

Healthcare workers in Greece hold one-day strike over privatisation; protests and strikes continue across Iran over cost-of-living crisis; union sells out doctors' national stoppage in Kenya over staffing levels, pay and conditions

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.

National hospital strike in Greece against further privatisation

Healthcare workers in Greece held a national strike on Thursday to oppose increasing privatisation in the health service.

The Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Employees (POEDIN) said in a press release that Greece has “the most privatised system in Europe,” with 40 percent of spending on healthcare going to private providers. It called for an end to the use of private doctors in public hospitals.

POEDIN also called for an increase in pay, permanent contracts, increased staffing levels and higher spending on public healthcare, which it said was only 5.5 percent of GDP in Greece. The European average is 7.5 percent.

In 2015, the Syriza government betrayed its popular mandate and implemented austerity measures dictated by the EU, beginning a privatisation spree.

National two-day strike at Deutsche Telekom in Germany in pay dispute

Customer service workers joined a two-day national strike at Deutsche Telekom (formerly T-Mobile) in Germany from Monday.

The United Services Union (Verdi) called the walkouts during collective bargaining negotiations for 70,000 workers at the mostly privatised telecommunications company (around 30 percent state-owned). According to *rbb24*, around 4,500 Deutsche Telekom workers joined a rally in Potsdam on Monday.

Deutsche Telekom's most recent offer was for a 27-month agreement, with a non-consolidated bonus of 2,000 euros this year, a 4.2 percent pay rise next January and a further 150 euro increase from October 2025. Verdi called for a 12 percent pay rise and a one-year contract.

Germany's IG Metall union ends 180-day strike at recycling company

The IG Metall union announced Monday that it was ending a 180-day strike at the recycling company SRW in Leipzig, the longest strike in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany according to *Junge Welt*.

Workers demanded an 8 percent pay rise, a 38-hour week and an increase in bonuses, but SRW refused to negotiate with IG Metall, only the works council.

IG Metall called a pause to the strike on May 6, but SRW locked out the around 90 strikers until the end of May, the *Sächsische Zeitung* reported. The union explicitly said it would do nothing else to demand improved working conditions at the company since “there is no way for a responsible solution based on social partnership.” Instead, it said it would “support employees who want to find jobs in companies bound by collective agreements.”

Croatian textile workers strike over unpaid wages

Workers at Varteks, a clothing company based in the Croatian city of Varaždin employing around 600 people, concluded a nine-day strike this week, demanding wages owed for February and March.

According to *Večer*, Varteks offered a 50-euro bonus to anybody who did not join the strike, which the unions said they would take legal action against. The strike ended on Wednesday after the government promised workers would be paid from a state insurance fund, *NI* reported.

Cyprus port workers strike to enforce collective agreement

On May 8, workers at the port of Larnaca in Cyprus walked out, accusing Kition Ocean Port, the company, which operates the docks, of violating their collective agreement.

The SEK and PEO unions told the media that Kition “violates the

agreement on working hours and overtime employment” by hiring external contractors for additional work rather than offering overtime to its employees.

Workers announced an indefinite walkout, but by the end of the first day, the unions agreed to the government’s demands for “industrial peace” and suspended the strike in favour of mediation. The Labour Minister said, “The volatility abroad makes it necessary to preserve stability within the country,” *Cyprus Mail* reported.

Kition claimed the strike was not “in accordance with the law,” and several employers’ associations called on the government to restrict the right to strike. The Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry suggested restrictions on strikes in “essential services.” They include ports among these because stoppages “inflict major blows on the development of the country,” i.e., on the flow of profits.

Sanitation workers strike in Paris, France for pay rise and Olympic bonus

French waste collection and water hygiene workers in Paris began a strike Tuesday. Planned to last for six days, it was called off Wednesday by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT).

The CGT called for a pay rise and a bonus linked to the high workload due to the Olympic Games. The union said around 70-90 percent of workers joined the brief strike, while the government of the French capital claimed only 16 percent stopped work.

According to *RTL*, the CGT’s demand was for an increase of 400 euros to monthly salaries and a 1,900-euro bonus for working during the Olympics and Paralympics between July and September. The deal it quickly accepted was far lower: a pay rise of 50 euros from July and a further 30 euros in January 2025, and a bonus of between 600 and 1,900 euros depending on the workload during the Olympics, *France Bleu* reported.

Jean Castex, former prime minister and current CEO of the Parisian Autonomous Transport Administration (RATP), told *RTL* that the unions, including the CGT, signed an agreement for metro and commuter rail drivers not to strike during the Olympics in return for a bonus between 1,600 and 2,500 euros.

French firefighters strike over staffing crisis

Firefighters held a one-day strike on Thursday, with a protest in Paris, to demand improved staffing levels, and the recognition of more of the risks they take.

A representative of the CGT union told *France Bleu* the local governments, which fund the fire services, can no longer cope, and called for national funding. He said that in his region, due to staffing shortages, response times “are between 30 and 45 minutes, just because there is nobody to put in the truck.”

Striking firefighters also called for cancer to be recognised as an occupational hazard. According to *France Bleu*, only nasopharyngeal cancer is recognised in France, while firefighters are exposed to carcinogens which can cause many different cancers.

Bicycle delivery workers continue strikes against low pay in Austria

“Gig economy” delivery workers in several Austrian cities held a warning strike on Wednesday, refusing to take lunch orders between 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

The Vida union called the stoppage, part of a long-running pay dispute by delivery cyclists for Lieferando and Foodora.

Vida is calling for an 8.7 percent pay rise for the 2,000 workers covered by the sector’s collective agreement, while the employers offered 5.8 percent.

Strike at Santiago Airport in Spain against understaffing and overwork

Workers at Santiago de Compostela Airport in Spain began a two-day strike Thursday, cancelling around a dozen domestic flights on the first day.

The airport workers are calling for the hiring of more staff, as their overwork is “very serious, both physically and psychologically,” the General Union of Workers (UGT) told *Europa Press*.

The UGT says it called for higher staffing levels for a long time, but the workload became even more unbearable recently after nearby Vigo airport was temporarily closed, and its traffic diverted to Santiago.

Bus drivers’ strike in Vladivostok, Russia

On Saturday, 22 bus drivers in the city of Vladivostok, on Russia’s east coast, stopped work. According to *Versia*, the strike was over “late payment of wages and poor working conditions,” although the news site also said the drivers called for higher wages.

The drivers are reportedly employed by two private companies, VladAvto and Kaslar, each owned by the same man. The local prosecutor’s office said it opened an investigation into the non-payment of wages, which it claimed were “not confirmed so far.”

School support staff in Birmingham, UK walk out in equal pay dispute

Around 1,500 mainly women school support staff across 35 schools in Birmingham, England, walked out Tuesday.

The GMB union members, who work as teaching assistants and catering staff, are pushing for the implementation of equal pay. An equal pay exercise comparing the female roles of school support staff showed a £760 million pay gap compared to equivalent male roles.

Around 500 strikers held a protest outside the Birmingham Council House in support of their claim.

September saw Labour-controlled Birmingham council issue a section 114 notice, effectively declaring bankruptcy. The council blamed the equal pay bill as partly responsible for the council’s budget deficit. The council is planning a series of severe cuts worth £300 million in response.

Tractor manufacturer workers in Basildon, England strike over pay

Around 500 workers at the CNH Industrial tractor factory in Basildon, England, walked out on Tuesday.

The Unite union members are protesting CNH's reneging on a 2022 commitment to pay a 7.4 percent increase for 2024 and instead offering 4 percent. The 2022 agreement was for pay increases to be based on the average rate of inflation over the year.

CNH made profits of £2.4 billion last year and paid its CEO £19 million in 2022, 310 times the pay of an average CNH employee.

The current scheduled strike dates are May 14-16, 21-23 and 28-30. CNH, one of the biggest employers in Basildon, exports tractors across the globe.

On April 1, the London-based CNH laid off 220 workers at the Case tractor factory in Mount Pleasant in southeastern Wisconsin, outside Racine. Nearly 220 of the plant's roughly 660 workers were given "indefinite layoff" notices. The layoffs come over a year after the United Auto Workers rammed through a sell-out contract, ending a nearly nine-month-long strike by roughly 1,100 agricultural and construction equipment manufacturing workers in Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa.

Pay strike by nuclear power plant workers at Dounreay, Scotland

Around 500 workers at the Dounreay nuclear power plant in Scotland began a 24-hour strike Wednesday over pay.

Initially Unite, GMB and Prospect union members had voted by overwhelming majorities to strike after rejecting a 4.5 percent pay offer from April 2023, with strike dates set for May 1 and 2.

However, the employer, Nuclear Restoration Services Limited, came back with a new offer. The three unions suspended the planned stoppage while their members considered the new offer. The new offer, a £500 bonus on top of the 4.5 percent offer, was overwhelmingly rejected by Unite and GMB members but accepted by Prospect union members.

The Unite and GMB members will also begin a two-week work to rule and overtime ban Thursday. A further walkout is planned for May 29.

Wednesday saw a 200-strong picket outside the Dounreay site.

Strikes by mental health social workers in Barnet, London over pay and staff shortages

Mental health social workers in Barnet in the UK capital began a three-week strike Monday.

The Unison union members are involved in a long-running dispute over pay and staff retention leading to staff shortages—began in September. They have held 37 days of stoppages. They voted 91 percent in a 100 percent turnout to continue their action.

They are paid 25 percent less than staff who work with children. Plans by Labour-controlled Barnet council to use the services of social work staff agency Flex360 during a previous two-week strike were ended when Flex360 pulled out of the proposed arrangement as it would have been deemed illegal. However, the council is now proposing to use Flex360 to permanently outsource some roles.

Further stoppages are planned June 17 to July 12.

UK teachers at Liverpool school walk out over bullying claims

Around 70 teachers at the prestigious Blue Coat School in Liverpool, England, walked out on Tuesday over claims of bullying by management and excessive workloads.

The National Education Union (NEU) members were also set to walk out Thursday, with further strikes planned for May 21, 23 and June 12-13.

Staff say there is an atmosphere of chaos at the school. Since 2020, two headteachers at the school have quit and are under investigation by the Teaching Regulation Agency. A former assistant headteacher at the school who was sacked last year is also under investigation.

UK government statistics workers take industrial action short of striking in response to diktat on working-from-home arrangements

Around 1,000 staff working for the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) began action short of striking May 8.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members are refusing to obey a ruling that they should be present in the office 40 percent of the week. They are instead following the patterns of work around working from home undertaken previously.

The PCS members voted by a 73 percent majority to walk out over the issue and by an 84 percent majority for action short of striking. The PCS said it may escalate the action.

ONS, headquartered in Newport, Gwent, has offices in Darlington, Edinburgh, London, Manchester and Titchfield.

Unite union ends strike of canteen workers at Drax power station, UK after accepting new pay offer

The Unite union has ended strikes by around 20 mainly female canteen workers employed at Drax power station in Yorkshire, England.

They have held a total of six weeks of stoppages since early December last year in their fight for a 50p an hour pay increase. They are employed by BaxterStorey on behalf of Drax power station. It has assets of over £200 million and its latest reported operating profit was £25 million. Drax's operating profits for 2023 were £908 million.

According to Unite, the employer offered a £1 an hour site bonus on top of agreeing to pay the real living wage figure set by the Living Wage Foundation (LWF) from January. The current LWF wage rate is £12 an hour. Unite says this amounts to a 19 percent pay increase.

Talks on union recognition by BaxterStorey are still ongoing.

Further protests in Iran over deteriorating living conditions

Monday saw retired telecommunication workers across Iran take part in protests demanding increased pensions as their value falls. Protests took place in cities including Ahvaz, Arak, Isfahan, Marivan and Tabriz.

Gold merchants in Isfahan and Tabriz continued strike action to protest new taxes, leading to cuts in their revenues. Merchants in the Sadaf Shopping Centre in Tehran went out on strike to protest new taxes, which would impact their livelihoods.

In Fasa in southern Iran nursing staff rallied outside the governorate building, protesting poor working conditions and demanding government intervention.

Oil contract workers at Iran's Mazeran Petrochemical company in Chabahar began a protest Saturday against wage arrears. They held a similar protest against wage arrears in March.

There were further protests Tuesday, including residents of the village of Arvo in the Damavand region who clashed with security forces. The villagers were protesting attempts to divert their water resources.

There were also strikes by market vendors, selling cosmetics and perfumes in Tehran, protesting working conditions. There were similar strikes by market vendors in other markets across Tehran, including the iconic 15 Khordad Passage and the Grand Bazaar.

Pensioners protested in Kermanshah, demanding higher pensions and improved living conditions.

With inflation currently at 35 percent and the economy near collapse due to US sanctions, Iran is being drawn into NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, in Ukraine against Russia, and war plans against China.

Union sells out Kenyan doctors' strike over staff shortages and permanent jobs for interns

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, and Dentists Union (KMPDU) has told its members to return to work without having achieved their main strike demand.

The doctors and clinicians began a national stoppage March 14, to protest the government's broken promises made to end a 100-day strike in 2017. Their demands included health insurance, permanent postings for interns, and staff shortages.

KMPDU Secretary General Davji Atallah, who signed the agreement on behalf of more than 7,000 members, said "one of their demands" was not met. Announcing the return to work, he said the interns "will not be posted but we will be having conversations on this issue."

A few days earlier he had declared it was preferable to give up all the other demands to get permanent jobs for the interns.

In May 2023, Atallah said, "The public hospitals are a shell... Interns are the ones running those facilities. This must stop."

Dr Austin Omondi, a medical intern, posted on Twitter/X: "The internship issue is what took us to the streets. We have succeeded in failing to address the primary issue."

South African Sibanye-Stillwater gold miners protest over job cuts

Hundreds of miners working for the multinational gold mining company Sibanye-Stillwater marched in protest on Saturday in the West Rand district of Johannesburg, South Africa. They are demanding an end to ongoing retrenchments and the implementation of proper health and safety measures, among other issues.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members blocked a major highway, causing disruption to traffic until police intervened. The workers mainly protested the planned retrenchments of 575 employees, with a further 550 offered severance packages. Potentially up to 4,000 workers could eventually lose their jobs throughout the company's field of operations in South Africa.

The miners have pledged to step up their actions if they do not receive a reply to their memorandum of demands within two weeks.

In 2022, a five-month pay stoppage by gold miners at the company was sold out by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union. The NUM, representing South Africa's 163,000 platinum miners, refused to

unite their struggle with that of the gold miners.

Unpaid clothing workers occupy local government offices in Gauteng province, South Africa

A dozen co-operative workers who for years have produced school uniforms in Gauteng, South Africa occupied the offices of the provincial Department of Social Development overnight on May 7, then picketed outside for the next two days.

The seamstresses, who work for small co-operatives, are demanding payment for thousands of uniforms supplied to schools in the province in the last three months. They say that due to a change in the procurement system, they are now subcontracted to main contractors above them, who have failed to reimburse them for their work.

The Gauteng Department of Social Development is under investigation for alleged corruption and tendering irregularities.



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