

Widespread stoppages across Greece on May Day denounce Gaza genocide; protests against cost-of-living crisis continue in Iran; doctors and clinicians' strike continues in Kenya over pay, conditions and funding

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 May 2024

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Greek workers hold widespread stoppages for May Day

On Wednesday, International Workers' Day, many workers in Greece stopped work to protest the austerity and poor working conditions faced by the working class. Public transport workers, sailors, journalists, teachers and others joined the one-day strike and protest called by the General Confederation of Greek Workers.

Many demonstrators in Athens carried Gazan flags and denounced the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians by the Israeli regime. One told *Kathimerini* "It was our duty not to forget that genocide as the (Labour) day calls."

Swedish nurses begin overtime ban, as employers demand deregulation of working hours "due to Sweden's entry into NATO"

Around 63,000 nurses, midwives and other healthcare workers in Sweden began to refuse overtime on April 25, as part of a dispute between the Healthcare Association union and the Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR) and Sobona employers' associations.

Nurses are calling for shorter working hours, improvements in schedules and rest periods, and for hospitals to stop relying on overtime, the *Göteborgs-Posten* reported.

The Healthcare Association said the employers not only refused to meet their demands for shorter hours but were calling for healthcare workers to be exempt from the Working Hours Act. The act sets limits on working hours but allows unions to sign away these protections in a collective agreement.

The union quoted the SKR and Sobona's written justification, that "among other things, ongoing investigations into society's preparedness functions with a connection to working hours due to Sweden's entry into NATO. This in combination with an uncertainty about the long-term

needs of the [healthcare] organisations."

Metal workers continue rolling strikes in the Netherlands

Dutch metal workers continued rolling regional strikes this week, during negotiations over a new collective agreement between the trade unions and Federation of Technology Employers' Organisations.

According to *De Limburger* thousands of workers were expected to go on strike in Limburg province on Wednesday.

The unions are calling for a 10.1 percent pay rise and an additional 100 euros, as well as higher pay for younger workers to cover the 60,000 vacancies in the sector, the local paper reported. The employers' offered a pay rise of 9.2 percent but spread over 22 months.

Portuguese court workers hold new strikes over pay, staffing and overtime pay

Workers in Portuguese courts held two new one-day strikes last week, on Wednesday and Friday, in a long-running dispute over pay, staffing levels and overtime payments.

According to *Lusa*, court workers have also refused all work before 9am, after 5pm or during the lunch hour since January 8.

The government attempted to impose minimum-service requirements during last week's strikes, as Thursday was also a public holiday and so several criminal suspects were released because they could not be interrogated by a magistrate within 48 hours of being arrested.

The Lisbon Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the Judicial Employees' Union, which appealed the government's decision and attributed the release of the suspects to "pure incompetence" of the Ministry of Justice, *Lusa* reported. The court rejected the minimum service requirement, as requiring work after 5pm would be "intended to impose a system of court functioning that is not imposed in normal times [i.e., in the absence of a strike]".

Strike at Portuguese packaging factory for collective agreement

Workers at the packaging factory in the Portuguese city of Viana do Castelo held a stoppage from Saturday until Tuesday, called by the Union of Workers of Manufacturing Industries, Energy and Environmental Activities of the North (SITE Norte).

The union is calling for British multinational DS Smith to sign a new collective agreement, and has been in negotiations since February, calling for a 4.3 percent pay rise.

SITE Norte told *Lusa* that there was a “strong police presence” near their pickets, as gendarmes were deployed to ensure strike breakers were able to enter the factory.

Quarry workers in Carrara, Italy, strike after businessman calls injured workers “morons”

Quarry workers in the Italian province of Massa-Carrara, famous for its high-quality marble, held a strike on April 24. Hundreds protested in the town of Carrara, to denounce comments by CEO Alberto Franchini of a marble company, who blamed workers for industrial accidents.

Public broadcaster *Rai* interviewed Franchini as part of an investigation into the enormous profit margins made on Carrara marble and broadcast his outburst when he said workers “get hurt because they are morons [deficienti]”. He said clearly “accidents have occurred in the last ten years, I’m sorry to say it, but unfortunately it’s the workers’ fault.”

The general secretary of the CGIL union pointed out that “the stone industry is one of the sectors with the highest rate of accidents, not to mention occupational disease”, including fatal accidents, *dire.it* reported.

Italian auto workers strike against unsafe conditions at Stellantis factory

On Tuesday, workers at the Stellantis factory in Pomigliano d’Arco, Naples, stopped work for eight hours in each shift to denounce unsafe conditions in the factory. According to the unions, 90 percent of workers at the plant joined the strike, while Stellantis claims it was 70 percent.

ANSA reported that the unions cited problems with “cleanliness and hygiene within the production units,” as well as the malfunction of extractor fans which could allow toxic fumes to build up inside the factory.

Strike at Stellantis supplier in France against plant closure

A strike at a Stellantis parts supplier in France has stopped production at three of the auto manufacturing group’s factories, two in France and one in the UK.

According to *Le Figaro*, 280 workers at MA France, a former Peugeot factory in Seine-Saint-Denis near Paris which produces stamped metal parts, have been on strike since April 17 against the potential closure of their plant.

Stellantis said it plans to resume production at one of the three factories indirectly affected this week, and the other two next week.

Indefinite strike against understaffing at French hospital

Workers at the hospital in the southern French town of Lavaur began an indefinite strike against understaffing on April 24, with more than 150 joining a strike meeting in the hospital courtyard on the 25th, *La Dépêche* reported.

Healthcare workers at the hospital are calling for the urgent hiring of around 30 new staff to replace those who have resigned, and say staff shortages have made it impossible to take holiday time.

One nurse in the nursing home at the hospital told *La Dépêche* that “for 76 residents, there is only one nurse in the morning and one in the evening.” The General Confederation of Labour said it met with the hospital’s management which “even denies that there have been job cuts.”

Striking bin workers in Ferizaj, Kosovo, threatened by local government

The municipal government in the city of Ferizaj in Kosovo declared a “state of emergency” on Friday last week, in an attempt to break the ongoing strike by drivers of bin lorries.

It threatened the “mobilisation of the entire municipal mechanism” to enforce waste collection. In a Facebook post, the municipal government claimed the law included sanitation workers in the category of those who had no right to strike.

The Qëndresa trade union told *Kallxo.com* that the drivers would not return to work until the head of the municipal cleaning company resigned, accusing him of abusing and threatening employees.

Uber Eats delivery workers hold two-day strike in Brussels, Belgium

Delivery workers in Brussels began a two-day strike on Tuesday against Uber Eats, demanding an increase in pay by 2 euros per trip and 50 cents per kilometre, and an end to dismissals without any notice, *RTL* reported.

The “Maison des delivreurs” collective called the strike and told the media that their pay has not increased since 2019, while prices have risen by at least 20 percent. It denounced Uber Eats for automatically dismissing workers by disconnecting their app when “decided by the algorithm without any real possibility of defending their point of view.”

Baggage workers at Copenhagen Airport, Denmark, hold wildcat strike over shift patterns

Baggage handling workers employed by SAS Ground Handling held a brief wildcat strike at Copenhagen Airport on Saturday morning, opposing increased working hours, unpaid breaks and excessive weekend shifts, *Ekstra Bladet* reported.

They reportedly walked out at Denmark’s largest airport at 7:30am until 10am.

Border force staff at London's Heathrow airport walk out over roster changes

Around 300 border force staff working at London's Heathrow airport's terminals 2, 3, 4 and 5 began a four-day stoppage Monday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members are responsible for checking passports of airline passengers arriving and departing from the airport. They oppose proposals by Border Force (part of the UK Home Office) to impose new working rosters. According to the PCS, the new rosters mean staff will be forced to work over 50 hours a week in 10-hour shifts. Border Force staff have few breaks and cannot swap shifts with colleagues.

PCS say the roster changes will discriminate "against older workers, women and those workers with families, and those with disabilities. It makes it almost impossible to fulfil caring responsibilities."

According to the PCS, around 250 of the workers with caring responsibilities will be forced out if the new roster plans go ahead.

Unite calls off planned strike of airline refuelling workers at London's Heathrow airport

The Unite union has called off a planned 72-hour stoppage of AFS employees at Heathrow airport.

AFS is responsible for refuelling planes of 35 airlines at the airport. Unite called off the action after AFS offered improved pension and sickness payments for new employees in line with current workers' conditions.

Strike by teachers at school in Bedford, England over pension changes

Teachers at the Bedford Greenacre Independent School, England walked out Wednesday and Thursday.

The National Education Union (NEU) members were responding to planned changes to their pension arrangements to be implemented by the school management. Teachers belonging to the Teacher's Pension Scheme (TPS) face either a 3.5 percent pay cut or transfer to an inferior defined contribution scheme from September this year. The school management is taking the action in response to a forthcoming increase in employers' contribution to the TPS. According to the NEU, the teachers have been threatened with "fire and rehire" tactics over the proposed changes.

The NEU members held two days of stoppage over the same issue last week and further walkouts are scheduled for next week.

Strikes by children's nursery staff at Balham and Eastwood, London over proposed cuts

Staff at Balham and Eastwood nurseries run by Wandsworth council in

the UK capital have been taking days of strike action since the end of March including April 23 and 24.

The action by NEU and NASUWT members was in response to Wandsworth council's plans to cut posts at the two nurseries, including special needs coordinators. Rated as "outstanding" by Ofsted, the nurseries have a large proportion of children with special needs.

Teachers at school in Hessle, England walk out over new pay scheme

Around 70 UK teachers at St Anne's School and Sixth Form College in Hessle, east Yorkshire were set to hold three days of stoppage this week on top of two days last week.

The NEU members are protesting the replacement of an existing pay scheme with one that does not give extra payments for dealing with pupils with special educational needs.

Protest in Ellesmere Port, UK by parents over inadequate provision for children with special needs

Around 40 parents gathered outside The Portal in Ellesmere Port in England. The Portal houses the offices of the Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC). The protesters were accusing CWAC of ignoring its legal obligations for supporting children with special needs and disabilities (SEND).

Kim Bilcliffe, who has a four-year-old son with special needs, told the BBC News website that the CWAC Special Education Needs (SEN) team was only meeting the 20-week legal timescale for producing Educational Health Care plans (EHCs) in nine percent of cases.

She told the BBC, 'We want the SEN team to put the needs of parents and children at the heart of everything they are doing.'

Nuclear submarine production workers in Derbyshire, UK begin work-to-rule over pay

UK workers at Rolls-Royce's Raynesway nuclear submarine production site in Derbyshire began a month-long work-to-rule on Monday.

The GMB members voted by a 90 percent majority to take action after rejecting a pay offer from the company.

Unions call off scheduled strike of nuclear power plant workers at Dounreay, Scotland as employer makes new offer

Workers at the Dounreay nuclear power plant were due to strike Wednesday and Thursday this week and again on May 15 and 19.

The Unite, GMB and Prospect union members voted by overwhelming majorities to strike after rejecting a 4.5 percent pay offer from April 2023. However, the employer, Nuclear Restoration Services Limited, came back with a new offer. The three unions suspended the planned stoppage while their members consider the new offer.

Unite calls off strike of library workers in Greenwich, London over pay and contracts

A planned strike of around 60 employees of social enterprise body, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) in London due to take place Tuesday was called off by Unite.

The workers across 12 libraries of the London borough previously walked out in March. They were protesting low pay with GLL delaying pay rises in line with the London Living Wage, to which it subscribes. They were also protesting the use of zero-hour contracts. The scheduled stoppage was called off as GLL came up with an offer described by Unite as “a great victory for employee solidarity.”

Continuing protests across Iran over mounting cost-of-living crisis

Monday saw further protests across Iran by workers and pensioners against deteriorating living conditions.

Retirees of the Telecommunications Company of Iran held protests in Tehran, Kermanshah, Tabriz, Sanandaj, Khorramabad, Ardebil and Urmia cities across Iran held protests against the declining value of their pensions.

Gold bazaar merchants in Tehran and in Tabriz walked out to protest steep rises in taxes. In Shush, striking workers from paper manufacturer Pars Paper demonstrated in front of the governorate.

Between April 26 and April 28 truck owners in several cities, including Tehran, Sistan-Baluchistan, Kerman, Ilam and Asaluyeh, took their trucks off the road. They are protesting rising fuel prices as the Iranian government cuts back on its allocation of fuel subsidies. In Tehran the striking truck drivers blockaded the Babaei Highway in the northeast of the city.

Tomato growers in Rudhar-e-Jonubi protested in front of the governorate’s office on April 27. They were protesting the rising prices of agricultural products needed to produce their crop. The rising costs are making tomato production unprofitable.

With inflation currently at 35 percent, and its economy near collapse due to US sanctions, Iran is being drawn into NATO’s widening war in the Middle East through provocations such as the killing April 1 of seven military officers and two generals in the Iranian embassy in Syria in an airstrike by Israel’s IDF.

Kenyan doctors continue national strike over staff shortages, pay and funding

Kenyan doctors and clinicians are continuing their national stoppage, begun March 14 to protest the government’s broken promises made to end a 100-day strike in 2017. Despite many attempts to force them back to work including declaring the strike illegal, the doctors are refusing to back down until their demands are addressed.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union, Kenya Union of Clinical Officers and Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers’ grievances include the lack of comprehensive health insurance, delayed posting of medical interns, proposals to reduce interns’ salaries by nearly 80 percent, and staff shortages. The national and county governments have also refused to fund training and development, denying doctors any study leave and not paying training fees for the last six years.

Several other public sector unions are claiming to support the doctors but are calling only for demonstrations every Tuesday rather than strikes in solidarity.

Kenya’s funding of the health sector has consistently fallen short, even compared to other African countries, with only 4.5 percent of its GDP going to health.

Doctors on one-week strike at hospital in Delta State, Nigeria

Resident doctors at the Delta State University Teaching Hospital (DELSUTH) in Nigeria began a one-week strike on April 27 to protest the inadequate state government funding and lack of training for resident doctors.

Dr. Harrison Udjah, President of the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) at DELSUTH said, “Despite recent renovations, the ongoing decay of the hospital is glaringly evident. The elevator has never functioned, plumbing remains as problematic as it was before the refurbishment, fixtures are falling apart, and the air conditioning units and fans have all malfunctioned. Working within the hospital has become an extremely distressing experience...”

Petrol tanker drivers in one-day strike in Nigeria to protest rising costs

Many petrol stations in Nigeria were closed at the end of April due to a one-day strike by petrol tanker drivers, who downed tools on April 29.

The action called by the Nigerian Association of Road Transport Owners was to protest the poor state of the roads and second devaluation of the naira currency, forcing up operational costs. Fuel marketers have now agreed to increase freight charges.

Sacked security guards continue protest in Johannesburg, South Africa to demand jobs back

Security guards have set up camp for the past two weeks outside the offices of the Gauteng Department of Health in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The South African Cleaners, Security and Allied Workers Union (Sacsaaawu) members have been sacked and are demanding their jobs back. The workers were on month-to-month temporary contracts. They vow to continue the protest, which involves sleeping overnight, despite a court interdict demanding it ends.

Sacsaaawu secretary-general Diphapang Potsane issued a further demand: “We want our provident funds, UIF [unemployment insurance fund], and medical aid back because they were being deducted from our salaries but were not paid into the fund.”

South African students at Port Elizabeth TVET College in Gqeberha continue protest over non-payment of living allowances

South African students at Port Elizabeth TVET College in Gqeberha are continuing their two month-long protests over unpaid National Student Financial Aid Scheme's (NSFAS) allowances, and other management issues. Lectures and other academic activities have been suspended since March.

Students have had to look for part-time jobs to pay for their food, transport and housing and some face eviction since they are unable to pay rent without the allowances. Students also say the college does not check accommodation is up to standard. One told *GroundUp* that, "Three students share a very small room which does not have air conditioning and is not ideal for studying. We are also made to pay for electricity. The water is dirty and smells bad, so we have no choice but to buy bottled water."

Student representative Siyabulela Stuurman said concerns were raised with management on 16 February: "The college promised to fix our demands. But after weeks we discovered that nothing was being done; that's when we decided to close all gates."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact