

Strike by Norway's civil servants banned on "national security" grounds; South African steelworkers' strike at SA Steel Mills continues, demanding sacked strikers are reinstated; general strike in the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Berea to protest Israeli Defence Force murder of four Palestinians

## 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.*

### Norway's Labour Party government bans civil servants' strike on "national security" grounds

Last week, the Norwegian Labour Minister, Tonje Brenna of the Labour Party, intervened to ban a civil servants' strike called by the white-collar unions Akademikerne and Unio.

According to *NewsInEnglish.no*, Brenna ordered thousands of Akademikerne members back to work and imposed arbitration after the union called its members in the National Security Authority cyber-intelligence agency to join the strike. Days later, she imposed the same order on Unio, citing the strike by police and a supposed "increased risk that criminals and other threat actors can enter Norway via air or sea," insisting "it is necessary to control our borders."

Civil servants in the larger LO union federation walked out on May 25 for a separate pay deal. LO recently signed a pay agreement without calling strikes for a 0.75 percent rise with a further 2.15 percent subject to local negotiations. LO members are voting on the deal this week, with the largest affiliate to the LO recommending rejecting it. If there is less than a 66.7 percent participation in the ballot—it is usually below this—LO can ignore its members' vote, the head of the LO Media Foundation wrote in an opinion piece for *FriFagbevegelse*.

### Doctors in Mayotte in overseas France strike to oppose dangerous understaffing

On Monday, almost all doctors at the hospital in Mamoudzou, the largest city in the French overseas region Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, stopped work and protested against a dangerous lack of staff, *Ouest*

*France* reported.

Around 50 doctors protested outside the hospital with slogans including, "How many deaths [does it take] for a reaction?"

According to *Le Figaro*, only 200 of the 300 posts for doctors at the hospital are filled, and in the emergency department only four out of 37. Mayotte is among the most impoverished regions in France. Situated just off the east coast of Africa, more than 80 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

### German dock workers strike in wage dispute

Workers at German ports have held several strikes in a dispute between the United Services Union (Verdi) and the Central Association of German Seaport Companies (ZDS) over pay for 11,500 dock workers.

On June 7, workers at the Port of Hamburg, Germany's largest port, joined a one-day warning strike, and dock workers in Bremen stopped work on Tuesday.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Verdi is demanding an hourly wage rise of three euros, and the union said ZDS's offer of a 2.5 percent increase "means no real wage increase for the employees."

### School support workers strike against job losses in Lisbon, Portugal

On June 5, support workers in Lisbon schools held a one-day strike to oppose more than 100 job cuts in the Portuguese capital.

The Union of Public Service Workers told *Lusa* that 40 jobs were already cut two years ago. The union said that Lisbon City Council attempted to hire school support workers as freelancers, and "if workers are required, then an employment relationship must be arranged by the local authority."

## **Strike at Leonardo aerospace in Italy against plant shutdown**

Workers at the Leonardo aerospace factory in the Italian town of Grottaglie held a strike of four hours per shift on Thursday to oppose a prolonged shutdown of the plant.

The FIM, FIOM and UILM unions oppose “management’s decision to suspend production activities for several months, effectively using the plant as an accounting management tool, regardless of the possible consequences, especially for the workers affected,” *ANSA* reported.

The Grottaglie plant reportedly manufactures parts for the Boeing 787. The multinational Leonardo, 30 percent owned by the Italian state, is also one of the world’s largest weapons manufacturers.

## **Waste collection workers in several Spanish cities strike over pay**

Workers in municipal waste collection and street cleaning services are in many wage disputes across Spain, with several strikes this week.

In the Galician town of Carballo, a two-day strike begins on Sunday, opposing a pay offer by the private company UTE, which runs the service, of a mere 20 euros per month above the minimum wage, *Quincemil* reported. A further five days of strikes are planned throughout June.

In the nearby city of A Coruña, an indefinite strike will begin on June 24, coinciding with the celebrations of the summer solstice. The unions accuse UTE (which also runs the service in A Coruña) of “unjustified dismissals” and an excessive workload.

According to *Europa Press*, workers in waste collection and street cleaning in three municipalities on Ibiza also plan an indefinite strike beginning between June 24 and 28, against their pay levels and working hours.

## **Auto parts workers strike over pay and for decent toilets at Serbian factory**

Workers at an auto parts factory in the Serbian city of Leskovac have been on strike since June 11, following several short stoppages. They demand a 20 percent pay increase, the abolition of attendance “bonuses” which effectively penalise taking sick days, and that the conditions of the toilets are improved, which they called not “worthy of a human being,” *Novi Magazin* reported.

According to *Resetka*, the company which operates the factory, Jura, received state subsidies on the condition that it pay at least 120 percent of the minimum wage, but is reportedly still paying the legal minimum. One worker told *Nova* about conditions in the factory: “I can’t count how many crying women I’ve seen in all these years. Our management thinks that everything here is solved by yelling and screaming. Half of the company is on tranquillisers, that’s how much stress there is.”

On Thursday, the unions representing Jura workers said they would suspend the all-out strike and call walkouts of one hour per day instead, supposedly because they expected negotiations to take a long time. The company reportedly threatened that if the strike continued it would consider shutting down the factory permanently.

## **Brussels recycling workers strike against violence**

Workers in the recycling service in Brussels, Belgium, run by the municipal Bruxelles-Propreté company, refused this week to collect waste in the north of Brussels after one of their colleagues was attacked on Tuesday.

The protest follows a strike begun last month, which lasted around a week, at the municipal recycling centres in protest against a sharp increase in attacks on workers at the centres and in the street.

## **Hundreds of UK healthcare staff at Teesside hospitals walk out to demand backdating of upgraded pay**

Hundreds of UK healthcare assistants (HCAs) employed by North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust began a five-day stoppage Monday at sites across the north-east of England.

This is the fourth round of strikes by the HCAs, who argue they should be paid at band level 3 rather than band 2. At band 2, the HCAs are expected to deliver personal care to patients, such as washing and dressing. However, many fulfil clinical roles like taking blood and inserting cannulas, which should entitle them to the higher band 3 pay level.

The two hospital trusts accepted the argument that the HCAs be paid at band 3 but are only prepared to backdate the payments to July 2021. They argue this was when the government clarified the elements of the roles of HCAs. Unison argues the workers were carrying out band 3 level duties before this date and should be paid accordingly.

The seven hospitals run by the two trusts affected by the strike action are University Hospital of North Tees, University Hospital of Hartlepool, James Cook University Hospital, Friarage Hospital, Redcar Primary Care Hospital, East Cleveland Primary Care Hospital and Friary Community Hospital.

The five-day stoppage will be followed by a 48-hour walkout from June 17.

## **Further 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 were on strike Monday and Tuesday.

It follows a one-day stoppage on May 28 by the Unite union members, who are opposing the council’s plan to apply pay benchmarking. This could see some workers lose around 30 percent or £17,000 in pay over four years. Under pay benchmarking, employers compare the salaries paid for a particular role to the market average pay for that role.

## **Further strike by engineering workers in north east England over pay**

Around 170 workers at three British Engines sites in Newcastle and South Shields began a seven-day stoppage Monday.

The Unite union members at the three sites, BEL Engineering in Newcastle and Rotary Power and Michell Bearings in South Shields, rejected a 3 percent pay offer by overwhelming majorities at each site. The offer is a real terms pay cut.

They previously held a one-week stoppage at the end of May over the same issue.

### **Strike of hospital staff at Liverpool hospitals over COVID payment**

Around 130 UK staff at Liverpool University Hospital and Broadgreen Hospital in Liverpool began a 48-hour stoppage Monday.

The GMB union members, who work as catering staff, cleaners and porters, are protesting not being paid a £1,600 lump sum, part of last year's pay settlement. They were employed by outsourcing company ISS but were transferred back into direct NHS employment on April 1, 2023. Because they were still employed by ISS on March 31, they missed out on the lump sum paid to directly employed NHS workers.

### **UK tin can printers at Liverpool manufacturer strike over fire and rehire threat**

Specialist printers employed by Envases tin can printing company, Liverpool, England began a two-day strike Wednesday.

The Unite union members are protesting threats by the company to "fire and rehire" them if they do not accept a new contract which would require the printers to work in the production hall at times. According to Unite, the printers have "already agreed to become more flexible."

Further walkouts are scheduled for June 17-21 and June 24-25.

Global company Envases produces an assortment of tin cans at its Trinity Park Industrial Estate site in Liverpool.

### **Logistics workers at GXO Logistics in Feltham, London, continue strike over low pay**

HGV drivers and warehouse workers employed by GXO Logistics at their Feltham site in London are continuing their strike. Begun May 28, it is due to run until June 18.

The Unite union members are protesting low pay. The warehouse workers are on £12 an hour, below the London Living Wage of £13.15 an hour, while the HGV drivers receive below the market rate.

The company, with a £7 billion turnover last year, is responsible for distributing food and beverages across the UK capital. Its customers include leading brands such as Costa Coffee and brewery and hospitality firm Whitbread.

### **Electric vehicle manufacturer workers in Coventry, England to walk out over pay**

Around 100 workers at the London Electric Vehicle Company (LEVC) based in Coventry are to hold a one-day stoppage on Thursday.

The Unite union members rejected a 3.5 percent pay increase plus a one-off £400 lump sum, which would be a real terms pay cut. In January, a pay increase should have been implemented when RPI (retail price index) inflation was 4.9 percent. Following the one-day stoppage, workers will begin an overtime ban and further stoppages could be called.

LEVC, which makes electric vehicles, including taxis, is owned by Chinese-based Geely Auto Group, whose latest profit figure was £584 million.

### **Unite union suspends strikes by tractor manufacturer workers in Basildon, England as company makes new offer**

The Unite union suspended the latest three-day stoppage, begun Tuesday by around 500 workers at the CNH Industrial tractor factory in Basildon, England. The workers have held stoppages since May.

They were protesting CNH reneging on a 2022 commitment to pay a 7.4 percent increase for 2024, offering instead 4 percent. The 2022 agreement was for pay increases to be based on the average rate of inflation over the year.

Unite suspended the walkouts and is balloting its members on a new offer from the company. Announcing the suspension, Unite said scheduled stoppages for June 18-20 and 25-27 will not go ahead, but fresh action will be announced if the new offer is rejected by the workforce.

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. CNH is one of the biggest employers in Basildon, exporting tractors across the globe.

On April 1, the London-based company laid off 220 workers at its US Case tractor factory in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin. 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.

### **General strike in two West Bank cities over Palestinian deaths at hands of Israeli Defence Force**

A general strike took place across the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Bireh on Tuesday.

It was in response to the death of four Palestinians on Monday. They were killed as Israeli Defence Force (IDF) troops carried out a 50-vehicle raid on the village of Kafr Ni'ma in western Ramallah. Eight others were injured in the same raid.

The deaths occurred when the IDF opened fire on a Palestinian vehicle. Those going to the aid of the vehicle's occupants were injured as the IDF continued to fire.

### **Continuing strikes and protests in Iran over pay and living conditions**

On Sunday, Telecommunications Company of Iran retirees held protests in the cities of Bijar, Sanandaj and Tabriz. They were demanding higher pensions and improved living conditions.

Retired teachers in Tehran gathered outside the education ministry on

Sunday, protesting the low level of pensions.

On Tuesday, thousands of pensioners rallied outside the Budget and Planning Organisation offices in Tehran. They were protesting the low level of pensions that leaves them unable to buy basic necessities.

That day also saw massed ranks of retired workers gather in the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. As well as demanding improved pensions, they demanded the release of imprisoned workers and teachers arrested at previous demonstrations.

Tuesday marked the third day of a stoppage by workers at the Kaveh Sodium Carbonate company in Firuzabad. The workers are demanding an increase in pay and improved working conditions.

Workers in the city of Ilam who had been laid off also held protests, demanding government action to ensure job security.

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.

### **South African steel workers at SA Steel Mills demand sacked strikers reinstated**

Striking workers protested June 7 outside the Johannesburg headquarters of the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC), which provides funding and grants to industry. They were demanding government intervention in their ongoing dispute with employer SA Steel Mills.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members walked out May 22 over the dismissal of 165 striking workers in April, when negotiations over pay and conditions collapsed. Their strike has since been ruled lawful by a labour court.

Workers demand that IDC, as shareholders in SA Steel Mills, withhold funding until the employer reinstate sacked workers, improve pay and safety conditions and allow union representation.

### **South African local government employees picket office over workplace bullying**

Workers in the provincial Department of Sports, Art and Culture offices in Northern Cape, South Africa demonstrated last week to force management to deal with their complaints of harassment from a senior director.

The National, Health and Allied Workers Union members say they will shut down the department's supply chain unit if their accusations of management bullying are not addressed.

### **Unions end Malawian health workers' national strike after court injunction**

Malawian healthcare workers began a national strike on June 10, only to be forced back to work by union leaders after a court ruling declared the strike illegal. The strike was called to demand higher pay and other improvements.

The strike was solid, with minimal healthcare services provided. The

staff also held protests near medical facilities during the walkout.

### **Bank workers in Mali continue strike to demand release of union members**

National Union of Banks, Insurance Companies, Financial Institutions, and Businesses of Mali members are continuing their stoppage until the authorities release general secretary Hamadoun Bah and all arrested colleagues after accusations of "forgery and use of forgery" as well as "insults" and "defamation."

Mali is a former French colony.



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