

National public sector strikes in Greece and Portugal over wages; pension and wage protests continue across Iran; Ghanaian judicial workers in indefinite walkout

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 Greece over wages and staffing levels

Public sector workers in Greece held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday, calling for a universal 10 percent pay increase, an increase in the amount of salary exempt from income tax to 12,000 euros, and for bonuses to be paid again.

Teachers, healthcare workers and municipal workers joined the strike, but the transport workers' unions did not call their members to walk out.

The Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY), which called the strike, said that real wages are now 40 percent lower than 14 years ago, when austerity measures began. ADEDY also called for increased hiring on permanent contracts in hospitals, schools and other public services.

According to *ef.syn*, the unions met with an official from the Ministry of Finance, who reportedly refused all their demands, citing "fiscal constraints." The official said the government would only hire enough new public sector workers to replace those who retire or leave.

Workers in Portuguese public services hold one-day strike over pay and working conditions

On Friday last week, public sector workers in Portugal held a 24-hour strike in hospitals, schools, courts and other services, and thousands joined a protest in Lisbon.

The Common Front of Public Administration Unions called for a pay rise of at least 15 percent, or a minimum of 150 euros increase in monthly salaries, as well as improvements to working conditions and staffing levels.

Strike over wages at Portuguese aeronautics and military equipment company maintenance company OGMA

Workers at OGMA, a Portuguese aeronautics company with many contracts from the US, Britain and other countries to maintain military equipment, held a four-hour strike over wages on Monday.

According to *Esquerda.net*, the three unions representing workers at OGMA called for an 80 euro increase in monthly salaries backdated to April, and a further 100 euros from September. OGMA has offered only 2.5 percent. The unions say it imposed a pay freeze between 2010 and 2017, and low increases after that.

OGMA is 35 percent owned by the Portuguese state, and since privatisation in 2005 has been 65 percent owned by the Brazilian multinational Embraer.

Major teachers' strikes in two Spanish communities

Teachers in Valencia and Madrid, Spain held strikes this week, with thousands joining rallies in the cities.

In Madrid, teachers' unions called a strike on Tuesday, calling for a reduction in school hours and class sizes, an increase in pay to the level of other autonomous communities and other improvements to working conditions, *Europa Press* reported. This is the second teachers' strike for these demands, following a one-day stoppage on May 8. The unions said that 67 percent of teachers stopped work, while the Community of Madrid says 23.4 percent did so.

Teachers in Valencia stopped work on Thursday to oppose the education policies of the right-wing coalition government in the Generalitat Valenciana. According to *The Leader*, the Generalitat plans to cut funding for construction of schools and vocational training, and will close 206 kindergartens and primary school classes. It also plans to change the school district system, so parents will be able to choose schools outside their own neighbourhoods. The unions said this will disproportionately benefit well-off families and is "segregating."

The new so-called "educational freedom law" on language is also opposed by many teachers. The law allows parents to vote on which language—Spanish or Valencian—is used for each course, *The Leader* reported. The unions described this as an attack on Valencian and called for its withdrawal.

The Generalitat's Minister of Education, José Antonio Rovira of the right-wing People's Party (PP), refused to withdraw the education policies, claiming they are "an electoral programme endorsed by the

majority of Valencians,” *Europa Press* reported.

This is a lie, even in electoral terms: the PP received only 35.7 percent of the vote in the 2023 election, and its far-right coalition partner Vox received 12.6 percent. The government’s total of 48.3 percent was on a turnout of only 67 percent, so less than one in three of the full electorate in Valencia voted for the current government.

Strikes continue in Dutch metalworking sector

Dutch metalworkers continue rolling strikes in an ongoing collective bargaining dispute, with workers in the province of Drenthe stopping work for 24 hours on Thursday, and in Utrecht and North Holland on Friday, the *Algemeen Dagblad* reported. Hundreds of workers have joined each of the regional strikes so far.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) are reportedly calling for a pay rise of at least 10 percent in negotiations with the Federation of Technology Employers’ Organisations, which represents smaller metal companies. The employers offered only 9.19 percent spread across two years for the 360,000 workers covered by the agreement.

According to *Metaal Nieuws*, the FNV and CNV last week reached a collective agreement with the FME employers’ association, which represents the larger manufacturing companies. The deal includes a 9 percent pay rise spread over 18 months, equivalent to around 5.9 percent annually.

The FME claimed to find it challenging to increase wages, as its members “suffer from unfair competition from abroad.” The FNV accepted this and issued its own call for protectionist measures, pledging to “work together with FME to get this much higher on the agenda of politicians in The Hague.”

Serbian teachers hold one-day strike against violence in schools

Teachers from hundreds of schools in Serbia stopped work on Wednesday last week in response to an attack on a teacher in the town of Baćka Palanka. The teacher was hospitalised after a former student hit him with a paving slab.

The Trade Union of Education Workers of Serbia said there is a specific law covering violence against lawyers, which they want extended to teachers, *Blic* reported. According to the union, its 26,000 members in 860 schools stopped work.

Transport workers fight privatisation in Belgrade, Serbia

On Tuesday, transport workers in Belgrade held a protest and blockaded several streets to oppose plans to privatise several routes in the Serbian capital.

Three unions representing workers at the City Transport Company (GSP), owned by the City of Belgrade, called for the transfer of routes from GSP to private companies to be suspended, and a “guarantee that no GSP plant will be closed due to a reduction in the volume of work and the transfer of the same work to a private carrier,” according to *Nova*.

More blockades and strikes are reportedly planned for Friday and

Monday.

The opposition People’s Movement of Serbia said it suspected GSP was “deliberately pushing itself into financial debts and devastation in order to bring it to a stage where the only way out is privatisation,” and accused its management of privatisation “introduced through the back door.” However, its own plans for GSP involved restructuring and job cuts, and it did not rule out privatising some routes, *Nova* reported.

Swedish nurses to strike in dispute over workload

Around 2,000 nurses in Sweden will strike on June 4, escalating the month-long conflict over their workload. On April 25, the Healthcare Association union called an overtime ban for 63,000 nurses and midwives, calling on the Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR) and Sobona employers’ associations to reduce working hours and stop relying on overtime.

The employers demanded that the union agree to an exemption from the Working Hours Act for healthcare workers, claiming this was necessary “due to Sweden’s entry into NATO... in combination with an uncertainty about the long-term needs of the [healthcare] organisations.”

French rail and airport workers strike for “Olympic bonus”

Workers on the French railways and airports walked out this week to demand an “Olympic bonus” in return for the enormous extra workload which will accompany the Olympic and Paralympic games in Paris between July and September.

Rail workers in the Île-de-France region, which contains the capital, held a one-day strike on Tuesday, stopping between 60 and 80 percent of commuter rail services during peak times and most services outside of rush hour.

According to *RTL*, the rail strike only affected services operated by the national rail company SNCF, as the unions have already negotiated a separate bonus averaging 1,000 euro for workers at the Parisian Autonomous Transport Administration (RATP). The SNCF has reportedly so far only offered an extra 50 euros per day for working during the Olympics. At least one of the rail unions, Sud-rail, also called for a 400 euro increase in basic monthly salaries.

The same day, workers at Aéroports de Paris—the company which operates the two major airports in the capital, which is 50.6-percent state-owned—also went on strike to call for a “homogeneous bonus” to everybody working during the Olympics, as well as an “emergency hiring plan” to increase staffing levels, *Ouest France* reported.

Italian government bans rail strike during Formula 1 competition

Italy’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, Matteo Salvini, signed an injunction May 16, banning a rail strike called for May 19-20 by the CUB Trasporti, USB and SGB unions.

A statement on the Ministry of Transport’s website says the decision was “made especially in view of the weekend for Formula 1 fans,” as 200,000 are expected to attend the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix near Bologna. The statement cited potential “problems of public order and

safety" but was blatantly taken in light of the impact on a profitable event.

Officially, the strike was only postponed, and can be rearranged to another date. However, as the USB said in a statement "in a nutshell, it is written that the strike is illegitimate because there would be widespread participation. Ergo, in Italy, only strikes that don't work would be allowed".

Strike by thousands of education support staff in Northern Ireland to demand implementation of pay and grading review

Thousands of education support staff in Northern Ireland began a three-day stoppage Monday to demand the devolved Stormont government implements in full a recommended pay and grading review.

The workers are employed as bus drivers, classroom assistants, cleaning and catering staff in Northern Ireland schools. They belong to the Unite, Nipsa and GMB unions. Workers in the Unison union are taking action short of striking over the same issue.

The Unite and Nipsa members stoppage was for the full three days, while GMB members walked out Monday and Tuesday. All three unions are due to strike June 3-4 over the issue.

Strike by UK Royal Fleet Auxiliary seafarers over pay

Around 500 seafarers working for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) were on strike Sunday. The seafarers are civilians but supply logistical and operational support to the UK's Royal Navy.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have rejected a 4.5 percent pay rise implemented by the RFA. They are pushing for an increased offer.

The RMT—which refers to its members on RFA vessels as being involved in "humanitarian operations"—has made no attempt to mobilise its RFA members providing support to Royal Navy operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea facilitating Israel's operations in Gaza.

Further strike by job centre security staff in England strike over pay

Around 1,000 security staff employed by security firm G4S to provide security at Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre offices in England held a fourth 24-hour strike Monday.

The GMB members are protesting a below-inflation pay offer, which, according to the GMB, would mean around 70 percent of the security staff only being on the minimum wage.

A 48-hour stoppage is planned for May 28.

Last week the result of a ballot of Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members working in G4S on the DWP contract was announced. The PCS members voted by a 95 percent majority to strike over the issue of pay. The PCS has yet to announce any strike dates.

The strike of security staff has led to the closure of some job centres over security fears.

Plastic container manufacturer workers in Norwich strike over pay

Around 100 workers at the Berry Norwich factory in Norwich began a three-day stoppage Sunday. Berry Norwich produces plastic containers, including for food products.

The Unite union members work as engineers, operators and maintenance staff at the site. They have rejected a pay offer of 3.5 percent due to have been paid from October when RPI inflation was over six percent. Berry, which trades as Massmould Ltd, made operating profits of £2,695,000 for the year ending September 2022.

Further walkouts are planned for May 28-30 and June 1-2.

Supermarket staff in Brighton, UK set to strike over pay and working conditions

Around 100 staff working for the Asda supermarket chain's Brighton Hollingbury Superstore in south east England are set to walk out on Friday from 8pm Friday until 3pm Saturday.

The GMB members' dispute is over several issues, including cuts in working hours, unresolved equal pay issues, fast pace of work and lack of collective bargaining rights for the GMB union.

GMB members at Asda stores in Gosport, Lowestoft and Wisbech have also recently been on strike over similar issues. A GMB press release noted, "There are further stores across the South East where members have voted overwhelmingly to be balloted formally and where formal industrial action ballots may well follow next."

Engineering workers in north east England set to strike over pay

Around 170 workers at three British Engines sites in Newcastle and South Shields are due to begin a seven-day stoppage Friday.

The Unite union members at the three sites, BEL Engineering in Newcastle and Rotary Power and Michell Bearings in South Shields, rejected a 3 percent pay offer by overwhelming majorities at each site. The offer is real terms pay cut.

Various stoppages by UK teachers

Around 70 teachers at the prestigious Blue Coat School in Liverpool, England, walked out on Tuesday and Thursday this week over claims of bullying by management and excessive workloads.

The National Education Union (NEU) members walked out two days last week, with further strikes planned for June 12-13.

Staff say there is an atmosphere of chaos at the school. Since 2020, two headteachers at the school have quit and are under investigation by the Teaching Regulation Agency. A former assistant headteacher at the school who was sacked last year is also under investigation. This week the chair of the board of trustees stood down.

Teachers at Byron Court Primary School in Wembley, North London walked out Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

The action by NEU members follows a one-day stoppage last week. The school is threatened with academisation following an inadequate Ofsted report in November last year. A three-day stoppage is planned from June 4.

Teachers and administrative staff at the Sir Francis Hill Community

Primary School in Lincoln, England walked out on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The action by NEU, NASUWT and Unison members follows previous action. They accuse the school manager of bullying. Parents joined strikers on the picket line this week to show their support.

Further strikes are planned for June 4-6 and June 10-13.

NEU members at the James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS) private day school in south east London were on strike Wednesday, over plans by the school to remove them from the teachers' pension scheme (TPS). JAGS is the second oldest independent girls' school in the UK.

NEU members at the King Edward V Lordswood school for girls, Birmingham were set to walk out Thursday over plans by the school to remove teachers from the TPS.

Security staff at London hospital strike over pay

Around 30 security staff at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals were set to begin a 10-day stoppage Thursday.

The Unite union members are pushing for a 96p per hour increase. It follows previous action, begun in March. Hospital security staff at other London hospitals, such as King College Hospital, have starting salaries of £30,000 a year.

Protest over funding cuts to Welsh National Opera

Tuesday saw a protest outside the Welsh devolved government, Senedd. Hundreds of supporters joined with members of the Welsh National Opera (WNO). They were protesting a 35 percent funding cut by the Arts Council of England, together with a 11.8 percent cut by the Arts Council of Wales.

The WNO members' protest included singing selections of music including from Bizet's *Carmen* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

In addition, a letter of protest against the cuts was sent to the Welsh First Minister, Vaughan Gething. Signatories included Sir Bryn Terfel, Ruth Jones and Michael Sheen.

Supermarket warehouse staff in Cheshire and Wakefield, UK strike over pension changes

Around 1,000 workers employed as warehouse stock controllers, canteen staff and administrators at Morrisons supermarket warehouses in Wakefield and Cheshire began a four-day stoppage Thursday.

The Unite union members voted overwhelmingly to strike against proposals by the company for workers to increase their pension contributions while the company reduces its contribution. Unite say it would mean workers being around £500 a year worse off. Morrisons recorded profits of nearly £1 billion in October last year.

Additionally, Morrisons wants to get rid of a long service award, impose changes in job roles and increase the "pick rate" for workers to pack items from the shelves.

A further walkout is planned for June 13-16.

Middle East

Ongoing protests in Iran

Sunday saw ongoing protests by workers and pensioners across Iran.

In Tehran, retired teachers rallied outside the Planning and Budget Organisation. They were protesting the inadequate levels of their pensions.

In Tehran and Isfahan, retired steel workers protested the low levels of their pensions in face of a cost-of-living crisis.

Social security organisation retirees in Ahvaz and Kermanshah also protested, demanding increased pensions.

Rail workers in Kerman in south-eastern Iran took to the streets protesting the dismissal of fellow workers, as well as calling for increased pay and improved working conditions.

Jewellers and gold merchants in Tehran closed their businesses to protest new punitive taxes.

Tuesday saw strikes of oil project workers in Asaluyeh opposing an inadequate pay rise offer. The workers vowed to continue their protests for a pay increase.

With inflation currently at 35 percent and the economy near collapse due to US sanctions, Iran is being drawn into NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, in Ukraine against Russia, and war plans against China.

Protests over power outages in Yemen's Aden city

Protests took place last week the Yemeni port city of Aden.

Crowds of people thronged the streets protesting electricity blackouts lasting more than 10 hours. The blackouts coincided with an excessive heatwave, leading to intolerable living conditions. In response, security forces were mobilised to subdue the protests.

Ghanaian judicial workers walk out on national strike due to non-payment

Judicial workers in Ghana walked out in an indefinite national strike on May 16, due to the non-payment of allowances from February last year and from July last year to the present.

"This situation has made it practically impossible for us to continue to pre-finance our transportation to and from the court premises," their statement said.

The workers had been promised the arrears would be paid in May. Failure to keep this promise triggered the strike.

Tunisian lawyers hold one-day strike to oppose police torture of colleague

Tunisian lawyers launched a one-day strike on May 16, following the arrest and torture of two of their colleagues. The strike is part of an upsurge of struggle against the repression meted out by the regime of President Kais Saied.

Hundreds took to the streets of the capital city, Tunis on May 16, denouncing the arrests and torture. Two journalists had also been recently arrested. "No fear, no terror. Power belongs to the people," were among the slogans chanted by demonstrators.

Nigeria Labour Congress rejects government offer on minimum wage, admits to discussing cuts

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) have rejected the latest government minimum wage offer of N54,000.

Saying more than he intended, NLC spokesperson Professor Theophilus Ndubaku stated "What we are negotiating now is wage reduction because what they are now telling us is that if we walk out from there, if we agree on N54,000, that means we will come out and tell people who are already earning N77,000 that their wage has been reduced."

Ndubaku claimed that the unions were maintaining their demand for N615,000 as the new minimum wage, but their past actions prove that this claim is for public consumption only.

Nigerian airline workers picket to oppose sackings

Workers picketed Turkish Airlines on May 21, protesting the dismissal of seven members of the National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE).

The NLC claimed the protests will continue until everyone sacked or forced to resign by the airline had been reinstated. The airline has been accused of targeting NUATE members for dismissal and replacing them with non-members.

Refuse workers in Johannesburg, South Africa strike for permanent employment

Up to 300 casual waste collection workers sub-contracted to the Pikitup municipal refuse collection agency in Johannesburg, South Africa, have been on wildcat strikes and protests since May 16 demanding permanent contracts.

The Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Unions of South Africa (DEMAWUSA) members want to be absorbed into Pikitup, with permanent employment, membership of the municipal employee share scheme and access to personal protective equipment.

They say there is corruption within the tendering process for companies employing casual workers but another union, the South African Municipal Workers Union, which represents Pikitup's permanent employees, has denounced the claims and refused to support the striking workers.

Many of those on strike are employed via the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), a discredited African National Congress (ANC) government scheme in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector but without the salary or benefits given to direct employees.

Health workers barrack President Cyril Ramaphosa at election rally

in South Africa, demanding improved pay and conditions

Temporary and part-time community healthcare workers stopped South African president Cyril Ramaphosa from speaking to ANC supporters at an election rally in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal on Friday.

The workers interrupted Ramaphosa with chants and calls for him to meet them before the national elections on May 29. They demand that he absorb them fully into the health service, giving them permanent contracts, full-time employment, improved wages and access to pensions and health insurance.

Many of the temporary workers are from the discredited the Expanded Public Works Programme, the ANC government's scheme that Ramaphosa is still promoting as a solution to the country's mass unemployment.

Community protestors halt operations at Glencore vanadium mine in South Africa

Local protestors have blocked access roads and halted production since April 29 at the Rhovan open-cast vanadium mine and smelter complex in Rustenburg, South Africa, majority owned by Swiss multinational commodity trading and mining company Glencore.

The local Bakwena-ba-Mogopa Community Development Foundation, a 26 percent shareholder in the mine, has put forward grievances around the lack of job opportunities for local youth and the relationship between Glencore and the local tribal community.

South African transport workers protest in Pretoria over unpaid wages

Transport workers sub-contracted to North West provincial-government-owned North West Transport Investments (NTI) marched to the Gauteng province's Department of Transport offices in Pretoria May 8. The workers demanded intervention over non-payment of wages by NTI for the last four months.

The South African Workers Union Ya Bashumi and Economic Freedom Fighters members accuse NTI of financial mismanagement and corruption, insisting it is the Gauteng provincial government's responsibility to pay their salaries. The protest was monitored with a substantial police presence.



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