

# 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.*

## One-day general strike in the Belgian public sector against austerity

Workers in public services across Belgium walked out in a one-day general strike called by the General Union of Public Services on Tuesday, the fifth strike in recent weeks against the coalition government's austerity measures. Many workers in transport, waste collection, postal sorting centres, courts and prisons stopped work, despite the other two large unions not calling on their members to join.

Striking workers oppose the austerity measures of the coalition government, which is cutting unemployment benefits and public-sector pensions to meet the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on the military.

On Thursday, a strike and demonstration in Brussels for workers in the non-profit sector was also held to demand investment in services such as health and social care.

## Strike for equal pay at outsourced junior schools in Palma de Mallorca, Spain continues

Teachers in the outsourced pre-schools of Palma de Mallorca in Spain's Balearic Islands have been on indefinite strike for over three weeks, demanding equal pay with the public sector. Their monthly salaries are 700 euros lower than in the pre-schools owned by the Palma City Council, *Europa Press* reported.

Around 500 people, teachers and families, joined a protest in Palma last week to support the strike. The Workers' Commissions and General Workers' Union are calling for the gap to be reduced gradually, however, with pay equality only to be achieved in September 2026.

The City Council imposed draconian minimum service requirements of between 75 and 92 percent, preventing many teachers from participating in the strike. A court rejected the unions' lawsuit against the minimum service levels.

## Bus drivers in Lower Saxony, and DHL drivers in Leipzig, Germany walk out over pay parity

Bus drivers in Lower Saxony, Germany went on a warning strike for

two days on Tuesday, affecting transport in Braunschweiger Land, Hildesheim, Lüneburg, Nordhorn, Stade and Verden.

Around 2,500 Verdi union members are in dispute over a collective agreement and pay parity, being paid 3.30 euros per hour less than workers in other areas. They walked out May 14 over the same issue.

On May 15, DHL delivery drivers in Leipzig, Germany went on 45-hour warning strike.

The DPVKOM union members are demanding pay parity with drivers in the West, who earn 700 euros more per month. The union is calling for a 500 euros increase plus 8 percent rise for all grades.

## Greek dockers at Cosco terminals in Piraeus port walk out over labour agreement

Dockers at container terminals 1 and 11 in port Piraeus, Greece went on a 48-hour warning strike May 17. Since November, the ENEDEP union members have been demanding employer Cosco sign a labour agreement over pay and conditions. Management responded by seeking a court interdict declaring the strike illegal.

The workers walked out previously in November as part of a 24-hour general strike against the rising cost of living, to demand higher pay. In October, the same workers protested the Gaza genocide preventing the loading of a container of ammunition bound for Israel.

## Workers on Ro-Ro ferries in Attica municipality, Greece defy courts and continue strike over pay and conditions

Ferry workers in Attica, Greece are continuing their stoppage begun May 12, despite the labour court declaring it illegal.

The PENEN union members who work on the Ro-Ro ferries plan to stay out until Friday. Their demands include adequate staff numbers, 48-hour days off work and pay upgrades among other issues.

Owners Piraeus Port Authority S.A. recorded record profits last year, up 30.8 percent to 87.5 million euro.

## Taxi drivers demonstrate in France against attacks on pay

On Monday, several thousand taxi drivers in Pau, Amiens, Paris and Bastia demonstrated against new rates for medical transport.

Almost 1,000 taxis snarled up the centre of Paris, and police arrested 64

and fired tear gas. Drivers in Marseille and Toulon joined the protests on Tuesday. The drivers plan to continue demonstrating all week.

Currently, 85 percent of taxi drivers are approved to transport patients. A cost-cutting medical insurance decree passed by the government means loss of income for taxi drivers, as patients will be transported in groups and drivers paid a flat rate of 13 euros per journey plus mileage.

### **Rail workers' stoppage in Bursa, Turkey over pay and hours**

Workers at Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's transport company in Turkey walked out on Tuesday after pay talks collapsed.

The around 2,800 Turkish Railway Workers Union members want a rise in line with inflation and a 40-hour week. The Consumer Price Index inflation rate was 37.9 percent in April.

### **More strikes against UK university jobs cull while union opposes unified action**

Staff at the University of Newcastle in England held a stoppage last week and are striking again this week against job cuts.

While the university management cite a £4.2 million budget shortfall, they are investing £274 million in two new accommodation blocks to house an extra 2,000 students. The staff-student ratio will rise, and courses will be cut.

Nearly 100 UK universities face a jobs cull of around 10,000 this year, after 10,300 job losses in 2023-24. At Durham University staff voted to walk out for ten more strike days. Greenwich University faces a cut of 319 posts, a quarter of its workforce. The University and College Union, however, refuses to mobilise unified strike action to defend jobs, instead negotiating on a university-by-university basis for voluntary redundancies.

On May 16, students at Bournemouth University staged a protest in solidarity with staff who face 200 job losses.

### **Protest at London's Ealing Council plan to close half its children's centres**

Around 75 people joined a protest organized by Save Ealing Children's Centres against plans by Labour-run Ealing Council in London to close 12 of its 25 children's centres. The council also intends to close a nursery offering full-time places, due to its budget deficit.

The centres provide essential services for parents and undocumented migrants, such as English lessons, parent coaching sessions and play and stay.

A further demonstration is planned at 6pm on June 10, Percival House.

### **Wilson James workers at London's Heathrow airport continue stoppages for pay parity**

Workers marched to London Heathrow Airport's head office in May 22

as part of their pay dispute.

Around 500 Unite union members employed by contractor Wilson James walked out initially in April, growing to 800 for three days from May 20. The workers assist 4-6,000 passengers with mobility problems each day.

They are demanding pay parity with Wilson James employees at Gatwick airport, who are paid 10 percent more.

Rather than broadening the action to mobilise all airport workers, most of whom are low paid, Unite organized an appeal to Heathrow Airport bosses to intervene, who are equally ruthless when it comes to exploiting the workforce. Unite general Secretary Sharon Graham said, "Wilson James can well afford to put forward an acceptable offer. Heathrow bosses need to tell the company to do just that..."

Year-end July 2024 saw Wilson James' profits soar to £35.4 million. Pre-tax profits for 2024 at Heathrow Airport Limited reached almost £1 billion.

Unite suspended action by baggage handlers at Gatwick due over the half term, over late or missing pension payments. Workers will vote on new terms. Also at Gatwick, staff who fuel Easyjet, Air India and Uganda airlines plan to walk out from May 23-27 over pay.

### **Waste collection workers begin strike over unpaid wages in Soran, Iraq**

Waste collection workers in Soran, a city in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region, began a strike on Sunday, pledging not to return to work until they are paid their overdue wages for March and April.

According to *964media*, the company hired by Soran municipality to collect waste did not pay salaries from the start of this year either, with workers receiving three months' back pay in March but no payments since.

Delegating all responsibility to the private firm, an official from the city said, "the company is obligated to pay workers' salaries under all circumstances" and that the city would take "legal steps" if they were not paid. The firm claimed that local banks "experience heavy workloads" but it would pay salaries by the middle of this week, although *964media* noted this does not explain why the March salaries have not been paid.

### **Egyptian lawyers strike for 48-hours against new fees**

On Sunday, Egyptian lawyers began a two-day strike against new fees introduced by the Cairo Court of Appeal. The court now charges a "file review fee" of 33 Egyptian pounds per document, which the Lawyers' Syndicate described as a burden on lawyers and their clients, violating the constitutional right to litigation for poor citizens.

Lawyers held a half-hour protest in April against the fees, and plan to escalate their actions if the fees are not abolished this week.

### **Africa**

### **University of Zimbabwe staff continue pay strike**

University of Zimbabwe lecturers have been on strike for over a month to demand a salary of US\$2,500 and improvements in working conditions, among other issues.

The University administration responded by sacking the strikers and replacing them with scab labour, paid US\$3.30 per hour before tax plus a smaller amount in the local ZWG currency, which is subject to high inflation.

A letter sent out to those replacing strikers says, "Please note that this rate is inclusive of all teaching-related duties, including preparation, assignment setting and marking, as well as the setting and marking of examination scripts." Many of the contracts offered are of three months duration, so they will lose their jobs after the strike.

Lecturers at the university used to earn as much as US\$3,000, but their pay was driven down to US\$250. The Association of University Teachers having overseen this decline, offered no plan to fight the management's strike breaking."

Some fishermen have not received their salaries for seven months or more. The first such protest was held at Walvis Bay on 9 May, with over 1,000 fishermen taking part in a march to Windhoek.



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#### **Care workers at home in Kimberley, South Africa walk out and Gauteng doctors work to rule over lack of remuneration**

Workers at the Helen Bishop Home in Kimberley, South Africa, walked out on May 12 due to lack of pay. The following day, workers set fire to tyres outside the care home, and police were called.

The Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union members, who have not had their wages for April, told *DFA* news they were too hungry to care for their vulnerable patients. Union spokesperson Paul Gras said, "The last time staff downed tools, a patient died because only the caregivers knew how to feed him."

In Gauteng, doctors withdrew overtime if they were not paid fully and on time, from May 8. The anaesthesia department at the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital in Ga-Rankuwa also withheld anaesthesia services due to payment delays, likewise the department for medical family care in Ekurhuleni. The SA Medical Association Trade Union wrote to the Department of Health in Gauteng demanding payments owed by Thursday.

#### **Ethiopian health workers defy intimidation, continue partial strike**

Ethiopian health workers have been on a strike for several weeks to demand a liveable wage.

They have reported facing arrests and intimidation by authorities since the nationwide partial strike began. The government arrested over 78 medical doctors and other health professionals taking part in the strike.

The strikers are determined to continue their action in spite of the crackdown against them and warn that it could escalate to a full strike by May 26. At present, emergency services are being provided with only non-emergency appointments affected.

#### **Namibian fishermen continue their protests over pay and conditions**

Namibian fishermen employed under the government redress programme are set to continue their protests to demand payment of outstanding salaries and better working conditions.