

French Nutella workers strike, Tram and metro workers' stoppage in Greek capital

## 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.

### Nutella food production workers strike in Normandy

A blockade of the Nutella factory in Normandy, northern France has entered its second week. Around 160 of the 400 workers have been on strike since May 27, preventing trucks from entering or leaving. The Force Ouvriere union members are seeking a 4.5 percent pay rise plus €900 bonus and improved working conditions.

The factory normally produces a quarter of the world's Nutella chocolate spread but the action has cut production by around 80 percent. The company is threatening to implement a judicial order to end the blockade, and the strikers could face massive fines.

France has been engulfed in months of "yellow vest" protests against poverty and inequality.

### Tram and metro workers' stoppage in Athens, Greece

Workers on the Athens tram and metro lines 2 and 3 system stopped work at 9 pm Monday for the rest of the day's shift. A similar stoppage took place on May 31. The action was called to protest the Syriza-led government's ongoing attacks on public transport, including the running down of infrastructure, fare price increases and privatisation.

### Irish health workers strike

The around 500 ambulance workers at the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) held a 24-hour strike on May 31. The National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) members, part of the Psychiatric Nurses Association, are fighting for trade union recognition.

The majority of HSE ambulance staff are Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members. The HSE only recognizes SIPTU for negotiations over working conditions. NASRA, which has already held a series of 10-hour strikes since the beginning of the year over the issue, has now begun a series of 24-hour strikes. Further 24-hour strikes are planned over the next weeks.

In a separate dispute, 10,000 health support staff at nearly 40 Irish health facilities are to hold a 24-hour strike on June 20 with further 24-hour strikes planned for June 25, 26 and July 2, 3 and 4. The SIPTU members are taking action after the Irish government reneged on promises to implement the results of job evaluation scheme which would mean pay rises of up to €3,000.

### Strikes planned at Scottish airports

Airport staff working in security, fire safety, engineering and other roles

at Scottish airports in Glasgow and Aberdeen are to hold a 12-hour strike today. It is to be followed by a 10-hour strike on June 10. The Unite members voted by a big majority on a turn out by three quarters to take action.

Previous action planned for April was called off by Unite for talks held under the auspices of the government mediation services, Acas. The workers are seeking a substantial pay rise, rejecting the latest three percent offer and are opposing plans by AGS Airports Limited, which runs the airports, to close its final salary pension scheme.

Glasgow airport workers will also hold a four-hour strike on June 14 in pursuit of their demands.

A proposed strike on June 12 by air traffic control staff at the several airports, which make up the Highlands and Islands (Hail) group, has been called off. The air traffic control staff held a 24-hour strike on May 23. The Prospect union members had taken action to demand a pay increase after rejecting an offer from Hail. The company has now made a revised offer, which will be put to the workers. Industrial action short of strike action will continue pending the outcome.

### Rail workers at private franchise in southwest England to strike

Rail workers at South Western Railway, England are to begin a five-day strike on June 18. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members are protesting the slow progress of talks between the RMT and the company.

An RMT press release stated the company had promised "each passenger train shall operate with a guard with safety critical competencies." On this basis, the RMT accepted the use of trains with door control operated by the driver (DOO) rather than the guard and suspended their long-standing dispute in February.

Similar action against DOO has taken place nationally by rail guards over the last three years at the different train operating companies. DOO threatens passenger safety and 6,000 guards' jobs. The RMT isolated the disputes, with token strikes on a regional basis and accepted the extension of the use of DOO trains.

The beginning of the South West strike will coincide with a one-day strike on June 18 by drivers and other workers at the Bluestar bus company, which operates in Dorset and Hampshire in southwest England. The RMT members voted by a near 90 percent majority for action to demand a pay rise after rejecting a three percent offer.

### Lecturers at Portsmouth University, England protest job cuts

Lecturers in the science faculty at the University of Portsmouth in southwest England held a protest Monday. The University and College Union (UCU) members protested outside a meeting of university

executive board called to discuss cutting the jobs of 65 members of the faculty. In total, around 400 are employed in the science faculty.

As its now standard practice, the UCU is prepared to accept “voluntary” redundancies.

#### **UK fleet auxiliary staff vote to strike**

Around 700 mariners at the UK’s Royal Fleet Auxiliary have voted by a 90 percent majority to strike over pay. The RMT members have rejected a 1.5 percent offer. The Auxiliary Fleet, which is owned by the UK Ministry of Defence, supplies and services the Royal Navy. No date has been set for the action.

#### **Israeli Dan bus company drivers strike over assault**

Bus drivers at the Dan bus company in the Israeli city of Petah Tikva held a two-hour strike on Monday. They were protesting the assault on a driver that took place the previous Thursday. At an emergency meeting, a female driver said she had been attacked by a passenger in April and been off work since.

The strikers are demanding the Israeli government take action to reduce the attacks, which have been increasing over the last two years. They are also demanding the company provide equipment and training to enable them to deal with attacks.

#### **South African waste pickers protest landfill site closures and job losses**

Waste pickers demonstrated outside the Committee for the Environment and Pikitup offices in Johannesburg, South Africa last Friday. The workers reclaim recyclable materials on council waste sites and were protesting the closure of waste landfill sites.

The 20 protesters representing 6,000 African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) members demanded that the Pikitup managing director speak to them.

Around 200 ARO members marched on the same offices in May opposing the closure of the landfill sites. They also demand the provision of waste collection hubs and protective clothing, payment for the process of registering reclaimers, while opposing passing their work on to private companies.

The workers want the integration of ARO members into the council workforce as set out in the Department of Environmental Affairs Guidelines.

#### **South African union calls off dockers’ equal pay strike**

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union called off a proposed strike set to paralyse South Africa’s ports. The strike was due to start May 30, with the union cancelling it to conform to a labour court indictment.

Workers are demanding equal pay for black and white skilled workers carrying out the same job. A labour court judgement on the legality of the strike has been postponed until September.

#### **South African health workers’ union settles for half promised bonus**

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) called off a strike after two days. Health workers in the South African Medscheme struck after threats to downgrade a promised R10,000 bonus payment. The union ended the strike after agreeing less than half the original promised bonus, receiving only a bonus of around R4,750.

#### **South African mining safety company, Videx, agrees to negotiations following strike**

South African workers on strike since May 15 over unpaid bonuses have forced company managers to address their demands. The mining safety company, Videx, was forced to negotiate with the National Union

of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) over industry agreed bonus conditions.

Under a labour relations agreement, the attainment of production targets must be compensated with bonus payments. Six hundred of the 800 labour force went out on strike when Videx refused to pay bonuses when targets were met.

Videx attempted to get the strike made illegal, but failed, forcing the company into negotiations with NUMSA.

#### **South African pharmacy workers strike to reinstate overtime pay**

Workers went out on strike last Friday at Aspen Pharmaceuticals, Port Elizabeth, South Africa over unsocial hours and overtime payments being stopped. Almost 500 workers struck when the company arbitrarily stopped weekend and overtime payments.

One worker claimed that the company was in debt and trying to cut costs. This was denied by an Aspen spokesperson pointing to a recently released statement on the Stock Exchange News Service.

A picket was set up by around 100 Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers’ Union members, closely monitored by security guards.

#### **Workers in Nigerian Kogi state protest partial wage and pension payments**

The union umbrella body, the Joint Action Committee (JAC), has rejected proposals by the Nigerian Kogi state government to only pay 30 percent or less of wages and pensions due. The JAC has not proposed any action to enforce workers’ demands.

JAC comprises the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees, the Nigeria Union of Teachers, the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria, the Nigeria Union of Pensioners and the Non-Academic Staff Union. It pointed out to the state government that the federal government had made provision for wages and pensions to be paid.

#### **Zimbabwe rural teachers strike for a living wage**

Zimbabwe rural teachers began an all-out strike Monday to demand a living wage. The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe said the strike call was well received by its members. The government is intimidating teachers for taking action, accusing them of a regime change operation.

Teachers want to revert to having their wages paid in US dollars rather than the highly unstable Real Time Gross Transfer (RTGS) dollars. The union is not pursuing a wage increase, but only asking for teachers’ wages of 500 RTGS dollars to be paid in US dollars. Private businesses and even government departments are rejecting payments in RTGS dollars and demanding payments in foreign currencies.

The RTGS was introduced in February at an exchange rate of US \$1 to RTGS 2.5 but is now trading at almost RTGS 9 to US \$1.

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