

Dock workers strike in France against pension reform; Iraqi oil workers' peaceful protests at South Refineries Company met with violence by security forces; Women on Farms Project protesting deadly pesticides use in South Africa attacked with stun grenades

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.

French dock workers strike against pension reform

On Friday, workers at French ports will hold the first of four 24-hour strikes called throughout June by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) against the pension reform forced through last year by the Macron government. Ten shorter four-hour stoppages will follow over the month.

Before 2023, dock workers were eligible for retirement at 58, but the reform extended the retirement age to 60. The CGT stated: "In April 2021, the President of the Republic clearly expressed during a visit to the port of Le Havre that the pension reform would not apply to dock workers and port workers," accusing the government of a "lack of respect for its commitments", *La Provence* reported.

However, if the government was able to force through the pension reform and renege on promises it made to divide workers by profession, it was only due to the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy, including the CGT. While two-thirds of the French population was in favour of a general strike against the law, the unions restricted the movement against the reform to a few token stoppages and opened "negotiations" with the government.

Fuel refinery workers resume strike against job losses in France

On Tuesday, workers at the ExxonMobil oil refinery in the French town of Port-Jérôme-sur-Seine resumed their indefinite strike stopping production. They are opposing a partial closure of the plant, involving hundreds of job losses.

The CGT called an indefinite strike from May 24 against the loss of 647 jobs and a further 30 elsewhere in France, but suspended it last week during negotiations.

The CGT told *Franceinfo* an early retirement scheme already exists, providing 80 percent of normal salary as a pension, and "we ask that the

company at least match this" for the hundreds of workers made redundant. It told the broadcaster that ExxonMobil's current director had already closed two sites in Italy, and "has no qualms about destroying jobs and throwing people into precariousness."

However, the CGT is only seeking to negotiate "the best conditions [for redundancy] and the least possible job losses," rather than opposing job losses in principle. It denounced the "American culture at ExxonMobil", suggesting job cuts could be more effectively pushed through if the company would work with the unions.

Almost one in ten Faroe Islanders on weeks-long strike over pay

Around 5,000 workers in the autonomous Faroe Islands, around one in ten of the population, have been on strike since May 14.

According to *TV2*, the strike was called by four unions representing dock workers, cleaners, bus drivers and workers in many other sectors to call for a pay rise between 13 and 15 percent.

The strike is reportedly having a major impact. All imports of goods have been paralysed, fuel is only available to the emergency services, several schools are closed and many workers who are not on strike are staying home either because they cannot commute or need to look after their children. A visit from the king of Denmark (also head of state of the Faroe Islands) and the queen was indefinitely postponed.

Metalworkers in the Netherlands continue rolling strikes in pay dispute

Dutch metalworkers continue rolling strikes over pay, with 24-hour strikes on different days in different regions. Most recently, workers at smaller metal companies in the province of Groningen stopped work on Thursday.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) calls for a 10.1 pay rise in a one-year contract, and for automatic increases in line with price rises. The Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) says at least 12.5

percent is needed over two years to compensate for recent inflation, but the employers' offer amounts to an average of only 5 percent per year.

The strikes are in smaller metal companies, which employ 360,000 workers in total. In May, the FNV and CNV signed an agreement with the FME employers' association, representing larger companies, for a 9 percent pay rise spread over 18 months.

Strike for improved staffing levels at kindergartens in Berlin, Germany

On Thursday, workers at 280 municipal kindergartens in the German capital held a one-day strike for increased staffing levels, *rbb24* reported.

The United Services Union (Verdi) called the walkout after the Berlin Senate refused to negotiate over staffing levels, claiming it had no authority to negotiate separately from other states.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, many of the 7,600 kindergarten workers who look after 35,000 children in Berlin were expected to join the strike. Verdi announced that if the Senate does not begin negotiations, it will call a three-day strike next week.

Warning strikes over pay at German university hospitals

More than 1,300 workers at university hospitals in the German state of Baden-Württemberg joined warning strikes on Monday, postponing non-urgent operations, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported.

The walkouts were called by Verdi during collective bargaining for 30,000 workers in the state's university hospitals.

Verdi is calling for a pay rise of 11 percent or 500 euros to monthly salaries, whichever is larger, as well as increased leave. The Baden-Württemberg University Hospital Employers' Association did not even present an offer during negotiations in May, and new negotiations began on Tuesday.

Greek sailors on research ships strike against pay freeze

Sailors on two ships operated by the Greek state-owned Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (ELKETHE), the Aegean and Filia, are on strike to end a wage freeze imposed in 2008.

The crew of the Aegean stopped work on Saturday, and their colleagues on the Filia joined them Wednesday. The stoppage on the Aegean directly defied a court ruling that any strike would be "illegal and abusive" *ef.syn* reported.

The Panhellenic Union of Sailors (PENEN) is calling for sailors on ELKETHE-operated ships to be included in the collective agreement covering other coastal shipping vessels. An exception was made in 2008, and PENEN says that pay rises on research vessels have been 25 percent lower than in coastal shipping, so sailors' wages were drastically eroded by inflation.

Tech support workers in Spain strike for three days over pay

Workers at DXC Technology in Spain began a three-day strike on Monday after previous two-day strikes in March and April.

Unions representing DXC workers say wages have declined by up to 19 percent in the last four years and are calling for pay rises to compensate.

According to *La Nueva España*, the unions announced 60 percent of the American multinational's Spanish workforce of 7,500 joined the strikes. DXC provides technical support for IT services in banks, energy supply and public services, giving the strike a large economic impact, *Tercera Información* reported.

Strike at Turkish tyre factory for new collective agreement

Workers at Turkey's largest tyre factory in the city of Çankır? have been on strike since May 29, during collective negotiations covering 2,400 workers between the Petrol-?? union and Japanese multinational Sumitomo Rubber.

Petrol-?? told the *Ihlas News Agency* that Sumitomo offered salaries of 26,000 lira, while the union wanted more than 30,000.

Reprisals for wildcat strike against union-backed contract in Turkish shipbuilding company

Last week, hundreds of workers at the Gürdesan shipbuilding company in Turkey held a three-day wildcat strike against the contract signed by the Özçelik-?? union, which fell far short of the union's own low pay demands.

This week, *Evrensel* reported that 40 workers were sacked in reprisal for the strike. Workers ended the strike after Gürdesan management told them: "Start production, let's discuss [the contract] again."

A worker told the newspaper that 40 of the former strikers were individually called to a meeting, at which no union representative was present, and told they were dismissed. He said, "We did what we had the right to do and what the union could not do," adding, "We will talk to our friends and make a decision accordingly, we can also start protests in front of the factory."

Workers protest mass dismissals in Menemen, Turkey

Workers in Menemen, near the Turkish city of İzmir, are protesting outside the municipal government building after the municipality fired 400 workers following the local elections.

The Belediye-?? union said the incoming mayor of the ruling Justice and Development Party "played with people's hopes and dreams by hiring 3,000 people in order to be re-elected." He then announced mass job cuts after the election, despite promising "I would give my life."

Junior doctors in Northern Ireland hold 48-hour stoppage over pay

Junior doctors in Northern Ireland began a 48-hour walkout on Thursday. The stoppage involves hospital doctors and GPs across the

province.

The action by British Medical Association (BMA) members follows a 24-hour stoppage on March 6, which was the first walkout by BMA members in Northern Ireland. They voted by more than 97 percent for the walkout.

It was followed up by a 48-hour stoppage May 24. A recent pay offer from the Northern Ireland Department of Health (DoH) was for 9.07 percent for 2023/24, with slightly more for those in their first year. According to the BMA, pay for junior doctors in the province has eroded by more than 30 percent since 2008. Currently, starting pay for junior doctors in the province is £26,000 a year.

Hundreds of striking junior doctors were expected to attend a rally at midday Thursday outside Stormont (the regional seat of government).

Junior doctors in England are set to begin a five-day stoppage on June 27 in their 18-month long fight for pay restoration.

Further strikes by tractor manufacturer workers in Basildon, England over pay

Around 500 workers at the CNH Industrial tractor factory in Basildon, England began a three-day stoppage on Tuesday. It follows 10 days of strikes in May. Further three-day stoppages are planned to begin June 11, 18 and 25.

The Unite union members are protesting CNH reneging on a 2022 commitment to pay a 7.4 percent increase for 2024, offering instead just 4 percent. The 2022 agreement was for pay increases to be based on the average rate of inflation over the year.

CNH made profits of £2.4 billion last year and paid its CEO £19 million in 2022, 310 times the pay of an average CNH employee. CNH is one of the biggest employers in Basildon, exporting tractors across the globe.

On April 1, the London-based company laid off 220 workers at its US Case tractor factory in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin. Nearly 220 of the plant's roughly 660 workers were given "indefinite layoff" notices. The layoffs come over a year after the United Auto Workers rammed through a sell-out contract, ending a nearly nine-month-long strike by roughly 1,100 agricultural and construction equipment manufacturing workers in Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa.

Scottish Further Education college lecturers continue strike over pay

Lecturing staff at Further Education (FE) colleges throughout Scotland are continuing their programme of strikes for an improved pay offer.

The Educational Institute of Scotland – Further Education Lecturers Association members have been involved in a long-running pay dispute. They have not had a pay rise since 2021.

They rejected the latest offer from the employers' body, the College Employers Scotland (CES). CES's latest offer of £5,000 over three years from September 2022 amounts to a pay cut in real terms.

They walked out for three days last week and this week are striking Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Four days of stoppages are also planned for each of the remaining weeks of June.

Hundreds of UK healthcare assistants employed by Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust walk out over pay

Health care assistants (HCAs) at Kettering General Hospital, Leicester General Hospital, Leicester Royal Infirmary, Glenfield Hospital and Northampton General Hospital in England began a three-day stoppage Tuesday.

The Unison union members at the five hospitals run by the Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust voted by over 90 percent for the action.

The HCAs are currently on a band two salary, paid to HCAs to provide personal care including washing and feeding patients. However, most are performing clinical roles such as inserting catheters and conducting electrocardiogram tests, for which they should be paid on band three. The HCAs are demanding to be put on band three and for the pay to be backdated to 2018.

Ongoing strike action by teachers at a number of London schools

Teachers in a number of schools in the UK capital are taking action over different issues.

Around 180 teachers, National Education Union (NEU) members at Little Heath and Hatton special schools in the London borough of Redbridge, protested insufficient measures to address inadequate accommodation.

Some 20 teachers at St Dominic's primary school in the east London borough of Hackney were on strike Tuesday and Wednesday over workloads.

NEU members at Belmont Park School in the east London borough of Waltham Forest were due to strike Thursday over working conditions. Further stoppages are planned for June 13-14, 17-19 and 24-27.

Staff at Balham and Eastwood nursery schools in south London began three days of stoppages Tuesday. They are opposing plans to cut places and jobs at the nurseries, which would compromise provision for children with special educational needs.

NEU members at Byron Court primary school Wembley in the London borough of Brent are continuing their series of stoppages and are out on strike Tuesday through Thursday this week. The school is threatened with academisation following an inadequate Ofsted report in November.

Picketing teachers were joined by parents and people from the local community showing support. NASUWT members joined the strike on Tuesday, the first of a planned 11 days of stoppages.

Fuel delivery drivers in Ellesmere Port, UK set to walk out over pay

Around 50 drivers working for fuel supply firm Oxalis, formerly known as Hoyer, based at the Stanlow refinery, Ellesmere Port in England, are due to begin a three-day stoppage Thursday.

The Unite union members are protesting a pay offer £2 an hour less than Oxalis drivers based in Birmingham and Thurrock. They are responsible for delivering fuel supplies to Shell, BP and Esso garages across northwest England and the Scottish borders. They also deliver supplies to airlines at Liverpool airport.

A further walkout is scheduled for June 13-15.

Rail catering staff at UK rail firm to walk out over roster changes

UK catering staff at rail company Avanti West Coast are due to walk out on Friday. They provide on-board catering to Avanti passengers.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are protesting new rosters imposed on the staff by Avanti. The company is changing shift patterns at short notice and enforcing overtime. An RMT press release noted, "The company's chaotic management has left staff unable to plan their lives, creating an unacceptable level of stress and fatigue... our members... demand a fair and reasonable work-life balance."

A picket line is due to be mounted at Manchester Piccadilly railway station on Friday.

PCS union calls off strike in England by National Museum of Liverpool workers over withheld cost-of-living payment as workers accept new deal

The strike by workers at the National Museum Liverpool (NML) in England has ended. The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union recommended a new deal from the employer, which its members voted to accept on Sunday.

The workers, who have held more than 60 days of strikes, voted by a 94 percent majority to walk out after NML withheld a £1,500 cost-of-living payment made to civil servants as part of a pay agreement. The NML was the only one of more than 200 employers to have withheld the payment.

The new offer is for a £1,200 one-off payment, a 35 percent discount in the museum's café and shop and an additional two days leave a year.

The NML workers are based at seven sites across Liverpool, including the Museum of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum.

Protest by hundreds of Uber drivers in Birmingham, UK over falling pay

Hundreds of Uber drivers protested outside Uber's premises in Birmingham, England on May 30. They were protesting falling pay and the company's refusal to talk to them.

The previous month saw a similar protest which brought the city centre to a standstill. Uber has an official agreement with the GMB union to represent Uber drivers.

Protesting Iraqi oil contract workers attacked by security forces

Since May 26, contract workers employed by Iraq's Ministry of Oil's South Refineries Company have been holding protest rallies.

The General Federation of Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Unions, the General Union of Oil Workers and the General Union of Energy members are protesting being on temporary contracts for over three years without achieving permanent status.

On Sunday, the protestors were attacked by Iraqi security forces using rubber bullets and electric batons. Some protestors were injured, and some were arrested.

Ongoing nationwide protests across Iran against deteriorating living

conditions

Sunday saw protests by Social Security Organisation retirees in the cities of Tehran and Shush in southwest Iran. Those in Shush called for higher pensions and for the release of imprisoned teachers and activists.

Fishermen and boat owners in Bushehr in southern Iran protested in front of the provincial governorate against poverty and unfair practices impacting on their livelihoods.

In Isfahan, in central Iran, steel industry retirees protested against the high cost of living.

In Gachsaran and Ahvaz oil and gas contract workers protested against unfair contracts and poor working conditions.

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 and in Ukraine against Russia and the war plans against China.

Police in South Africa use stun grenades on Women on Farms Project protesting pesticide use

Over 200 protesting women farm workers were met with riot shields and stun grenades from police protecting the parliament building in Cape Town, South Africa, on Tuesday when they marched to demand the government ban the use of deadly pesticides.

The Women on Farms Project (WFP) members are in an ongoing fight to change laws on harmful chemical use in the farming industry. After the government watered down proposed guidelines, the WFP marched to parliament to present their memorandum, which said, "This move allows rich, resourced and powerful corporations to undermine the safety and well-being of our agricultural workers and communities."

After a previous march by the WFP in September 2023, the WSWS wrote, "The pesticides, banned in the EU but exported to South Africa by pharmaceutical and biotechnology company Bayer, are making women who work on the farms ill."

Workers at South African steel company continue picket as court rules strike lawful

The strike, started May 22 by steel workers at SA Steel Mills in Meyerton, South Africa, over the dismissal of 165 employees and unsafe conditions in the workplace, continues after a labour court ruled their action was lawful and therefore protected.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members demand the reinstatement of workers sacked in April when negotiations over pay and conditions collapsed. They say the company should honour a collective agreement made with the steel industry's representative body, which guaranteed workers the minimum wage.

Nigerian national strike over minimum wage in danger of being sold out

Workers across Nigeria began indefinite strike action on June 3 as part

of a long-running battle to establish a liveable minimum wage as well as opposing the government-imposed increase in electricity prices.

The strike led to the shutdown of the country's power grid shortly after 2 a.m. local time, throwing the whole country into darkness. Many flights were cancelled from Lagos, the busiest airport, and from the capital, Abuja. Schools, offices and hospitals remained closed.

After only one day of effective action, leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) rushed into talks with the government at which they were promised nothing, receiving just a vague assurance that a future offer would be at least 60,000 naira per month, a starvation-level payment.

The NLC and TUC then proposed a return to work—a proposal accepted by the unions making up the two federations. Previously, the NLC had said of the N60,000, “Government’s counter offer mocks the excruciating hardship brought on workers by its insensitive and oppressive economic policies.”

The agreement was signed by NLC President Joe Ajaero and his counterpart in the TUC, Festus Osifo, alongside government ministers.

“Even 100,000 naira won’t be enough as prices in the market have gone up, but it will be better than what we have now,” said Shittu Lawal, a worker at the information ministry in Kano, after saying he would be disappointed by anything less than N100,000 per month.

The NLC and TUC had already lowered the bargaining position they had used in public speeches from N600,000 to N495,000, while the government barely moved its offer.



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