

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## **Tens of thousands of Belgian workers in countrywide strike against government budget cuts**

Over 30,000 workers in Belgium walked out and joined public demonstrations in Brussels and other cities Wednesday in the latest protest against government cuts and reforms.

Strikes affected shipping and ferry services, flights from Brussels and Charleroi airports, bus and metro services in the capital, waste collections, the judicial system and other administrative services.

ACV, ABVV and ACLVB union members and other social organisations oppose the “Arizona” coalition government’s financial restraints on wages, cuts in unemployment and other benefits and pension reforms.

## **Tens of thousands of Italian metalworkers strike for new contract agreement**

Metalworkers throughout Italy held an eight-hour strike June 20, with thousands attending demonstrations in Genoa, Naples and Turin for a new contract that affects 1.5 million workers.

In Bologna, over 7,000 workers demonstrated, with some blocking the city’s ring road. They may face criminal charges under new anti-union legislation.

The FIOM, FIM and UILM union members demand a collective bargaining agreement for improved wages, reduced working hours, greater job security and increased workplace safety.

The action was one of many called the same day by several unions in response to mounting pressure from workers for better pay and conditions. The strikes, which caused disruption to trains, buses, airports and ports throughout the country, reflect broad working-class opposition to the deepening social inequality overseen by fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

## **Spanish metalworkers in Cadiz and Murcia continue strikes for a collective agreement with employers**

Some 26,000 metalworkers in Cadiz, Spain resumed an indefinite strike

Monday, after the proposed collective agreement between the UGT union and the Federation of Metal companies of the Province of Cadiz (Femca) fell through.

According to the CGT union and the Metalworkers Coordinator (CTM), over 5,000 workers marched through the Cadiz area Wednesday. Both the CGT and CTM oppose the agreement negotiated by the UGT last week.

Metalworkers in the Murcia region of Spain are also to continue their strike after the failure of a similar UGT-brokered agreement on Tuesday.

The walkouts are the latest expression of the explosive anger building in Spain’s industrial working class. It is part of a broader strike wave, as workers fight to claw back wages gutted through years of below-inflation pay, soaring housing costs and rising food prices.

## **EasyJet cabin crew flying out of Spain strike for pay increase**

Cabin crew with EasyJet in Spain went on a three-day strike Wednesday, causing flights to and from Malaga, Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona and Alicante to be cancelled. Thirty workers also demonstrated in Terminal 2 at Barcelona-El Prat airport.

The Unión Sindical Obrera members say their salaries are the lowest in Europe, and demand pay rises to bring them level with EasyJet staff in other countries. Many are also on nine-month seasonal contracts, lowering their wages even further.

## **Car mechanics at London dealership strike over pay**

Car mechanics working at Hedin Mercedes-Benz dealership sites around London walked out Monday and Wednesday and are due to strike Friday.

The Unite union members at the Bromley, Brooklands and Croydon sites are responsible for repairs, MOT (statutory testing) and servicing of high-end Mercedes cars across the capital. They are protesting Hedin’s refusal to make a pay offer for this year.

Last year, they were given a 2 percent rise when average RPI inflation was 3.6 percent. In April of this year inflation was 4.5 percent, meaning they have had a real-terms pay cut.

Further walkouts are scheduled for June 30, July 2, 4, 7, 9 and 11.

## **Cleaners at health centres in north-west England strike over underpayment**

Monday marked the final day of a three-day stoppage by cleaners and their supervisors working for outsourcer Mitie at health centres in Blackburn, Burnley and Rossendale in north-west England.

The Unison union members are protesting consistent underpayment. They also say they have not been paid the £1,655 COVID recovery bonus payment made to all other NHS staff in 2023.

They have taken action previously over this issue.

### **Walkout by wine packaging workers in Bristol, UK over pay**

Around 200 UK wine bottling and packaging workers employed by major wine supplier Encirc are taking part in intermittent strike action.

The Unite union members at Encirc's plant in Avonmouth, near Bristol, are in dispute after the company imposed a 3.2 percent pay award. The company, with a £600 million annual turnover, is refusing to negotiate with Unite over an improved offer.

Talks initiated by government mediation body ACAS failed to resolve the issue. The programme of stoppages begun June 19 will continue until July 5. The union is selecting stoppage dates and work shifts judged to have the biggest impact on production. A 12-week overtime ban is also taking place.

The action is expected to lead to wine shortages in supermarkets.

### **Underground rail system workers in Glasgow, Scotland strike over working conditions**

Around 100 drivers and station staff employed by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) on the Glasgow underground rail system, Scotland held a 24-hour strike Wednesday. Further stoppages are planned for Friday and Saturday.

The Unite union members are protesting chronic understaffing, which has led to workers routinely working up to 10 hours beyond their contracted 39 hours and repeatedly being called to take shifts at short notice. The extra worked hours do not attract improved shift, overtime or weekend allowances.

A planned 24-hour walkout on June 20 was suspended after SPT put forward an offer on pay, terms and conditions to address staff shortages, but this was rejected by the workers.

An overtime ban begun June 13 remains in place. This week's stoppages coincide with outdoor gigs at Bellahouston Park featuring Sting, Simple Minds and Stereophonics and are expected to disrupt travel to the events.

### **Municipal workers in uMhlathuze Local Municipality, South Africa continue strike over pay and horrendous conditions**

The strike begun June 17 by public sector workers at the uMhlathuze Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa is continuing.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) members have a raft of unresolved grievances, including unfair dismissals, lack of health and safety measures, no danger allowance payments or overtime pay, discrimination against potential employees who are disabled, corruption, inadequate tools, unroadworthy works vehicles, dilapidated

buildings and lack of toilet facilities.

Expanded Public Works Programme workers on temporary contracts for five years are not made permanent, yet there are staff shortages.

The strike has disrupted waste collection and the water supply. Municipality residents in Esikhaleni have taken to burning waste in municipal skips. Around 67 percent of the city of uMhlathuze's 1,483 public employees are SAMWU members and involved in the dispute.

Also in Kwa-Zulu Natal, unemployed doctors staged a sit-in protest on Monday outside the Office of the Premier, demanding posts are released. There is a shortage of doctors in hospitals.

Previous sit-ins took place in January and March over the same issue, each lasting three to five days.

### **Ethiopian health workers continue strike over pay and conditions**

Ethiopian health professionals are continuing their pay stoppage begun May 13.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali's response was to tell them to "find satisfaction" in curing their patients and accept that their pay is low. He also accused health workers of shirking their responsibilities and of undermining their patients' well-being.

Other demands of the strikers include improved working conditions. They face overcrowded facilities and a lack of supplies, including essential medicines.

### **Workers in tertiary education join strike by teachers and council workers in Ondo State, Nigeria over minimum wage**

Tertiary education sector workers joined the 14-day warning strike by teachers and council workers in Ondo State, Nigeria begun June 20.

The SSANU, NASU, NAAT, and SSANIP union members are fighting for the implementation of the minimum wage of ₦70,000, agreed with government in a Memorandum of Understanding to be implemented from January 2025, and five months' salary arrears.

The unions released a statement saying, "We hereby appeal to all the stakeholders in Ondo State especially the political leaders, traditional rulers and religious leaders to kindly intervene in this issue."

Educational Management scholar Professor Akungba Akinrotimi Oyetakin observed that investment in education is completely inadequate to meet the needs of modern tertiary institutions.



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