

24-hour public sector workers' strike in Belgium against austerity; protests across Iran continue to oppose dire living conditions and poverty; university lecturers in Zimbabwe continue stoppage over pay

## 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.*

### Public sector workers across Belgium in general strike against attacks on social welfare

A nationwide 24-hour strike by transport and public service workers took place in Belgium Monday evening through Tuesday, against attacks on pensions. This is the fourth such action over four months.

Flights were cancelled at Brussels and Charleroi airports as security personnel, administrative staff and baggage handlers walked out.

State-run SNCB rail services and urban bus, tram and metro travellers were also hit by the strike. Municipal, federal, judicial and postal workers were amongst the many who stopped work. Public hospitals ran only a minimal or emergency service.

The General Labour Federation of Belgium and the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions members also held demonstrations in Brussels, Antwerp, Liège and many other cities. They are protesting federal government austerity policy, particularly around pension reductions and raising the retirement age.

### Rail workers in Portugal strike for cost-of-living pay improvements

Sales staff, inspectors and ticket office workers, at national rail carrier Portuguese Railways (CP) stopped work from Monday midnight until Tuesday in support of the ongoing 2025 pay claim by thirteen different rail unions.

The SFRCI rail union, representing the revenue workers, and the other unions say they are willing to accept CP's latest proposals, but the government's Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing has refused to endorse the measures in the agreement.

The rail workers demand pay rises are awarded in line with the cost of living and also backdated, to maintain the difference between their salary and the National Minimum Wage for each year since 2018. They plan a

two-day strike from May 7 to May 8.

### Cereal manufacturing workers at two UK sites walk out over pay

UK workers employed by breakfast cereal manufacturer Weetabix at its sites in Corby and Burton Latimer in Northamptonshire began a three-day stoppage Tuesday. Weetabix employs around 1,000 workers at the sites.

A ballot, which ended March 17, of Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw) members at the sites saw an 89 percent majority for the stoppage. They rejected an inadequate pay offer from the company. Usdaw used the vote to try and negotiate an improved pay offer, but this failed.

Weetabix is owned by US based consumer packaged foods company, Post Holdings.

### Academic staff at Keele University, England begin five-day stoppage over job cuts

Academic staff at Keele University in England began five days of stoppages this week.

The University and College Union (UCU) members, who voted by a 75 percent majority, walked out Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. They also plan to strike on May 6 and 8. They are taking the action over Keele's plans to merge its schools of humanities and social sciences, leading to the loss of 24 full-time equivalent posts. The university, which is facing financial strictures, says this will lead to an annual £1.85 million savings.

A UCU spokesperson said, "they're moving to compulsory redundancies, which is a red line for us." The union has accepted thousands of redundancies nationally for years, with the caveat only they were carried out "voluntarily".

### Planned strike by UK teachers at private school in Brighton over

## **threat of cuts to jobs and conditions is called off by union**

The strike scheduled for Wednesday by teachers at the Roedean school for girls near Brighton, UK was called off by the National Education Union (NEU). It would have been the first strike in the exclusive boarding school's 140-year history, where annual fees are £45,000.

The NEU members opposed restructuring plans, which could result in the loss of 28 jobs and cut the school's contribution to the government-run Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). Currently the school makes a 28.66 percent contribution to the TPS. They are proposing to cap the contribution to 22 percent. The teachers would have to make up the difference, equivalent to an almost 7 percent pay cut, or transfer to an inferior private (defined contribution) scheme.

Wednesday's strike was called off by the NEU after Roedean management agreed to put an NEU offer to the board of governors, but planned stoppages for May 6-7 and 13-15 are still scheduled.

Support staff voted by a more than 80 percent majority for the action., while teachers by a nearly 88 percent majority.

## **Bus drivers at Stagecoach in West Scotland to walk out after rejecting pay offer**

Around 500 drivers working for Stagecoach in West Scotland are set to walk out on Friday. It will be the first of seven stoppages planned throughout May.

The Unite union members voted by a 98 percent majority to strike after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer from the company. The drivers are based at Stagecoach's depots in Ardrossan, Arran, Ayr, Dumfries, Kilmarnock and Stranraer.

The further planned stoppage dates are May 6, 9, 12, 16, 19 and 23. Stagecoach cancelled holiday dates booked by the drivers during the planned strike schedule. Unite responded by threatening to take legal action.

## **Nationwide protests continue in Iran over worsening social conditions**

Protests by workers, retirees and civil groups continue across Iran.

On Sunday, Social Security Organisation retirees held protests in Ahvaz, Kermanshah and Shush, calling for higher pensions and provision of basic services. At the Kermanshah protest the retirees expressed solidarity with families of those killed and injured in the recent explosion at the port of Bandar Abbas. The explosion, which killed over 60 and injured around 1,000, is being blamed on the regime's negligence over storing sodium perchlorate explosive.

Steel and mining retirees held coordinated protests in Isfahan, Kerman and Tehran against declining living standards. The same day residents and truck drivers in the city of Bahabad rallied to protest plans to privatise the nearby Cha Gaz iron ore mine.

Social security retirees are calling for nationwide protests on May Day, including in Tehran where they plan to rally in front of the Social Security Organisation office. The Coordinating Council of Teachers' Unions has also called for nationwide protests in front of education ministry buildings on May Day. Their demands will include raising teachers' salaries above the poverty line and free, good quality education for all.

Monday saw rallies in the cities of Ahvaz, Ilam, Isfahan, Kermanshah,

Sanandaj, Tabriz and Tehran by Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI) retirees. They were protesting declining living conditions as the value of their pensions declines. They accuse TCI major shareholders of looting their pensions.

They also expressed solidarity with the families of those killed and injured in the Bandar Abbas explosion.

Also on Monday, workers at Makran Agro-Industry in the city of Konarak held a protest over the laying off 90 workers with more than five years of seniority.

Farmers held rallies in the cities of Garmsar and Aradan on Tuesday. They protested by lining major roads with their tractors and agricultural machinery as part of ongoing protests over water rights.

A report at the beginning of the year noted over half the population live in poverty, which continues to rise. The value of the riyal plunged by a third in the last four months of 2024. US sanctions and threats of war are exacerbating Iran's economic contraction. US air and naval forces are in striking distance of Iran.

## **Zimbabwe university lecturers continue stoppage over promised pay rise**

University lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) are continuing their stoppage begun in early April to demand an increase in their wages, which can be as little as US\$230—amongst the lowest wages in Zimbabwe.

The Association of University Teachers members are demanding US\$2,250 salaries for the junior lecturers, as was the case before their pay was cut in October 2018. Many lecturers have moved to better-paying jobs in other countries, including South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.

A High Court judgment gave the lecturers permission to picket without fear of arrest.

The Presidential Spokesperson George Charamba claimed that the funds to settle the dispute had already been allocated by the Chancellor, Dr. E.D. Mnangagwa, blaming "officials" for the money not reaching the lecturers.

## **South African teachers march in Pretoria to demand an end to austerity**

On April 23, thousands of teachers took to the streets and marched to South Africa's Department of Basic Education and National Treasury in Pretoria.

The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu) members demand the lifting of the African National Congress government's cuts to education, which have led to a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention.

Sadtu's general secretary, Dr. Mugwena Maluleke, said, "We have seen excessive workloads which is killer number one for our teachers." School buildings are dilapidated, he told *IOL* and children sit in overcrowded classrooms, many with broken windows.

The union issued the government with 21 days' notice of strike action, unless the austerity is addressed.

## **Nigeria Meteorological Agency workers continue their indefinite strike over pay and conditions**

Employees of the Nigeria Meteorological Agency (NiMet) began a nationwide indefinite strike on April 23 over welfare issues, including low pay and lack of benefits. The strike disrupted flight schedules across all major airports in the country.

NiMet workers perform crucial roles in ensuring safe flight schedules throughout the country.

The Joint Action Congress members lamented the deaths of three members during the last two months, due to what was described as avoidable conditions resulting from acute poverty.

### **Doctors in Botswana in pay protest limit emergency calls despite court order**

Doctors in Botswana are reducing their emergency calls to one per month.

The Botswana Doctors Union (BDU) members are in dispute with their employers over inadequate remuneration for their emergency calls. In response to stalled negotiations, the BDU issued a press release on April 3 announcing the go-slow protest.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Professor Oathokwa Nkomazana emphasised that any refusal to perform emergency services constitutes an unlawful strike, asserting that doctors are paid and legally obligated to respond to emergency calls.

Justice Isaac Bahuma granted an interim order on April 18 barring any further action by the BDU, which the doctors are ignoring.



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