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa were shut down April 11 during a protest by students over the non-payment of their National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Nsfas) allowances. Around 40 percent of students had not received the payment. Fires were lit in protest outside the college.

Payments are made to students based on their attendance, with registration information sent to the outsourced company. Students are demanding the institution go back to paying the allowances directly to students' accounts rather than a third company.

One student protesting, Yassin Shoba, told *Witness*, "Every student that is here, is here because they have no choice. They are scared that they will be brutally treated by management of the campus. There is no money for us to travel to campus," he said.

Another student, Ntokozo Miya, said, "We do not have money due to Nsfas allowances not being paid. Some core modules require 80 percent attendance and there are no lecturers for them."

The Student Representative Council (SRC) stated, "They told us that getting this list will take them approximately six days. We, as the SRC, decided to completely shut down the school for those six days until this

matter is resolved."

### **South African teachers strike at Hazyview in Mpumalanga to demand safety in schools**

Dozens of teachers held a protest at the Department of Education on Tuesday in Mpumalanga, South Africa calling for the strengthening of security following an increasing number of attacks on them and pupils.

They are demanding security officers as well as cameras, as currently people can enter the schools without being asked for identity.

According to *The Citizen*, there have recently been a number of robberies of cellphones and laptops in the province at both primary and secondary schools.

### **Community Health Workers in Gqeberha, South Africa march for permanent jobs**

Around 100 Community Health workers marched to the Department of Health in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa April 12 to demand permanent jobs.

The march included members of the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) and Cry of the Excluded NGO among others, with marchers carrying a Palestinian flag supporting health workers in Gaza.

Some 98 percent of the workers are women who provide the main source of income for their families. Currently they are offered one to three months' contracts with no overtime pay.

Care worker Nonkululeko Zamxaka from Soweto on Sea told *GroundUp* she earns R4,480 per month, with one of her key duties being to test for HIV for over four hours a day at her local clinic.

The workers submitted a list of demands including permanent contracts, uniforms and that the department ensure their contracts are renewed on time and without issues.

### **Namibian marine engineering workers walk out to protest attacks on work conditions**

Namibian employees of marine engineering company Namdock walked off the job on April 8 and protested in front of the company entrance.

They accuse top management of unilaterally changing their working conditions.

One Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union member, who spoke anonymously for fear of victimisation, said management cancelled their tea breaks. "The company took away our tea time without even consulting with our bargaining unit. The new working conditions were simply implemented without any of us being informed about the changes."

Namdock accused its employees of initiating unlawful industrial action and gave notice that the Namibian police force would be on-site to "maintain order." The company is partly owned by the Namibian Ports Authority.

### **Parliamentary workers continue strike over unpaid allowances in Anambra State, Nigeria**

Parliamentary staff at the Anambra State House of Assembly are continuing their stoppage begun March 28 over unpaid allowances.

Leaders of the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria met with the Speaker of the Assembly on April 11, but no agreement was made. The strikers resolved that their strike would continue until they are paid all the monies owing to them since 2019.



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