

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.

May Day in Italy sees first of three general strikes against declining living standards

Workers across Italy celebrated May Day 2026 with an all sector general strike May 1 disrupting travel and leading to flight cancellations. A further two general strikes are planned for May 15-16 and May 29, involving broad layers of the working class, from public sector employees and industrial workers to logistics, agriculture and service sectors.

This eruption of industrial action reflects mounting anger over declining living standards, precarious employment and the erosion of wages, as workers confront the consequences of austerity and pro-business policies.

Regional and sectoral strikes are also planned in May. School workers walked out on May 6-7 against attacks on pay, worsening job insecurity and education “reforms” including standardised testing.

Meanwhile, transport disruptions—including rail, air and local public transit—will affect millions, with a major shutdown planned at the end of the month. Air transport workers, airport staff and logistics employees are also mobilising, signalling the breadth of opposition across strategically vital industries. Health workers will join the movement on May 18, underscoring the crisis in public services after years of underfunding.

Real wages in Italy have declined over three decades, while inequality continues to deepen. While the Meloni government has tried to distance itself from the war in Iran, it has deepened its commitment to the war in Ukraine and is intent on increased military spending at the expense of essential services.

Workers join strikes and demonstrations on May Day

In Germany, thousands of workers took to the streets including in Berlin on May Day, highlighting the central role of public services in sustaining social life as the government declares its intention to direct public finances away from housing, infrastructure and healthcare and into military spending. The healthcare sector is particularly under attack by the Merz-led CDU/CSU coalition government.

In Greece, the private and public sector trade union federations—GSEE and ADEDY—called a 24 hour stoppage, with demonstrations held nationwide. May Day is a public holiday in Greece.

They were demanding higher wages, stronger labour protections and expanded social spending. This mainly hit public transport as workers on the metro and trains and ports walked out. The national rail network,

including regional commuter lines, was fully halted. The Panhellenic Maritime Federation joined the strike, tethering all ships to port. Also participating were members of the Stalinist affiliated PAME federation.

Amsterdam, the largest city in the Netherlands, saw one of its biggest May Day mobilisations of recent years. The demonstration reflected growing opposition to the newly formed right-wing coalition government, which is already prioritising budget discipline and austerity. Workers face attacks on unemployment insurance, cuts to health and social spending, and a housing crisis. Dutch transport unions are preparing strike action in mid-June, in the run-up to Public Service Day on June 23.

There were at least 320 May Day demonstrations across France. Police clashed with protesters in Paris. The Macron government is expanding derogations to allow more non-essential sectors to operate on International Workers’ Day, framed as “voluntary” and incentivised with higher pay. May Day is a paid holiday in France.

In Turkey, health workers turned out, as did workers in Serbia and North Macedonia. At rallies, union leaders rhetorically declared a public services emergency and demanded greater investment, and a common struggle across borders. In practice, however, the union bureaucracy serves to divide and suppress the unification of workers’ struggles, which is why living standards have regressed.

Healthcare workers across Portugal join two-day national strike , protesting collapsing public health system

Health workers in Portugal joined a two-day national stoppage on Monday, protesting the deterioration of public healthcare under conditions of chronic underfunding and staff shortages.

Workers took action over wages, overtime and career stagnation. Despite reports of intimidation from management, including threats of disciplinary action, 60 percent of the workforce participated.

Further industrial action is planned, with workers in multiple unions involved. Workers state that at stake is not only the defence of wages and working conditions, but the future of a public healthcare system increasingly subject to cost-cutting.

Early childcare staff in Madrid, Spain continue strike over pay, conditions and funding

Around 300 early childhood education workers in Madrid, Spain protested outside the regional Assembly on May 6 after completing a month of indefinite strike action. They focused attention on the deteriorating conditions in a sector largely staffed by women.

The mobilisation reflects mounting anger over low pay, job insecurity and the undervaluing of what is the critical foundation of the education system. The strike was organised by the Labour Platform of Children's Schools.

An indefinite strike at Madrid nurseries begun in April continues. A national strike of workers in the 0-3 years' sector was planned for May 7.

Industrial workers at Tubos Reunidos in Spain march to defend jobs

Workers facing redundancy have been demonstrating in Orduña, Amurrio and Bilbao, in Spain's Basque Country.

The steel pipe-maker Tubos Reunidos plunged from profitability in 2023 into €263 million of debt. It plans 242 job losses.

Founded in 1892 during the rise of Basque heavy industry, Tubos Reunidos grew into a transnational enterprise with operations in Spain and the United States. Today, its nearly 1,300 workers face the consequences of restructuring plans. While trade unions formally reject the layoffs, they offer no strategy to defend employment.

The crisis has been intensified by global trade tensions, particularly US tariffs imposed on steel and aluminium, which have squeezed profitability.

Unison ends strike at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, England on eve of council elections

The Unison union has pushed through a deal at the National Coal Mining Museum for England (NCMME) in Wakefield, England, cobbled together with management on the eve of the local council elections in which the Labour party faces a wipeout.

The NCMME is a registered charity governed by a board of trustees including Labour-run Wakefield council.

More than 40 museum workers, most of them underground mine guides, walked out five months ago over pay. The Unison union asked for a miserly 5 percent rise or £1 for all staff, whichever was higher, which management rejected.

The mine guides, former miners including veterans of the 1984-85 strike, earn £12.86 an hour. Other staff are on £12.60, barely above the national minimum wage of £12.21 per hour for workers.

According to Unison, the pay deal includes a 10.5 percent wage rise, meaning an increase for mine guides by £1.35 an hour to £14.21. The slightly increased offer from management above Unison's original paltry demand enabled the union to push through an acceptance vote.

Planned strikes and walkouts at several UK schools highlight increasing workload and threat to jobs

A strike by teachers in Dorset, England at the multi-academy Initio Learning Trust planned for May 6 was suspended at the eleventh hour by the National Education Union (NEU).

The NEU is entering negotiations with Trust management over proposed restructuring plans, including subject cuts and job losses at Queen Elizabeth's School and Corfe Hills School. The Trust runs 19 schools. Educators have staged protests, including a petition to parliament with 2,000 signatures.

Teachers describe intolerable conditions due to staff reductions, teachers working far beyond contracted hours, and constant surveillance from management, including the threat of "support plans" for those who fail to conform to rigid teaching methods. The NEU warned of further strikes later in May.

The next biggest teaching union, the NASUWT, also suspended its own planned walkouts at the same schools prior to the NEU climbdown, citing ongoing negotiations with management.

Separate strike action at Budmouth Academy in Weymouth by NASUWT members, backed by a 93 percent strike vote, took place April 26-27 over workload and conditions.

Education workers at Connaught School for Girls in East London are continuing their strike begun April 21. The NEU members oppose victimisation, unmanageable workloads and restructuring aimed at cutting jobs. The stoppage is planned until May 8.

School management has ceased to employ agency workers from Tradewind Recruitment as scab labour to break the strike.

Meanwhile, at Ashfield Academy, a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) school in Leicester, support staff held a stoppage on April 30. They are demanding reinstatement of victimised Unison representative and teaching assistant Tom Barker. Further action is planned for May 13-14.

The education unions refuse to mobilise their members in unified action to fight for a fully funded education system.

Critical care workers at hospital trust in England walk out over cuts to overtime pay and staff shortages

Critical care staff (nurses, support workers) at Salford Royal and other Northern Care Alliance (NCA) sites in England walked out for 48 hours on Monday. This is the third round of action over a dispute regarding overtime pay.

Hospitals affected are Salford Royal Hospital, Royal Oldham Hospital and Fairfield General Hospital.

The UNISON members are striking over being denied overtime rates when they work beyond their 37.5-hour week. Instead, they are required to take shifts through third-party staffing provider, which can leave workers earning less than their normal hourly rate and without pension contributions. UNISON says some workers are up to £10 an hour worse off for overtime shifts, which are used to cover understaffing.

Staff previously held 12-hour strikes on March 12 and further walkouts on April 7.

While emergency services are protected during the strike, the strike aims to highlight the urgent need for fair pay to ensure safe staffing levels in Intensive Care Units and Critical Care Units.

SAP software workers in Israel begin system sanctions over collective agreement

Software workers at tech giant SAP Israel this week began a partial sanction of work on repairing system failures in the company's software. The Histadrut union members are implementing "the first step in a series of organisational sanctions," which are expected to expand in an escalating contract dispute.

Two months ago, SAP abruptly ended contract negotiations and began the legal 60-day process to terminate the existing collective agreement.

The company said the agreement did not “provide the managerial flexibility required.” It has refused to change its position in the ensuing negotiations, leading Histadrut to declare an official labour dispute three weeks ago.

On April 16, more than 120 workers and supporters protested outside the home of CEO Orna Kleinmann. Placards read “SAP without workers is just code” and “Rights aren’t erased at the click of a button.”

Histadrut has warned of an escalation of the action, up to shutting down SAP’s operations in Israel.

A recent study by the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies has pointed to the use of AI to drive unemployment in the hi-tech sector in Israel. Study lead Professor Gil Epstein said that AI “explains about a fifth of the increase in programmer unemployment and locks the door mainly on young people.”

May Day rally in Baghdad demands higher wages, shorter hours

A May Day rally in the Iraqi capital raised critical demands for higher wages, health and social security coverage and shorter working shifts.

Protesters described shifts of up to 14 hours a day for salaries not exceeding 600,000 dinars (c. \$387). Protesters called for an eight-hour working day.

South African Post Office workers protest over wages and job security

Workers at the state-owned South African Post Office (SAPO) marched through Pretoria on April 29 to protest more than eight years without a pay increase, despite almost daily rises in inflation.

Members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) were joined by other unions as they marched to the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies to hand over a memorandum of demands.

SAPO has been under a business rescue plan since 2023. Two weeks ago, the business rescue practitioners told parliament that SAPO could be handed back to the board and shareholders, but said its future depended on securing funding beyond the rescue. Thousands of workers have been retrenched, while the remaining 5,700 have seen no pay rise.

South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) secretary general Zwelinzima Vavi told protesters that the government was “deliberately killing” the post office in order to hand it over to their cronies, after years of looting its assets. Postal workers oppose the privatisation of SAPO.

Vavi accused SAPO of deducting provident fund contributions from salaries but then failing to pass them to the appropriate authorities, meaning workers who became sick found their medical aid donations had vanished.

The memorandum demanded an immediate across-the-board R5,000 pay rise, full job security and a moratorium on retrenchments.

The unions are most concerned to stabilise the company, calling for the appointment of a functioning board, the allocation of 30 percent of government business to SAPO and implementation of an agreed R3.8 billion funding intervention. Business rescue practitioners have confirmed that this has been approved. R2.4 billion has been released to cover operating costs and creditor payments.

Impala Platinum miners in South Africa strike for union recognition

More than 1,000 miners at Impala Platinum Triple M in Rustenburg, South Africa began a protected strike on April 24, in a long-running dispute over union recognition.

Following a government conciliation order in May 2025, Impala was instructed to verify the membership of workers at Triple M in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The company systematically delayed this process for four months. It is reported that the company has recognised a closed shop agreement with another union.

Wageng Mochwaedi, NUM Deputy Chairperson in Rustenburg, accused Impala of “influencing service providers to deny workers their lawful rights” and undermining collective bargaining.

Municipal workers march in Buffalo City, South Africa over outstanding grievances

Hundreds of municipal workers have marched to the Buffalo City Metro city hall on Monday to present a memorandum of grievances.

The South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU) members have held protests and strikes over the last year demanding an end to outsourcing and casualisation, and the payment of danger allowances to workers exposed to disease in meter reading and sanitation.

Their strike was called off last September, when an agreement was reached, but the union says it has not been implemented. The only part implemented was the payment of a R6,000 COVID allowance to each worker. SAMWU regional secretary Thando Poni said “This is not a new memorandum of grievances; we are not starting anything new.” The municipality has acknowledged that the agreement was not implemented.

The protest clearly touched wider anger. SAMWU officials distanced the union from the burning of tyres and rubbish along the route of the march.

Water contractors in eThekweni Municipality, South Africa stop work over non-payment

Contractors responsible for servicing sewerage systems and burst water pipes across Durban, South Africa have downed tools over their non-payment by eThekweni municipality, for months in some cases.

More than 500 contractors are said to be involved, with some saying they were last paid in December. Those payments were only made after they picketed water and sanitation offices in November.

The municipality has introduced a new payment system, allegedly to fast-track payments, but contractors were only notified of this a week ago and had been offered no training in how to submit invoices.

Musa Mdladla, a spokesperson for the contractors, said they would “rather stop working than continue to be played by officials.” He said that “If the municipality does not pay us, we will have no option but to shut down every depot.”

In a separate dispute pointing to the crisis of South African infrastructure, residents of Mthatha in Eastern Cape blocked the main N2 road in protest to demand a consistent and reliable water supply. They say they have not had a consistent running water supply since 2016, when the pipes were diverted.

The municipality blamed faulty piping, but nothing changed. When

residents protested last year, the municipality installed 13 water tanks as a stopgap. Their regular weekly refilling lasted only six months.

Judiciary workers in Abia State, Nigeria continue two-month-long strike

The ongoing two-month-long strike by judiciary workers in Abia State, Nigeria is severely disrupting court operations and legal practice across the state. The industrial action by the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria members has paralysed court activities, preventing hearings, filings and other legal processes.

The shutdown is cascading throughout the justice system, with cases stalled indefinitely and access to legal redress curtailed.

The dispute underscores the deepening crisis in Nigeria's judiciary, where longstanding grievances over pay, funding and working conditions remain unresolved.

Unions call off non-academic university workers' strike across Nigeria

Non-academic workers in Nigeria's public universities have been instructed by their unions to return to work on May 11 without winning their demands. Their strike began May 1.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities and Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions promote illusions in government assurances that discussions over salaries and conditions will conclude within two weeks.

The strike centres on long-standing disputes over wages and conditions, including the renegotiation of a 2009 agreement. It paralysed administrative and support services across universities nationwide, including at the University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ilorin.

Workers rejected the government's proposed 30 percent salary increase, denouncing the government's failure to adhere to promises dating back to 2009.

At the University of Ilorin, the strike brought all campus activities to a standstill. It included protests at the university gates and a total withdrawal of services, paralysing administrative and support functions and effectively shutting the university down.

The suspension of the strike resolves none of the underlying issues confronting university workers and the broader working class in Nigeria. Public education remains severely underfunded while workers face rapidly rising living costs, stagnant wages and deteriorating working conditions. The repeated cycle of strikes, negotiations and government renegeing on agreements underscores the necessity for workers to organise independently of the union bureaucracy in struggle against government-imposed austerity.

Resident doctors strike at Delta State University Teaching Hospital in Nigeria after assault on staff member

Resident doctors at the Delta State University Teaching Hospital in Oghara, Nigeria have launched an indefinite strike following the violent

assault of one of their colleagues, exposing the intolerable conditions confronting healthcare workers in Nigeria as a result of the social crisis.

A senior doctor was reportedly attacked, suffering physical injuries including trauma to the ear. Such incidents are part of a broader pattern of harassment, threats and violence that has driven many doctors to seek accommodation far from their workplaces, further straining an already overstretched health system.

The stoppage, declared after an emergency congress of the Association of Resident Doctors, involves all sections of medical staff and reflects deepening anger over mounting insecurity and the failure of authorities to guarantee even basic protections for frontline workers.

The attack underscores the social tensions produced by collapsing infrastructure, including the health service, and in-work poverty with 63 percent of the population below the poverty line.



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