

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.

Week of strikes disrupt Portuguese rail network

A week of strikes by workers across the Portuguese state-owned rail network Comboios de Portugal (CP) saw major impact on services.

A partial strike by ticket inspectors and ticket office workers in the SFRCI union had 100 percent turnout, with a 25 percent minimum service requirement imposed by law. The strike was operative 5-8.30 a.m. from Sunday until yesterday, and resulted in 76 of 111 scheduled trains on Lisbon's urban routes being cancelled on Tuesday.

The workers are demanding salary adjustments, implementation of an agreement to restructure salary scales, and a commitment to collective bargaining.

At the same time, the SMAQ union, representing drivers, has been on an overtime strike, following a full strike last week involving 14 unions that saw virtually no train traffic for three days. No minimum service requirement was imposed for this action, which the government denounced as "politically motivated."

Public sector strike in France mainly affects airports

A public sector strike in France on Tuesday caused major disruption at airports, particularly in the southwest.

The strike was called across the whole public sector by five unions in response to the government's budgetary guidelines, which will cut public sector budgets in an attempt to save €40bn next year.

Five unions called the action for improved pay and conditions around the slogan, "For the defence of the public service." They are calling for the elimination of the waiting period before sick pay and an end to the lowering of regular sick pay from 100 percent to 90 percent, as well as restoration of the guarantee of individual purchasing power.

Some civil servants did walk out. In Angers, around 100 civil servants demanded the defence of public services and civil servant status, as well as improved pay and conditions.

The main strike activity was at the French Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC), where air traffic controllers were on strike. Flights were cancelled and delayed at Pau and Tarbes airports, in the southwest, with further disruption at Limoges, Marseille and Paris Orly.

Workers at Lidl stores in France begin indefinite rolling strike

Workers at the 1,600 Lidl supermarkets in France were due to begin an indefinite series of four-day strikes from today. The CFTC, CGT, CFDT and FO unions called on workers to strike every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Unsa, the main union at the store, has not signed the strike call.

The central issue is conditions for the 46,000 workers. Over the last two years, between 2,500 and 3,500 workers have left and not been replaced, causing an "exponential increase in workload." This and the company's performance objectives are threatening workers' health, said CGT representative Thierry Chantrenne, and, "We're afraid one of us will do something stupid."

From June 1, the company will open all stores on Sundays for six hours. The union members are demanding that Sunday work be voluntary, but Lidl has modified contracts for new hires, making Sunday work mandatory. The company is proposing extending contracts from 30 to 35 hours.

Chantrenne said, "We'll be open seven days a week, with a planned number of hours for six. If that's not a deterioration in working conditions, what is?"

In February, a strike was called by the CFDT, CGT, CFTC and CFE-CGC unions over similar issues and for a pay rise. It was well supported, but the unions called it off after four days.

French rail service mobilises strike-breakers against conductors' strike

Conductors were on strike at French national rail operator SNCF last weekend. The SUD-Rail and ASCT (CNA) union members were demanding an increase in work bonuses and more advance notice of work schedules, which they say are often subject to last-minute modification.

More than 60 percent of conductors on high-speed TGV trains were on strike on Saturday. That topped two-thirds of conductors in the southeast. Around half of the conductors on the regional TER services joined the strike.

Against this turnout, SNCF mobilised a strikebreaking force of managers and volunteers acting as conductors and downgrading the service. Fabien Villedieu from SUD-Rail accused the company of trying to "make the strike invisible by imposing a degraded transport plan, using single TGV units of 500 people instead of the double trains during peak times, which require more conductors."

A further SUD-Rail strike is planned for early June. CGT-Cheminots, the largest union at SNCF, has also called strikes over pay and conditions, but separating grades. Drivers will strike on June 5, controllers on June

Wildcat strike on Brussels Metro

A wildcat strike brought the whole metro system of the Belgian Brussels-Capital Region to a standstill for an hour on Tuesday morning.

Metro drivers of public transport operator STIB/MIVB spontaneously refused to work for an hour from 10 a.m. in protest at technical issues and security. This was triggered by criticism of the way STIB had handled violence on the metro following the recent Belgian football final.

STIB said it was unable to warn passengers of the disruption in advance because the strike was not union-led.

Ford workers in Cologne strike against job cuts

Workers at Ford's two plants in Cologne, Germany walked out on Wednesday, protesting plans to cut 14 percent of the company's European workforce. The plants produce the Explorer and Capri EV cars.

Workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action, and thousands protested in front of the factories.

The IG Metall union did not organise the ballot to defend jobs but to strengthen its negotiating position on the so-called "social contract." Benjamin Grushka, head of the Works Council, said he anticipated being invited for "further talks" imminently, and that the company should "make a move."

IG Metall has agreed to every previous job cut, with the workforce having been halved in the last five years.

Warning strike at German private insurance companies

The Verdi union has called a warning strike for today at German private insurance companies, during ongoing collective bargaining negotiations. Companies affected include Ergo, Allianz, Axa and Debeka.

To offset wage losses of recent years, the collective bargaining commission is demanding a 12 percent rise in monthly salaries and all bonuses for a twelve-month period.

According to Verdi, the employers' offer at the second round of negotiations covered a 35-month term, making an annual collective wage increase of 2.8 percent, which the union rejected.

Berlin teachers strike over conditions

Berlin teachers, social workers and educators began a three-day strike over conditions on Tuesday.

The GEW union members are striking over their demands for a collective agreement on health protection, which would provide for smaller class sizes.

The Senate (state executive) refuses to negotiate this, and Berlin argues that as a member of the collective state bargaining association it cannot act independently.

Only employed teachers are taking part, as civil servant teachers are not allowed to strike. This has been used to limit class cancellations during strikes, but several schools said they would not offer any classes at all during this strike.

Basque teachers continue indefinite strike against layoffs

Members of the Basque nationalist union ELA are continuing an indefinite strike against school merger plans that threaten the jobs of 60 workers at the Jesús María Ikastetxea (JM) college.

It was announced earlier this year that JM would merge with the Jesuitinas Bilbao school, with the dismissal of 44 teachers. The JM teachers have been on strike since March 18.

Jesuitinas has now cancelled the proposed merger, blaming "the insufficient number of enrolments, the economic unviability of the project, and the complex social context created."

The ELA say that they have been given no information about the situation, and the move has increased the risk, as the entire JM centre is threatened. ELA head Ainhoa Tirapu said, "We've gone from a risk to 40 families to a risk to 60 families."

Tirapu accused the regional government of Lakua of a "lack of transparency" and failure to provide "clear information." She has made a formal request to the Deputy Minister of Labour for a meeting of all parties on May 20.

Tirapu said the Lakua government had failed to respond to that request, but was quick to do so to demand minimum service increases and to "make the strike invisible."

TPI Composite workers' strike continues in Turkey

Workers at the TPI Composite engineering facility in Izmir, Turkey are continuing a strike over wages, after the failure to reach an agreement in collective bargaining negotiations. The negotiations cover 2,150 workers.

TPI offered a 30 percent raise in the negotiations, begun January 16. Describing this as a "poverty raise" in view of high inflation, the workers are demanding 120 percent.

On the second day of their strike, workers from the Sasal? T1 factory formed a convoy and marched to the T2 factory in the Menemen Maltepe Organised Industrial Zone. They chanted "Resisting, resisting to victory," and "We don't want poverty wages."

Emergency call trainers at North West Ambulance Service, England walk out over pay cut

Specialist ambulance workers walked out across North West England on May 6 for four days over an incentive payment. Around 12 workers picketed outside the ambulance station in Bolton.

The North West Ambulance Service withdrew the "Recruitment and Retention Premia" of the Integrated Control Centre Educators, meaning a pay cut of 9 percent or around £3,000 a year to some workers. Only longstanding employees will now get the payment, not newly appointed staff.

The Unison members provide a vital role, training emergency or 999

call handlers. Two stoppages occurred in March over the same issue in Manchester, Broughton and Liverpool.

Angry parents and pupils at UK secondary school in Sheffield protest cuts to arts

About 300 parents and pupils protested on Monday outside Newfield School in Sheffield, England against cuts to the arts curriculum.

They held home-made banners declaring “Save the Arts,” “Don’t Kill Our Creativity,” “Cutting Computing Doesn’t Compute,” “Fill This School With Artists” and “Drama Keeps Me Sane.”

Plans are underway to cut teaching hours for art, music, computing, design technology and music, to be replaced with a carousel model (alternating the subjects). The changes are to begin in September, for children in years 7-9 (11-14-year-olds).

The school is run by Mercia Learning Trust, a multi-academy trust. The children will be deprived of the arts to spend more on maths and English to boost test results.

Teachers at school in Cheshire, England walk out over attacks on pensions

Teachers at Alderley Edge School for Girls in Cheshire, England held stoppages on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday over pension cuts.

Management intends to withdraw from the Teachers’ Pension Scheme to reduce the employer’s contribution and move teachers at this private school to an inferior scheme. The National Education Union and NASUWT union members are threatened with redundancy if they do not comply.

Last week, teachers at Roedean private school for girls near Brighton and Ewell Castle Senior Prep school in Epsom went on strike over the same issue. Planned strikes for May 13-15 were called off by the NEU following a new offer, to be put to members in an online poll.

The NEU called off action this week at Avenue Primary School, when management withdrew compulsory redundancy threats planned due to budget deficit.

Protests continue across Iran over the cost-of-living crisis

On Monday, workers at the Iranian Offshore Oil Company in Lavan protested against caps on salaries and other issues. On the same day, retirees from the Telecommunications Company demonstrated in several cities, including Tabriz, Ilam, Arak, Kermanshah, Shahr-e Kord, Marivan, Sanandaj, Ahvaz, Rasht and capital Tehran against the falling value of their pensions.

Truck drivers rallied in front of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade to demand customs release their trucks, held for months due to general breakdown of the infrastructure. In Zeytun Township, homeowners marched to the Presidential Office demanding the release of construction permits. Healthcare workers at Zanjan Health Centre demonstrated in the courtyard of Zanjan University of Medical Sciences over pay and conditions.

The previous day, Social Security retirees staged a mass rally in

Farhanghahr’s Workers’ Square over poor pensions, meaning they cannot afford food. Tipper truck drivers walked out in Rostamabad over poor pay and lack of fuel.

In the textile sector, workers in Yazd protested in front of the governor’s office, because power outages were stopping production and causing layoffs, as well as destroying equipment. Bakers in Qaleh-Konj also protested after power outages spoiled their produce.

Annual inflation for 2025 hit 43.3 percent, pricing commodities out of reach for workers and pensioners. US sanctions amid threats to obliterate Iran unless it falls into line with US plans to restructure the Middle East in preparation for war with China has greatly exacerbated Iran’s economic crisis.

Municipal workers’ stoppage in KwaDukuza, South Africa over long-overdue pay uplift

Around 700 municipal workers in KwaDukuza in South Africa began a week-long strike May 5 over pay, leading to refuse piling high in the streets and no lifeguards on beaches.

The South African Municipal Workers’ Union members are protesting the incomplete implementation of promised pay uplift. In 2022, all municipal salaries were meant to upgrade to grade 5, and 13 percent of the workforce are still waiting for theirs.

Ethiopian delivery workers walk out to demand higher pay

Employees of DHL in Addis Ababa and Hawassa, including staff at the courier’s Bole International Airport branch in Ethiopia, are on strike for better pay after the company failed to respond to requests for an annual salary adjustment to offset the effect of inflation.

“This is modern slavery,” said Abathun Takele, president of the Transport and Communication Trade Union Industry Federation. “Employees are working 16 to 17 hours a day without any additional pay, and yet their demands for fair treatment and negotiations are continuously ignored.”

“The company used to increase salaries every April,” said Tilahun Tadesse, chairman of the DHL Express Ethiopia workers’ union. “We asked them to do the same this year, but only those in management received a raise, while the rest of the employees did not.”

The union put in for a 120 percent rise, and when the company countered with 20-24 percent, the union folded and asked for a 50 percent increase. The inflation rate is 21.54 percent. Some employees are not able to support their families.

The German-based transnational registered revenue of 84.2 billion euros in 2024, up 3 percent on the previous year.

Ethiopian health workers walk out over pay and right to strike without intimidation

A partial work stoppage was organised across three hospitals in Ethiopia during the Tuesday morning.

A staff member at Madda Walabu University Goba Referral Hospital, in Bale Zone of the Oromia region, said health workers were pressured by

local officials when they started their strike. “We are facing intimidation,” he said, adding that the hospital was “full of government officials since early morning.”

The partial strike followed a campaign using hashtags including #HealthWorkersMatter and #PayHealthWorkersFairly, along with a number of pre-strike protests held around the country to make demands that have remained unanswered for over five years.

A health worker from Akesta General Hospital in Akesta town, South Wello Zone in the Amhara region, reported that a doctor assigned to the Emergency Department was detained by security and told to manage routine patient care as well or “go to prison.” The source said the doctor was allowed to return to work after staff on duty and others “chose to go to prison [with him] in solidarity.”

Numerous health professionals were previously arrested, including three doctors from Arba Minch and Yonatan Dagneu, president of the Ethiopian Health Professionals Association, who had urged the government to respond to health workers’ calls. Amnesty International called on the authorities to “immediately release Yonatan Dagneu ... and others detained over the planned healthcare strike,” adding that they must “respect the right to peaceful assembly” and “stop harassing healthcare workers.”

Kenyan construction workers halt progress on Talanta Stadium over unpaid wages

Workers at the Talanta Sports City Stadium in Nairobi, Kenya downed tools last week to protest over unpaid salaries. The workers say unless they are paid, they will not return to work.

When completed, the government-built stadium is expected to cost KSh 44.7 billion.

Namibian workers’ strike in seventh week over pay and conditions

Namibian employees of Pretorious Plant Hire Trust in Windhoek have been on legal strike since March 24 over pay and conditions. The company, which leases hydraulic and earthmoving equipment, attempted to bring in scab drivers.

The eight Namibian Revolutionary Transport and Manufacturing Union members are demanding increased salaries, allowances, and medical aid benefits.



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