

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 strike and march against Belgian government's austerity reforms

Tens of thousands of workers in Belgium took part in a further national strike Tuesday, with estimates of between 40,000 and 70,000 demonstrating in the capital, Brussels. Air traffic and public transport were particularly affected.

The numbers involved show that workers are determined to fight the right-wing Arizona coalition government's regressive policies, which have affected pensions, benefits, wages and energy costs.

The mass protests were organised by the main trade union confederations in a political appeal to change the coalition's course.

Public sector employees in Greece hold 24-hour nationwide strike and protest rally over austerity pay and working conditions

Thousands of civil servants across Greece held a nationwide strike Wednesday, and hundreds rallied in the city of Athens. Teachers, healthcare workers and government employees, but not transport workers, walked out in protest over poor pay, working conditions and job security.

Members of the civil servants' union, ADEDY, demand wage increases, help with the rising cost of living, improved health and safety at work and permanent contracts.

Thousands of Portuguese nurses in one-day strike over pay and conditions

Nurses across every health sector in Portugal held a 24-hour minimum services strike Tuesday and marched through the capital, Lisbon, in protest at long-term staff shortages, poor pay and worsening conditions at work.

The Portuguese Nurses Union and the Professional Association of Nurses members demand a 35-hour week, backdated pay progression increments for 2018-2021 and a general pay increase to match the cost of living.

Nurses also want greater investment in the profession, as there is an estimated shortage of more than 14,000 nurses in the Portuguese National

Health Service, with 40 percent of nurse graduates emigrating for better conditions, recognition and prospects.

Ambulance workers in Ireland strike for more pay and improved working conditions

Over 2,000 National Ambulance Service (NAS) staff in Ireland began a work-to-rule Monday, followed by a 24-hour stoppage Tuesday. They are demanding salaries commensurate with their growing work levels and responsibilities. Further strikes are planned for the next two weeks.

The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union and the Unite union members say an independent report has recommended that pay reflect their greater workloads and professional responsibilities, including emergency patient care and medical treatment. Many of the workers are educated to degree level.

The government Health Service Executive and NAS management refuse to engage in negotiations unless ambulance crews agree to new arrangements, which workers say are unsafe and unmanageable at current staffing levels.

UK Royal Fleet Auxiliary workers strike over pay and conditions

Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members working for the UK Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) are continuing strike action in a deepening dispute over pay, working conditions and alleged breaches of the National Minimum Wage.

The latest 24-hour stoppages took place on May 8 and 13, with protests outside major naval hubs including Portsmouth. Workers maintained essential safety operations aboard vessels, including the management of gangways and moorings.

The RFA workforce is made up of civilian seafarers supporting Royal Navy operations around the world. Many RFA seafarers routinely work shifts of up to 12 hours a day, frequently spending months at sea under demanding operational conditions.

Workers say there is still no clear formula explaining how their pay is calculated in relation to the hours worked. The RMT raised concerns that, when the total hours are properly accounted for, some workers' effective pay rates may fall below the legal minimum wage. At the same time, years of below-inflation pay settlements and worsening conditions have fuelled growing retention problems across the service.

Ship officers in the Nautilus International union began an indefinite work-to-rule on Sunday over a pay and conditions dispute.

Workers at Cambridge University, UK, escalating strike over pay parity

Nearly 600 University of Cambridge workers walked out on Wednesday and Thursday in an escalating dispute over pay and the soaring cost of living. They plan further strikes on May 15, 20-22 and 26-29.

The strikes involve library, museum, IT and finance staff who are demanding a “Cambridge weighting” payment equivalent to the supplement introduced at Oxford University. Earlier walkouts disrupted operations at major university sites, including the Fitzwilliam Museum and Haddon Library.

The Unite union members are fighting against declining real wages in one of the most expensive cities in Britain, where low-paid university employees increasingly struggle to meet housing and living costs.

Oxford University introduced a pensionable weighting payment of £1,500 in 2024, later increased to £1,730 and extended to all non-clinical staff. Cambridge workers, by contrast, have received only a temporary 2.5 percent supplement for lower pay grades.

The growing strike movement at Cambridge reflects mounting anger among university workers across the UK, where years of wage restraint, inflation and austerity policies have eroded living standards while elite institutions continue to accumulate wealth and expand executive salaries.

It also underlines the role of the Unite and University and College Union (UCU), which refuses to mobilise its members in a joint, unified action to defend jobs, pay and conditions.

At the University of Nottingham, 2,700 staff received letters from management saying their jobs were at risk because the university could run out of money by 2031. Around 600 voluntary and compulsory redundancies, both academic and support, are planned in departments including physics, medicine and health sciences. UCU members have voted for a marking boycott.

Teachers at two UK secondary schools walk out to oppose job cuts and attacks on conditions

Teachers at Banovallum School and Queen Elizabeth’s Grammar School in Horncastle, Lincolnshire, are carrying out four days of strike action from May 11 against job cuts and worsening workloads imposed by the Horncastle Education Trust.

NASUWT and National Education Union (NEU) members oppose plans for seven staff redundancies and reductions to planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, measures which will intensify already unsustainable working conditions. The strikes have forced both schools to restrict attendance largely to students sitting examinations, with teachers mounting pickets outside the schools each morning.

Chronic underfunding in Britain’s state education system is driving cuts to jobs and attacks on conditions. The trust claims the redundancies are necessary because costs have risen beyond available funding. The reduction in PPA time—from 15 to 12 percent—means teachers are forced to absorb the impact of austerity through longer hours, increased administrative burdens and reduced time for lesson planning, marking and student support.

NEU and NASUWT members at Knutsford Academy are planning strike action for May 19 and June 2-3 and 9-11, as four teaching posts are under threat.

Protests over wages, conditions, cost of living across Iran

Protests over wages and conditions continue across Iran, with many demonstrations by groups of workers and retirees on May 12.

Medical staff at the Zanjan Health Centre protested outside the Zanjan University of Medical Sciences. They are demanding salary increases, the elimination of mandatory overtime and fair overtime rates. They are also calling for the provision of welfare items and wage benefits, performance bonuses and a reduction in working hours.

Retirees from the Telecommunications Company staged a further protest in cities including Tabriz, Ilam, Arak, Kermanshah, Ahvaz and the capital, Tehran. They are campaigning for their long-standing rights and benefits, in a protest at poverty conditions and rising living costs.

Two days earlier, pensioners of the Social Security Organisation in Shush and Haft Tappeh had protested at the Khuzestan Social Security Office over delays in annual pension increases and worsening conditions. They accuse the authorities of failing to respond to their demands.

In Abyek County, Kazvin Province, retired Social Security workers have submitted a protest petition against closure of the night shift at the Nabi Akram 24-hour clinic, owned by Social Security.

Nearly 102,000 of the Abyek area’s 120,000 population are covered by Social Security, but due to inadequate facilities, they have to seek most of their healthcare elsewhere. Closure of the night shift will only exacerbate these problems.

Workers at the Chabahar Petrochemical complex are protesting delayed wages, layoffs and low wages. They say that many receive wages of only 12-15 million tomans (\$154-194), while the government itself admits the minimum living costs are over 70 million tomans (\$900). Before the current war, around 3,000 workers were employed here, but two-thirds of them have been laid off.

On May 12, workers at the Iranian Offshore Oil Company in the Lavan region protested their dissatisfaction with salary caps, restrictions on payments and unfair classification of jobs in operational zones.

Residents of Zeytun Township marched to the Presidential Office to protest governmental refusal to implement judicial rulings for construction. The township houses more than 12,000 former members of the Jihad-e Sazandegi construction organisation. Despite nearly two dozen court rulings, the government has refused to issue construction permits. A plan to transfer part of the land to the government has also not been implemented. The protesters called for the enforcement of approved agreements and an end to this uncertainty.

Workers at the Kish Wood factory staged a protest last week over five months of unpaid wages. They are also protesting delays in payment of salary claims and months of insurance contributions.

Laid-off workers from the Phase 2 project of the Ilam Gas Refinery protested outside the provincial Department of Labour May 5, demanding clarification of their employment status. The workers were among the 350 employed on the project by the contractor Jahanpars. More than 150 were laid off in three phases between September 2025 and March 2026. They held a previous protest April 7.

Africa

Strike over salary grades by municipal workers in Eastern Cape, South Africa

Municipal workers at King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality in South

Africa's Eastern Cape are on strike against unfair salary grades. Workers began picketing last Monday, with waste going uncollected.

The dispute is a long-standing issue, and the municipality has offered no timeframe for resolution. It says it is not in a position to upgrade workers to grade six status because the municipality itself is only classified as having grade four status.

The municipality has applied for upgrading of the municipality as a whole, and says that until this is achieved no individual upgrading can proceed. Municipal directors, however, are already paid at grade six rates.

The municipality has called the strike illegal and threatened suspensions and disciplinary action unless it is called off.

Dismissal of 21 South African mineworkers overturned by Labour Court

The Johannesburg Labour Court has overturned the dismissal of 21 mineworkers sacked for an overtime dispute in 2023, ordering their reinstatement with full retrospective effect and backpay.

The miners, members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, had arrived for a night shift at Northern Coal's Mimosa colliery to find that their payslips did not reflect overtime earnings. Overtime accounted for around a quarter of their working hours, and the omission could have seen their take-home pay cut by a third.

They gathered in the toolbox area to seek clarification, and production was halted for several hours. Northern Coal charged the workers with participating in an unprotected strike, refusing to return to work and causing production losses. All 21 were dismissed in April 2023.

The Court acknowledged that the strike was unprotected, but described Northern Coal's response as unfair because the workers had returned to work on receiving assurances that the grievance would be resolved.

The Court rejected Northern Coal's claim for R2.2 million against the union and the workers for losses incurred, and said that management's response had escalated the dispute.

Students protest at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria over living conditions

Students at the University of Ibadan (UI), Oyo State, Nigeria, staged protests on May 6 over worsening living conditions and in solidarity with staff members who had walked out.

Hundreds of students marched across the campus carrying buckets and chanting "No water, no class" and "No light, no class," while disrupting lectures and examinations. They are protesting prolonged electricity outages, lack of running water and the breakdown of basic services in student hostels.

The protests forced the suspension of academic activities in several faculties, including Social Sciences, Education, Technology and Law, as students blocked lecture halls and major roads on the campus.

The conditions confronting students and university workers at UI reflect the broader collapse of public education in Nigeria after decades of austerity and chronic underfunding. While workers struggle against poverty pay and deteriorating conditions, students face overcrowded campuses, decaying infrastructure and the denial of basic necessities.

Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities members walked out on May 1 against poor conditions and unresolved demands. The unions suspended

the strike on May 11 without winning any concessions.

Truck drivers' protest paralyses traffic on border between Uganda and Kenya over arrest

Truck drivers carrying goods across the Uganda/Kenya border staged a protest during the week beginning May 4, paralysing trade and transport operations at the key Malaba crossing, one of East Africa's busiest commercial routes.

The drivers demanded the unconditional release of Sudi Kauli Mwatela, chairperson of the Long-Distance Drivers' Union, who was arrested at the Elegu border for alleged incitement to violence.

Drivers blocked the main highway with their vehicles for several hours in protest at the arrest, causing long queues of stranded trucks and major disruption to regional supply chains linking Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan. Ugandan authorities estimated the one-day stoppage resulted in losses of up to 35 billion Ugandan shillings in customs revenue collections.

Following Mwatela's release, he accused border security officials of routinely harassing truck drivers through intimidation, illegal charges and arbitrary stoppages during cross-border transit.

The dispute highlights growing tensions among transport workers across East Africa as inflation, rising fuel prices and deteriorating conditions intensify pressure on workers already facing long hours and insecure livelihoods.

The Malaba crossing is a critical artery for regional trade, with hundreds of trucks using it daily to transport fuel, food and manufactured goods across East Africa.



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