

National eight hour rail strike in Italy and seven-day strike by French workers on regional railways; teachers in Israel in wildcat strike after union accepts pay cuts; public sector workers in Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria 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.*

### **Tens of thousands of Italian rail workers in national strike over pay and conditions**

Railway staff at Trenitalia, the passenger and freight division of FS, Italy's national rail network, stopped work on Tuesday as part of their campaign for a collective bargaining agreement with the employer around wages, shifts and new regulations.

The strike by 100,000 Italian Federation of Transport Workers and other transport union members caused countrywide disruption. Further strike days are planned.

### **French rail workers in nationwide strike over pay rates and work schedules**

Train drivers, conductors and maintenance staff at French state-owned railways, SNCF, began a seven-day strike Monday impacting local and regional services but leaving intercity TGV high-speed trains unaffected.

The Federation of Railway Workers and SUD-Rail union members demand improvements in pay, conditions and staff levels.

### **French civil aviation workers at Toulouse airport in wildcat strike**

Maintenance and technical workers at Toulouse airport, France held a wildcat strike Tuesday. Over 50 flights were cancelled, which also affected schedules for the following day.

According to Toulouse based newspaper, *La Dépêche*, the unexpected strike is "part of a climate of growing social tension in the transport sector."

### **Hundreds of airport workers in Helsinki, Finland strike after unsuccessful pay negotiations**

Six hundred baggage and cargo handlers, maintenance, catering and other passenger administration workers at Helsinki Airport held a four-hour stoppage May 2 after negotiations failed for a collective agreement with Palta, the service sector employers' body.

The Finnish Aviation Union members threaten further strikes if the impasse continues.

### **Nurses in the Algarve, Portugal strike for overtime and back pay**

Nurses at the regional Local Health Unit in the Algarve, Portugal, which includes hospitals in Portimão, Faro and Lagos, went on a 16-hour pay strike May 2, with a similar stoppage planned for May 8.

The Portuguese Nurses Union members demand back pay owed since 2018 and double pay for overtime hours worked during public holidays and weekly leave days.

### **Strike by academic staff at UK's University of East Anglia over job losses**

Academic staff at the University of East Anglia (UEA), England struck Tuesday and Wednesday this week with a further stoppage planned for Friday. It follows two days of stoppages last week and a four-day stoppage planned to begin May 13.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted in February by 86 percent to oppose planned job cuts and held a day of action in March. In November last year, UEA announced it needed to cut lecturing and professional services roles. As a result of financial strictures, UEA sought to make 192 roles (equivalent to 163 full time posts) redundant.

Since the announcement, hundreds of staff have taken voluntary redundancy, been redeployed into alternative roles or resigned. According

to the UCU, fewer than 10 full time equivalent posts, representing 30 individuals, are now under threat of compulsory redundancy.

The UCU's role is to enable job losses without sparking a rebellion with compulsory redundancies. Announcing the stoppages, UEA's UCU branch noted, "The Union has worked closely with management to improve the voluntary redundancy scheme, to increase the number of roles available in redeployment and has suggested a range of financial alternatives that would offset these cuts to staff. We have engaged in this process in good faith and with a mind to ensure that UEA makes good on its public promise that compulsory redundancies are a 'last resort'."

The UCU plan a national rally in London on Saturday May 10 in opposition to cuts, entitled "Protect Education Now." A march from Bessborough Gardens in south west London is due to begin at 1.15pm.

### **Civil servants in Newcastle, UK to further extend strike over victimisation**

Around 300 UK workers at His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) based at Benton Park View near Newcastle are to further extend their stoppage.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members originally walked out December 23 and have repeatedly extended their action, which is now due to last until June 6. They are protesting the dismissal of three union representatives, Gordon Askew who was dismissed in January 2024, followed by Rachel Farmer and Joel Hamilton.

The PCS members involved in the dispute work in the Employer Services Helpline section and the stoppages led to a backlog of calls.

A UK parliament early day motion on the union representatives' dismissal was tabled in July 2024. It noted that, "HMRC has rejected appeals against their dismissal, despite evidence being brought to the attention of the investigator that two managers on the site had clearly doctored evidence prior to submission to the investigations, leading to two of the dismissals."

### **Strike by UK teachers at private school in Brighton over threat of cuts to jobs and conditions**

Teachers at the private Roedean school for girls, near Brighton, UK walked out Tuesday and Wednesday this week. It was the first strike in the exclusive boarding school's 140-year history, where annual fees are £45,000.

The National Education Union (NEU) members oppose 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. Management proposes 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.

A strike planned for April 30 was called off by the NEU after management agreed to put a union offer to the board of governors.

Support staff voted by a more than 80 percent majority for the action, teachers by a nearly 88 percent majority. A three-day stoppage is planned to begin May 13.

### **Teachers at school in Epsom, England walk out over attacks on pensions**

Teachers at the Ewell Castle Senior Prep school in Epsom, Surrey took the first of seven planned days of stoppages on Wednesday.

The NASUWT union members oppose plans by the school management to withdraw from the TPS, replacing it with an inferior scheme. They have been threatened with "fire and rehire" measures if they do not accept the changes.

### **Teachers at London school walk out over victimisation**

Teachers at Connaught School for Girls in Waltham Forest walked out for three days beginning Tuesday. They accused school management of bullying, victimisation of a union representative and excessive workloads.

The NEU members voted by a 62 percent majority for the action. The NEU accuse the head teacher of sending a letter to parents giving details of disciplinary action against an NEU member.

### **Israeli teachers in wildcat strike against pay cuts despite union climbdown**

Israeli teachers staged an unofficial "sick strike", after the teachers' union called off official action Sunday following an agreement with the Ministry of Finance.

The teachers had walked out over proposals promoted by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to cut pay by 3.3 percent as part of public sector budget cuts. The union ended the official strike following an agreement with the Finance Ministry. Under this agreement, teachers' pay would be cut by 0.95 percent rather than the original 3.3 percent and teachers would be given an additional two days' annual leave.

Many teachers opposed the sell-out and spoke out on television against the agreement. Rather than accept the deal, thousands of teachers reported sick on Monday and did not go into work.

According to the Education Ministry, around 17,000 to 20,000 teachers—10 percent of the workforce—reported sick on Monday. Some reports gave the number off "sick" as around 50,000. The Education Ministry declared the sick strike illegal, saying the teachers involved will not get paid.

Press reports indicate some teachers continued their protest Tuesday, with around 400 schools, including 100 in Tel Aviv, closed because of action by teachers. *Jerusalem Post* reported that around 200 Israeli doctors, who also face attacks on their pay, protested by not reporting for work.

By Wednesday, thousands of teachers were still taking part in the "sick leave" protest, but numbers were falling and more schools throughout the country were open. Also on Wednesday, the Labour Court ruled those still taking part in the protest should return to school immediately.

### **Protests continue by workers and retirees across Iran against collapse of living standards**

The wave of protests by workers and retirees across Iran continued on May Day. Working teachers and retirees protested in several cities, including Kermanshah, Shiraz and Tehran. They were pushing for increased pensions and pay, and the release of previously imprisoned teachers.

Solidarity protests for the victims of the recent chemical explosion at the port of Bandar Abbas were held by students in Babol and truck drivers in Isfahan and Qom.

Sunday saw synchronised protests across several Iranian cities. Retirees of the Social Security Organisation rallied outside their offices in Shush and Tehran to protest poor living conditions and inadequate medical provision.

Customers of the Modiran Khodro car company protested outside the company's headquarters in Tehran. Despite having paid in full, cars they had ordered had failed to be delivered.

Bakers held protests in Tehran and other cities. Bakers in Qom, Rasht and Shiraz had called for fairer prices and protection for their livelihoods. Bakers are facing rising rents, insurance costs and wage payments without being able to adjust their state-controlled bread prices.

On Tuesday, contract workers in the Gachsaran gas and oil region went on strike, protesting outside the Gachsaran governor's office. Among their demands was the end of the use of contractors, to be directly employed, to be paid on time and a pay increase.

Over half of Iran's population live in poverty, with the value of the riyal plunging. US sanctions and threats of war exacerbate Iran's economic crisis. The US air and naval forces are within striking distance of Iran.

### **Strike by construction workers in Dubai over lack of safety**

Around 13,000 construction workers employed on two Azizi property development sites in the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai went on strike on May 1 over lack of safety conditions.

According to Dubai newspaper *The National*, the strike was in response to reports that Azizi workers had died after being stuck in an elevator when a fire alarm went off. The incident did take place, but the trapped workers were successfully rescued. However, generally poor safety conditions fuelled the protest.

### **Striking Nigerian public sector workers in federal capital continue pay strike**

Striking council workers and teachers in the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are rejecting a flat N40,000 pay increment and continuing their strike begun March 24.

The Nigerian Union of Teachers and Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees members already walked out on three occasions over as many months over the issue.

Sa'ad Abdulmumin, local secretary of the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees complained that FCT council chairmen were ignoring the N70,000 minimum wage demand tabled by the union. He added, "We won't allow any attempt to sidestep the national wage template."

### **Doctors in Nigerian federal capital begin three-day warning strike**

Resident doctors in the FCT began a three-day warning strike on May 5. The strike is to protest months without pay for 127 health workers, who were wrongly labelled as "ghost workers."

The President of the FCT Abuja Resident Doctors, Dr. George Ebong, warned they would begin an indefinite strike and shut down hospitals in the capital unless their grievances are addressed.

The FCT Administration claimed it was "working round the clock" to resolve the issue of non-payment.

### **Kenyan doctors' stoppage in Kakamega County over pay and conditions continues**

Health workers in Kakamega County, Kenya are involved in strike action begun in the middle of April, affecting public hospitals across the region. The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union accuses the county government of failing to implement the 2017 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and systemic neglect of its members.

Secretary General, Dr. Davji Bhimji Atallah said, "Doctors have been on strike for 20 days, not for lack of commitment, but due to seven years of being denied promotions, non-remittance of statutory deductions, exploitation through locum contracts with gross salaries below a third of CBA rates, and no access to medical insurance."

### **Temporary community health workers in Kimberley, South Africa demand outstanding pay and permanent jobs**

Clinics in Kimberley, South Africa closed on Monday, as community health workers (CHWs) demanded their April salaries. Patients were unable to collect medication or access healthcare.

On April 24, the Northern Cape Department of Health announced payments would be delayed, as 1,000 National Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) members whose contracts had expired were not included in the upgraded Persal system for paying employees. When the system was upgraded, only permanent employees were captured.

Nehawu provincial secretary Moleme Moleme said the contracts of all the temporary workers would be extended for another 12 months, but workers are demanding permanent jobs.



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