

Pharmacists' stoppage across France against deregulation of sale of medicines threatening closures of pharmacies; South Pars gas field contract workers in Iran continue strike alongside cost-of-living protests by retirees; striking steel workers at South African company attacked with rubber bullets; Kenyan medical workers' stoppage sabotaged by union

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.

French pharmacists strike against medicine shortages and “pharmaceutical Amazon” reforms

Most pharmacies in France, employing 130,000, joined a national strike Thursday. They closed their doors to protest the crises facing the sector, including a government reform plan which the USPO pharmacists' union described as establishing a “pharmaceutical Amazon” system.

The unions anticipated 95 percent of pharmacists would join, with 40 demonstrations planned, including in Paris. Pharmacists cited ongoing medicine shortages as one crisis, as well as a shortfall in funding. According to *La Montagne*, around 80 percent of the income of pharmacies comes from the state's health insurance fund, but the fees they receive for each activity have not increased since 2019. This is despite massive price rises in recent years.

Around 2,000 pharmacies have closed in the last 10 years. In the reform opposed by pharmacists, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal promised to “unlock certain professions, like pharmacists,” including by making it easier to buy medicines online, *La Montagne* reported. The fear is that supermarkets and Amazon will be able to sell medication. The president of the USPO said, “That's called Amazon, it will be the death of our network and it is out of the question.”

Czech court workers strike against low wages

More than 90 percent of the 9,500 workers at courts in the Czech Republic joined a one-day strike on Wednesday, to call for a 15 percent

pay rise, *iDNES.cz* reported. The unions say the average salary of court workers is 15 percent lower than the national average salary. They are also calling for separate pay scales for employees of the justice system.

Strikes over pay in Norwegian public sector

Around 3,500 members of the Akademikerne and Unio white-collar unions in Norway are on strike in a pay dispute.

Around 1,250 stopped work from May 25, with another 2,250 walking out on Monday. Both unions are calling for a separate pay deal from the larger LO union federation, which recently signed a pay agreement without calling strikes. The strikes involve workers in passport offices, customs, schools and hospitals, and several hundred police officers who are also members of the two unions.

Akademikerne claimed the collective agreements covering the public sector were “adapted to LO's interests” and called for closer collaboration between shop stewards and employers, but this conceals the fact that LO members also face erosion of their living standards.

The deal signed by LO involves only a 0.75 percent across-the-board pay rise, with a further 2.15 percent subject to local negotiations. It is being voted on by members of LO unions this week. The largest LO affiliate, the Norwegian Civil Service Union, has already recommended voting against the deal as it is particularly poor for the lowest-paid workers.

Public administration clerks in Slovenia escalate stoppage despite onerous minimum service requirements

Workers in the Slovenian Ministry of Public Administration, who

administer services throughout large parts of the public sector, have been fighting since March 13 for a 28 percent pay rise and an increase in staffing levels.

For two months there was a walkout every Wednesday, and on May 15 workers at 34 of the 58 offices began an all-out strike.

The Union of State Authorities said that “all tasks that can be invented” have been designated as essential and included in minimum service requirements, concluding “in this way a strike is impossible or forbidden,” *Dnevnik* reported.

Strike in asylum services in Italy against “dismantling the right to asylum”

Workers in the Italian Ministry of Interior, who work with asylum seekers, held a one-day strike on May 24 against the use of unqualified staff and an unsustainable speed-up in asylum procedures demanded by Italy’s neo-fascist Meloni government and the European Union.

An official from the CGIL Public Service union told *ALA News* that the government’s policies “risk partially dismantling the right to asylum,” as there are more cases to assess for fewer qualified workers.

Eight-hour strike by construction workers in Naples, Italy, after deadly crash

On May 24, construction workers gathered in Naples, Italy, for an eight-hour strike two days after a 63-year-old colleague was killed at work.

Antonio Russo and two colleagues were reportedly travelling across the site on a cart when it collided with part of a boring machine which was being dismantled. One of the two colleagues is reportedly hospitalised in a critical condition, and the other suffered rib and leg fractures, *Fanpage.it* reported.

Addressing a rally in Naples, Russo’s daughter said of the constant threat of death at work, “This extermination must stop.” The union officials who spoke after her claimed to be fighting for safe working conditions but could only put forward the pathetic plea “that this government must immediately convene the social partners, the trade unions, to discuss what kind of business and organisation of work is to be encouraged in this country.”

Shipbuilding workers in Turkey stop production in wildcat strike against union-backed collective agreement

Hundreds of workers at the Gürdesan shipbuilding company in Turkey stopped work on Tuesday, walking out after the Özçelik-?? union announced details of the collective agreement it had signed.

One Gürdesan worker told *Evrensel* the union had announced “a 96 percent raise, but that is not the case. This is the figure they arrived at including all our fringe benefits. Our basic wage is much lower.” He told the newspaper that in January workers demanded a 100 percent increase in the basic wage and were pleased with the 96 percent figure when Özçelik-?? first announced it, but rebelled after the details became clear.

Özçelik-?? claims that production resumed after they “explained the details of the contract,” but workers denied that. They told *Evrensel* that

all 300 of them would continue the strike until their demands were met.

Nurses protest understaffing in Cyprus’ public hospitals

Nurses in Cyprus’ public hospitals protested last week with a one-hour stoppage on May 23, opposing understaffing and calling for a collective agreement.

The Panhellenic Trade Union Nursing Federation said there was a shortage of 138 nurses in public hospitals and mental health units were at 150 percent of capacity, the *Cyprus Mail* reported.

The State Health Services Organisation (OKYPY), which manages the public hospitals in Cyprus, said it had hired as many nurses as it could afford. A spokesperson for the organisation said, according to *Dialogos*, “OKYPY must become financially autonomous... must not depend on the state.”

The government’s plan for “financial autonomy” is that OKYPY should operate entirely on the same state insurance payments as private hospitals, and direct state payments to public hospitals will end after May, according to *Cyprus Digest*.

Exam invigilators at several Belgian universities hold “surveillance strike” in opposition to universities’ ties with Israel

PhD students and academics at several universities in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium announced a “surveillance strike,” turning a blind eye to any students caught cheating in exams, to protest ties between their universities and Israel during its genocide in Gaza.

Around twenty PhD students from four Flemish universities signed an open letter stating, “As long as our rectors ignore violations of international law by Israeli institutions, we will do the same when students break the rules,” *7sur7* reported.

Several university officials threatened sanctions against anyone caught taking part in the action, while the Minister of Education said, “Anyone who does not want to perform his task will resign or be fired,” according to *Nieuwsblad*.

Bus drivers demand reinstatement of sacked engineer in Yerevan, Armenia

Bus drivers in the Armenian capital Yerevan held a strike on May 22, after the chief engineer of the city’s bus company Yerevan Bus was fired.

More than 20 bus routes were reportedly affected. One striking driver was reported saying he suspected the engineer got in the way of the company and mayor’s plans to reform the transport system. He said, “[t]hey are ready to fire 200 administrative employees and over 1,300 drivers for the sake of their ambitions.”

Week-long wildcat strike over wages at Fertin Pharma plant in Denmark

Around 50 workers at the Fertin Pharma plant in the Danish city of Vejle returned to work Monday, after a week-long wildcat strike over pay.

They stopped work in the day shift on Tuesday last week to oppose the company's latest offer in local wage negotiations, *Jydske Vestkysten* reported.

According to *Vejle Amts Folkeblad*, a court ruled that it would impose fines of 80 kroner (around 10.70 euros) for every hour the wildcat strike continued, with a deadline of this Monday.

Fertin Pharma is owned by the American multinational tobacco company Philip Morris, which bought it in 2021 for over 800 million USD. The factory produces nicotine chewing gum.

Ongoing strike by mental health social workers in Barnet, London over retention payments

Around 20 mental health social workers in the north and south mental health teams at Barnet council in the UK capital are in the third week of a three-week stoppage.

The Unison union members are involved in an eight-month-long dispute over pay and staff retention leading to staff shortages, begun September. At the end of this week, they will have held 52 days of strikes. 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. The mental health social work teams have suffered an ongoing turnover of staff, with 25 staff leaving in the last 22 months. Although there have been replacements, the high turnover has led to a lack of experience within the teams. Unison had called for a 20 percent retention payment across three mental health teams to address this turnover, but has reduced this to 10 percent.

A four-week-long stoppage is scheduled from June 17.

Labour-controlled Barnet council plans to use an agency to scab on the strike. Under the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations 2003, this is illegal. But as *Community Care* notes, "guidance on the 2003 regulations stipulates that employers can cover a striking worker's work by contracting out the service, which appears to be what Barnet Council is planning to do."

Community Care later reported that Unison had sent a legal letter to the council's chief executive John Hooton, "stating that the planned move is unlawful 'strike breaking' and urging the authority to desist or risk court action."

Plans by Labour-controlled Barnet council to use the services of social work staff agency Flex360 during a previous strike fell apart when Flex360 pulled out of the proposed arrangement.

Walkout by housing repair workers at London borough of Greenwich over proposed pay cuts

Around 150 workers employed in the repair and investment service department at Greenwich council in the UK capital held a one-day stoppage Tuesday.

The Unite union members are opposing the council's plan to apply pay benchmarking which could see some workers lose around 30 percent, £17,000 in pay over four years. Under pay benchmarking, employers compare the salaries paid for a particular role and compare it to the market average pay for that role.

The striking workers set up a picket line outside the Birchmere Centre in Thamesmead.

Strike by train ticket barrier staff at UK rail company Northern Rail over pay and conditions

UK workers employed as ticket barrier staff for Northern Rail held a one-day strike May 24, and are due to walk out again Saturday.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are employed by Carlisle Support Services (CSS), which is under contract to provide ticket barrier services to Northern Rail. The CSS employees are paid less than directly employed Northern Rail staff, are barred from the company pension scheme and do not get sick pay.

CSS does not recognise the RMT for negotiating purposes.

Hospital support staff in Nottinghamshire, UK to strike over non-payment of COVID bonus

Around 300 UK hospital support staff employed by Medirest, a private contractor at Sherwood Forest Hospital Trust in Nottinghamshire, are to begin a 48-hour stoppage Thursday in protest at not getting a COVID bonus paid to directly employed National Health Service staff as part of their pay settlement.

The GMB union members are employed at the Trust's King's Mill, Mansfield Community and Newark Community hospitals. Their roles include catering, cleaning, portering and security. As contractors, they are not paid weekend enhancements or sick pay.

They held a 24-hour stoppage over the same issue on May 17.

Staff at UK University and College Union HQ to strike over working conditions

Around 200 UK staff employed by the University and College Union (UCU) are set to strike Thursday.

The Unite union members one-day stoppage coincides with the UCU conference this week in Bournemouth. They are protesting the breakdown of industrial relations.

A Unite statement said, "The UCU's undermining of existing industrial recognition agreements, failure to agree key working principles and heavy-handed use of disciplinary procedures have left our members with little choice but to take strike action."

Border Force staff at London's Heathrow airport set for further walkout over roster changes

Around 300 Border Force staff working at London's Heathrow airport's terminals 2, 3, 4 and 5 are due to begin a four-day stoppage Friday.

The action by Public and Commercial Services (PCS) members follows a four-day stoppage begun April 29. The strike will be followed by a three-

week ban on overtime and work to rule.

Border Force staff are responsible for checking passports of airline passengers arriving and departing from the airport. They oppose proposals by Border Force (part of the UK Home Office) to impose new working rosters. According to the PCS, the new rosters mean staff will have to work over 50 hours a week in 10-hour shifts. Border Force staff have few breaks.

PCS say the roster changes will discriminate “against older workers, women and those workers with families, and those with disabilities. It makes it almost impossible to fulfil caring responsibilities.”

According to the PCS, around 250 of the workers with caring responsibilities will be forced out if the new roster plans go ahead.

Civil Service World reported, “Lack of flexibility in the new roster will make it harder for officials to swap shifts. This will also see staff move to the annualised hours allowance system (AHA), where employees get an extra allowance in exchange for the employer having control over when hours are worked and having the flexibility to change shifts at short notice.

“The previous system meant officials couldn’t be forced to do overtime or work two hours over their rostered hours. Staff could also work shorter shifts across five days instead of the four-day week with longer shifts that AHA workers regularly work.”

PCS union suspends strike in England by National Museum of Liverpool workers over withheld cost-of-living payment

The PCS union has suspended the strike of workers at the National Museum Liverpool (NML) in England from Tuesday until June 2 for its members to consider a new offer from the employer.

The workers, who have held more than 60 days of strikes, voted by a 94 percent majority to walk out after NML withheld a £1,500 cost-of-living payment made to civil servants as part of a pay agreement. The NML was the only one of more than 200 employers to have withheld the payment.

The new offer which the PCS is recommending is for a £1,200 one-off payment, a 35 percent discount in the museum’s café and shop and an additional two days leave a year.

The NML workers are based at seven sites across Liverpool, including the Museum of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum. Should they reject the deal, stoppages will continue.

Protests by students at Huddersfield University, UK over job cuts

Students at Huddersfield University, England protested in front of the university on Friday May 23 against plans to cut jobs.

In April, the university announced plans to cut around 200 jobs, representing some 12 percent of staff. Twelve courses are targeted, including geography, maths and sociology.

Energy workers strike as retirees continue cost-of-living protests across Iran

Contract workers in the South Pars gas field have been on strike for two weeks, with many confining themselves to their dormitories over a series

of ongoing grievances.

One issue is pay, which even with a recent 35 percent rise is not keeping pace with inflation. Another is living conditions. Their accommodation is cramped and lacks basic amenities such as bathrooms. The contractors, who act as middlemen, fail to pass on wage increases and disregard their rights.

The South Pars gas field, one of the world’s largest, is the source of 50 percent of Iran’s gas production.

Sunday saw protests by steel industry retirees in Tehran, Isfahan and Ahvaz. They were protesting the failure of their pensions to keep step with inflation.

The same day saw protests by Social Security Organisation retirees in the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. As well as protesting the inadequacy of their pensions, they shouted slogans calling for the freeing of workers and teachers imprisoned for striking.

Shahrekord, central Iran saw protests Sunday by Maskan-e Melli housing company customers. They were protesting the years-long wait for houses they have signed up for.

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 and in Ukraine against Russia, and the war plans against China.

Steel company in South Africa uses rubber bullets against workers striking after 165 sacked

Steel workers at SA Steel Mills in Meyerton, South Africa were attacked by security guards when they picketed the company’s offices on May 22, in an ongoing strike over the dismissal of 165 employees and safety conditions in the workplace.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members demand the reinstatement of workers sacked in April when negotiations over pay and conditions collapsed and they went on a protected strike. They accuse the employers of not honouring a collective agreement, made with the steel industry’s representative organisation, which guaranteed workers at least the minimum wage.

Refuse workers’ strike for permanent contracts in Johannesburg, South Africa enters third week

Three hundred casual waste collection workers subcontracted to the Pikitup municipal refuse collection agency in Johannesburg, South Africa, are still on strike to secure permanent contracts.

The Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Unions of South Africa members have been picketing depots and protesting since May 16. They want to be incorporated into Pikitup, with permanent employment, membership of the municipal employee share scheme and access to personal protective equipment.

The workers blame corruption within the municipal tendering process for the existence of subcontractors who employ casual labour for Pikitup, often through nepotism. Another union, the South African Municipal Workers Union, which represents Pikitup’s permanent employees, denounced their claims and refused to bring out its members in support of the strikers.

Distribution company workers across South Africa strike over pay and conditions

Drivers and other workers at SG Convenience distribution company warehouses in three South African provinces stopped work May 20 in an ongoing strike over pay and conditions. On Friday, over 50 workers picketed the firm's warehouse in Durban.

The Dynamic People's Union of South Africa members are demanding a 15 percent pay increase, subsidised health insurance, meal allowances and an improvement in working conditions.

Doctors and nurses walk out over safety fears at South African hospital

Medical staff at Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli hospital in Qwa-Qwa, Free State, South Africa stopped work May 22 and protested after a doctor was shot and wounded during a burglary at staff residential quarters.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union members are demanding that the provincial Department of Health pay for increased security provision at the hospital.

Kenyan medical staff's strike to demand contract staff be made permanent sabotaged by union

The Kenyan doctors' strike by medical workers, begun March 14 to protest the government's broken promises to end the 100-day strike, is being sold out by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, and Dentists Union (KMPDU). The KMPDU has ordered its members back to work, without one of the main strike demands, permanent contracts for interns, being resolved.

This leaves the Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers (KNUMLO) members fighting on alone, they say until the government gives permanent appointments to interns—the mainstay of the health service.

Stephen Wafula, the KNUMLO branch secretary said, "UHC [Universal Health Coverage] staff were brought on board during Covid-19 to beef up the deficit in the human resource but the biggest challenge is that they are given a one-year contract and sometimes work for a very long time without pay."

Nurses and midwives in Oyo State, Nigeria take indefinite strike action

Nurses and midwives in Oyo State, Nigeria began indefinite strike action on May 21 over understaffing, lack of promotions and non-payment of allowances.

The chairman of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) in Oyo, Samuel Adeyemi, demanded mass recruitment of nurses and midwives and correction of a date for promotions. "We also demand the adoption and implementation of hazard allowance for nurses at LAUTECH Teaching Hospital [Ladoke Akintola University of Technology], Primary Health Care Board, College of

Nursing and Midwifery, College of Health Technology and OYSHIA," he added.

"We want the financial implementation of 2018 to 2022 promotion of members at LAUTECH, payment of a uniform allowance for all nurses in Oyo State and adoption and implementation of 25 per cent CONHESS adjustment for the nurses."

Health workers' strike over lack of medicines and poor conditions extended in Mozambique

Health workers in Mozambique on strike for a month over poor conditions have extended their walkout for another 30 days, due to the government's inaction over the lack of essential medicines for common diseases.

Sheila Chuquela, Mozambican Association of United Health Professionals (APSUSM) secretary general, said the government is harassing APSUSM members by moving them to remote areas or threatening to do so.



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