

Strike wave against plant closures and layoffs in Italy; strikes and protests continue in many cities in Iran over crisis in cost of living; clinical officers' stoppage in Kiambu, Kenya over contracts and pay into its fourth month

## 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.*

### Wave of strikes against plant closures and mass layoffs in Italy

In recent weeks, Italian workers have held major strikes and protests against a wave of plant closures and mass layoffs in the manufacturing sector.

On June 13, all manufacturing workers in the province of Caserta joined a one-day strike to oppose the deindustrialisation of the region, with many companies leaving. An official from the CGIL union said the American electronics manufacturer Jabil had confirmed it would close its Caserta facility, employing more than 400 workers, ANSA reported.

While the closures and job losses are part of a global offensive against the working class, the unions advanced a local pressure campaign, seeking to prevent a unified fightback by workers across the world. The CGIL official said the region needs "responsible businesses." Its solution to protect jobs was for "the region to do its part."

More than 2,000 people demonstrated in Modena last week to support an ongoing strike at the Mozarc Medical factory, which makes dialysis treatments. Mozarc, owned by US companies DaVita and Medtronic, announced it would retain only the research and development division of the plant, shutting down its production facilities with the loss of 350 jobs.

On Thursday, workers at the poultry processing plant in the town of Monteriggioni protested, holding a two-hour strike in each shift. The Amadori Group, which employs over 9,000 people in Italy, intends to close the plant, costing 200 jobs. ANSA reported that 80 percent of the workers are casually employed and will have no form of redundancy apart from the state's agricultural unemployment support, which they will not be able to collect until 2025.

### Acerinox metal workers continue months-long strike in Spain

Around 1,800 workers at the stainless steel manufacturer Acerinox have

been on an indefinite strike in Spain since February 5.

The striking metal workers are calling for pay increases. They oppose Acerinox's attempts to restructure their working conditions in the name of the company's "competitive strengthening," i.e., to boost its profitability.

Strikers are voting this Thursday whether to accept the latest proposal from the company to retain five shifts with a "flexible organisational model," *Europa Press* reported. It said the alternative is a model with "three shifts and with a smaller workforce," threatening the loss of between 475 and 550 jobs if its proposal is not accepted.

### Government of Basque Country, Spain imposes new minimum services on long-running Bilbao bus strike

Bus drivers in the Spanish city of Bilbao have been on an indefinite strike since April 9, calling for pay rises to compensate for inflation and for more secure employment, *deia* reported.

Strikers rejected an offer of an increase of 4 percent for 2022 and 2023 and 2.5 percent for 2024, according to *El Correo*. The unions then said they would reject "any proposal that does not link increases to the CPI."

The Basque Country's Department of Labour and Employment this week imposed an additional 20 percent minimum service requirement on top of the 30 percent already in place, meaning half of bus services must run during the strike, *Europa Press* reported. The mayor of Bilbao, Juan Mari Aburto of the Basque Nationalist Party, which supports the PSOE-Sumar government, said he was "very happy" with this restriction of workers' rights, and that he was pushing for "mediation and even arbitration" to end the strike.

### Strike to demand agreed wage increase at private clinics in France

French healthcare workers in private clinics walked out Tuesday, demanding the implementation of pay rises the unions had already agreed with employers, *Ouest France* reported.

The unions initially called an indefinite strike but ended it Wednesday

when the government said it would instruct private hospitals that the 446 million euros in recent government funding is “primarily to benefit employees.”

Workers called for equal pay in the public and private sector, and called their walkout a “real strike,” contrasting it with the threat by private clinics to close their doors if they did not receive additional funding. In response to this threat, the government reached a deal which, according to the French Democratic Confederation of Labour, allowed the hospitals to renege on the wage agreement.

### **Swedish nurses continue strike over working hours**

Several thousand nurses in Sweden have been on strike since June 4 in a dispute over workload and hours. This follows the announcement of an overtime ban by more than 60,000 on April 25 by the Healthcare Association union.

The Healthcare Association is calling for a reduction of hours by 15 minutes per day to reduce the pressure which leads to many only taking part-time contracts. According to the *Göteborgs-Posten*, the Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR) and Sobona employers’ associations say they cannot afford to shorten the working day.

SKR and Sobona initially asked the Healthcare Association to agree to exempt healthcare workers from the Working Hours Act, claiming this was necessary “due to Sweden’s entry into NATO,” but have now withdrawn this demand.

This week, the Healthcare Association told around 250 nurses and midwives in the county of Östergötland to return to work, saying the staff shortages in the region are so severe that continuing the strike would put lives at risk.

### **Municipal workers in Turkish cities strike over pay and job cuts**

Workers in municipal services in several Turkish cities held strikes and protests this week, against cuts to their pay and job losses following the local elections at the end of March.

Workers in the city of İzmir protested during the Eid al-Adha holiday. They oppose the dismissal of more than 90 workers at municipally owned companies, which claimed there was a “surplus of staff” who were hired before the elections, *YeniGün* reported.

On June 13, municipal workers in İzmir also stopped work to oppose the mayor’s reduction of a 14,000 lira pay rise, agreed with the previous mayor, to 7,000 lira. The mayor, Cemil Tugay of the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), blamed government regulations, saying that if he honoured the 14,000-lira rise “a criminal complaint will be filed against us and we will be made to pay it back with interest.”

While Tugay claimed to “respect people’s democratic reaction,” the Tüm Bel-Sen union said he slandered thousands of public workers by claiming only a “small impulsive group” protested his decision, *Evrensel* reported.

Workers in Menemen, controlled by the ruling Justice and Development Party, have also been protesting the loss of 400 jobs. Other workers from Çiğli near İzmir, who were fired after the election, protested last week and denounced the hypocrisy of the CHP.

They told *Evrensel*, “CHP bureaucrats went to Menemen to show solidarity with the workers. Our municipal administrators and district mayor were among them. They condemned what was done to the workers

there at the front lines. Now they have done the same thing to us.”

### **Spontaneous walkouts against job losses at hygiene product manufacturer and FedEx in Belgium**

Workers at the Ontex hygiene products factory in the Belgian town of Eeklo walked out June 13 in a spontaneous all-day strike. The company had announced it planned closure of their plant, with the loss of around 350 jobs. According to *De Standaard*, a further 140 layoffs are planned at Ontex’s facility in Buggenhout.

*Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN)* reported that “in consultation with the social partners” Ontex decided to keep the Eeklo factory closed on Friday, only reopening it on Monday. A representative of the General Labour Federation of Belgium told *RTL* the union ruled out calling a strike against the job cuts. He said, “When a closure is announced, we first negotiate the social plan [i.e., redeployment or redundancy payments]. It is only if the conditions of this plan are not satisfactory that we call for action.”

On June 12, workers employed by FedEx at Brussels Airport also walked out in a spontaneous strike, only returning to work on June 14. The stoppage was to oppose the American logistics giant’s plan to cut 385 jobs.

*HLN* reported that the trade unions filed a legal complaint against FedEx for hiring temporary workers to break the strike, which the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions said is “prohibited by law.”

### **Heineken workers in Portugal strike for equal contracts**

On June 14, workers at all companies in the Heineken Group in Portugal held a one-day strike, demanding that colleagues at one of the Dutch multinational brewer’s subsidiaries are transferred onto the same contract as the rest of the group.

The Union of Agricultural and Food, Beverage and Tobacco Workers of Portugal said that workers at Novadis, a drinks distribution company acquired by Heineken in 2008, had different pay rises from other workers covered by the main collective agreement.

### **South Wales steel workers take industrial action short of a strike over job cuts**

Around 1,500 steel workers employed by Tata Steel in Newport Llanwern and Port Talbot, Wales began working to rule and a continuous overtime ban on Tuesday, following a rally the previous day.

The Unite union members are taking action over proposals by Tata to make around 3,000 workers redundant. Tata intends to close two blast furnaces, replacing them with an electric arc furnace requiring a smaller workforce. Unite said, “Strike action will be scheduled if the company does not row back on its plans.”

No action has yet been scheduled by the two other unions, GMB and Community, representing steel workers at the site.

### **Further strikes by job centre security staff in England over pay**

Over 1,400 staff employed by security firm G4S to provide security at Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre offices in England began a week-long walkout on Monday.

The GMB and Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are paid the minimum wage rate of £11.44 an hour. They are demanding a pay rise and an increase in pay grade differential rates. Currently, supervisors are paid only 1p an hour more.

The GMB members, who held several stoppages in May, are joined in this week's walkouts by 200 PCS members. Further week-long stoppages have been scheduled from July 1, 15 and 29 by GMB members.

The previous strikes of security staff led to the closure of some job centres over security fears.

### **Strike by teachers at London school in response to attack on pensions**

Teachers at St Benedict's Independent Catholic school in the UK capital were on strike Wednesday and Thursday this week.

The NASUWT union members are protesting plans by the school to take them out of the teachers' pension scheme (TPS) and enrol them into an inferior scheme paying reduced benefits in retirement. Those teachers refusing to leave the TPS will have their pay cut.

Further stoppages are planned for June 26-27 and September 3-5.

### **Further strikes by teachers at London school against academisation**

Teachers at Byron Court primary school Wembley in the London borough of Brent are continuing their series of stoppages with walkouts Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

Both National Education Union (NEU) and NASUWT union members have been taking action after the school was threatened with academisation following an inadequate Ofsted report in November.

Further scheduled stoppage are for June 25-27 and July 2-4.

### **Teachers at school in Bournemouth, UK plan walkout over pay**

Teaching staff at the Ballard School in New Milton near Bournemouth, England are to walk out Thursday.

The NEU members voted by an 84 percent majority for the stoppage, after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer. It will be the first ever strike by teachers at the private school, which charges up to £6,000 a year per pupil. Teachers saw their pay eroded by inflation and the high cost of living. In 2020, the school ended the Teachers' Pension Scheme membership for the teachers, imposing a less favourable option.

Further stoppages are planned for June 27-28 and July 8-9.

### **Staff at UK prestigious scientific publisher set to walk out**

The London staff at scientific magazine publisher Springer Nature are set to walk out on Thursday. It will be the first strike in the publisher's 155-year history.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members voted by over 90 percent for a series of stoppages and a work to rule throughout June and July. They rejected a 5.8 percent pay offer. Springer Nature employs around 400 staff, including academic journalists, editors and production workers. The German-British publisher produces a stable of scientific magazines including the prestigious *Nature* magazine. It made profits of £412 million in 2022, with a global revenue of £1.5 billion.

### **Overtime ban by nuclear submarine propulsion workers in Derby, England**

UK workers at the Rolls Royce nuclear submarine propulsion facility in Derby are refusing to work overtime throughout June.

The action by GMB members is in support of their demand for improved pay and working conditions. The facility manufactures nuclear propulsion units for the Royal Navy nuclear submarine fleet.

### **Unite union suspends strike of nuclear power workers at Dounreay, Scotland after new pay offer**

A strike by around 600 UK workers employed by Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) due Wednesday was suspended by the Unite union after the company made a new offer.

The workers held a day's stoppage on May 29, as well as a ban on overtime and not working voluntary appointments. They had rejected a pay offer of 4.5 percent plus a one-off £500 payment and voted by over 85 percent for industrial action. Action short of striking will continue while the ballot on the new pay offer takes place.

### **Protest by taxi drivers in Crawley, UK against Uber**

Taxi drivers in Crawley, near Gatwick Airport outside London, held a protest outside a meeting of Crawley council Tuesday evening.

The Unite union members are protesting the airport's advertising of Uber services and providing reserve bays for the exclusive use of Uber vehicles at the airport. They argue Uber is able to circumvent the local authority taxi licence laws, which stop private-hire taxis being able to pick up fares outside the local area unless pre-booked.

They say this has led to an influx of Uber vehicles undermining the local taxi drivers' livelihoods. Gatwick Airport provides a lot of the trade for local taxis.

### **Ongoing strikes and protests across Iran against crisis in cost of living**

Saturday marked the fourth day of strikes by municipality workers in the city of Zahedan in Iran. They were protesting several months of arrears of wages.

The same day saw protests on the island of Lavan in the Persian Gulf by Offshore Oil Company employees. They were also protesting arrears of wages and demanding improved working conditions.

In the city of Hamedan, retired state employees protested in front of the local member of parliament's office over late payment of their pensions. In Arak in central Iran there were protests by applicants for houses from the state-backed Maskan-e-Melli housing company. They were protesting long delays for houses promised by the company.

Tuesday saw ongoing protests in Tehran, with customers of the Bank Mellat demanding the return of lost assets. In Kermanshah, retirees from several industries and state organisations protested at the low level of pensions and demanded increases.

The same day, workers employed by the Arta Industrial Group in Ardabil walked out to protest wage arrears. Prisoners in several prisons began hunger strikes. For 21 weeks prisoners have held protests as part of the "Tuesdays of No to Execution" campaign.

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.

### **Clinical officers' strike in Kiambu, Kenya continues into its fourth month**

Clinical officers in Kiambu, Kenya are still on strike after 74 days. The Kenya Union of Clinical Officers members oppose being used as hospital casualties under punitive payment terms.

A strike for permanent posts by Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, and Dentists Union members was terminated by the union last month without any improvement for thousands of interns, who are on short-term contracts.

### **Kenyan demonstrators in Nairobi protesting new tax hikes arrested by police**

Demonstrators in Kenya protesting tax hikes at the Nairobi Central Business District June 14 were assaulted by plainclothes police. Police threw tear gas canisters at crowds and dozens of protestors were arrested.

Many demonstrators held placards saying, "Do not force the taxes on us."

On her first demonstration, 29-year-old Rara Eisa said, "The prices of everything have gone up, life is no longer affordable." She called government policies oppressive.

A third of Kenya's population of 51.5 million live in poverty.

### **Striking health workers demand increased security in crime-ridden South African hospital**

Nurses and other health workers, worried about their safety after a spate of robberies at hospitals in the last six months, have refused to staff a clinic in Mthimba, Mpumalanga, South Africa.

The National, Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union members will not return until the provincial Department of Health deal with the problem. Last month, medical staff at another hospital in Qwa-Qwa, Free State stopped work when a doctor was shot and wounded during a burglary at staff residential quarters.

Social conditions in South Africa, the world's most unequal society, provide fertile ground for crime. The majority of the population live in utmost squalor, corruption is rife and poverty and astronomic unemployment levels prevail, particularly among the predominantly young population.

### **Ghanaian medical laboratory workers strike**

Lab workers in Ghana began a stoppage June 17, demanding the government finalise a Conditions of Service agreement outstanding for two years.

Dr. Cephas Kofi Akortor, General Secretary of the Medical Laboratory Professional Workers' Union (MELPWU) explained why the union called the strike: "To prevent a rather explosive situation that cannot be easily managed by the union, the National Executive Council at an emergency meeting, approved the demands of membership to proceed on a full-blown industrial strike action effective Monday 17th June 2024 to enable them to press home the needed attention and importance to be given to the concerns of the union."

The government's health ministry urged MELPWU to call the strike off.



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