

Unite union suspends strike by UK Jacobs Douwe Egberts workers, prepares sellout; Strikes in France against power company EDF, by interns at hospitals and national rail company; strike continues at Fiat Plastic in Serbia; German bus drivers in Rhineland-Palatinate on indefinite stoppage; further UK strikes at Jacobs Douwe Egberts and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 June 2021

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

### Europe

#### **Unite union suspends strike by UK Jacobs Douwe Egberts workers, prepares sell-out**

The Unite union has halted all further industrial action by the workforce at Jacobs Douwe Egberts coffee factory in Banbury, Oxfordshire. Unite entered two weeks of talks with management at the end of a 24-hour strike that concluded Friday morning.

The workforce are fighting plans by the company to “fire and rehire” them on inferior contracts. The 291 workers face losses of up to £12,000 a year, unsocial shift patterns, slashed overtime rates and unpaid breaks. JDE, part of JDE Peet’s the world’s largest coffee and tea producer—is imposing the cuts to maintain high levels of profits.

The “Banbury 300” twitter account posted Wednesday evening that the “Unite union and Jacobs Douwe Egberts senior management have agreed de-escalation plans for a period of 2 weeks to allow for meaningful negotiations from 25th June 2021 to begin.”

A posting the following evening stated that the scheduled strike action beginning on Thursday at 6am and ending Friday at 7am would go ahead “before meaningful negotiations begins on June 25th for 2 weeks .. halting all industrial action”.

The decision calls off strikes scheduled for Sunday June 27 and Wednesday June 30.

The dispute began with workers undertaking an overtime ban on May 1, with the union calling sporadic, mainly 24 day stoppages, beginning May 8.

Unite’s move is aimed at ending the strike permanently and coming to a

sellout agreement with the company. This is what the two weeks of talks beginning Friday will be all about. Despite its rhetoric throughout the dispute that a pre-condition for settling the dispute was that they company take the threat to fire and rehire off the table, Unite negotiators have entered the talks with the company maintaining its threats.

On June 2, the company issued dismissal notices to the strikers under Section 88 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act, giving them just weeks to sign new inferior contracts or be fired.

As the WSWs noted, this escalation of the company’s offensive was met by Unite agreeing a rotten deal over pensions. JDE and Unite reached an agreement to gut workers’ pensions, ending the defined benefits scheme and replacing it with a defined contribution scheme paying much smaller dividends. Workers are also threatened with pay cuts, which would force them to pay less into their pensions fund.

Even in those recent disputes where companies threatening to fire and rehire the workforce have withdrawn the threat—after strikes of varying duration—as the basis to enter talks with Unite and other unions, this was to reach deals in which the companies were able to impose almost everything they wanted.

Last month, after 11 weeks of strikes by bus workers at Go North West in Manchester, Unite leader Len McCluskey finalised a sellout deal in London including cuts in sick pay, unpaid meals breaks and lengthening the working day that will lead to job losses.

JDE workers at Banbury cannot wage a successful counter-offensive to defend their jobs, terms and conditions if their struggle is led by Unite. Strikers must act to prevent the sabotage of the trade union bureaucracy who are organising a sellout in their behind closed doors talks. Strikers must form a rank-and-file committee, acting independently of Unite and contact JDE workers throughout Europe and internationally to discuss a united campaign.

There is no possibility of waging a fight against a global corporation such as JDE on a local or national basis. The Socialist Equality Party urges Banbury workers to read the call for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and contact us today to discuss the struggle ahead.

### **Strike at French national energy company EDF against privatisation plans**

Workers at the French state-owned electricity company EDF walked out on Tuesday to oppose Project Hercule, the plan to split up the company and privatise the more profitable distribution and renewables parts of the business.

National electricity generation fell by around three percent during the stoppage, which the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) estimated involved over 12,000 workers.

The French government, EDF management, and the European Commission are calling for the break-up of the company, according to *Le Figaro*. Strikes against the plan have taken place since November last year by major union federations at EDF.

### **French medical interns strike against long working hours**

Medical interns in French hospitals were on strike last week on June 18 and 19, to denounce unbearable workloads. The National Inter-Union of Interns (ISNI) called the strike to demand a working week restricted to 48 hours, reports *Ouest France*.

The ISNI reported that five interns have committed suicide since the start of this year, and denounced the danger to patients caused by interns' exhaustion. A demonstration took place in Paris on June 19, with interns protesting under slogans including "Exhausted interns = patients in danger."

### **Transport strikes in France over wages, staffing and "reforms" at national rail company**

Transport workers at French national rail company SNCF went on strike Monday, to demand increases in wages and staffing levels and to oppose a series of "reforms." Four unions called the stoppage in the region of Île-de-France, which includes Paris, reported *20 Minutes*.

The CGT, which called a rally on June 15, demanded an end to outsourcing at SNCF, and opposed a planned "reform" to pensions. The CGT said that the creation of subsidiaries at the company was part of a privatisation plan. A national strike is planned by the CGT on July 1.

### **Strike continues at Fiat Plastic in Serbia as management is charged with misdemeanours**

Workers at Fiat Plastic in Kragujevac, Serbia, continue their fight to reverse a 300-euro annual pay cut, having begun one-hour daily stoppages in January.

The workers formed their own union at the plant, after complaining they were abandoned by Serbia's trade union organisations. On Monday, following a meeting with the Minister of Labour, the strike committee reiterated their demands for the return of all machinery removed from the

Kragujevac plant during the strike, as well as the reversal of January's pay cut.

*Danas* reported that last week management were charged with misdemeanours by the Labour Inspectorate over attempts to break the strike. Workers who took part in the stoppages, including the entire strike committee, were illegally placed on leave, and the committee locked out of the plant.

### **German bus drivers in Rhineland-Palatinate begin indefinite strike over pay and holidays**

After a seven-day strike earlier in June, thousands of bus drivers in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate began an indefinite strike on Monday, to demand a pay increase and extra vacation days.

The strike by 2,800 bus drivers in both public transport and school buses was called by the United Services Union (Verdi) as part of its collective bargaining with the employers' association VAV, reported the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The main demand of Verdi is that drivers are paid for time spent at work when they are not driving, such as waiting between trips.

### **Demonstrations in Brussels, Belgium to support struggle of migrants on hunger strike**

Around 500 people took part in a demonstration in Brussels, Belgium on Sunday, in support of the struggle of 400 "sans-papiers" undocumented migrants on hunger strike, reported *RTL*. The migrants, many of whom worked in low-wage jobs for years in Belgium, began their hunger strike on May 23, to demand the government sets clear criteria for the granting of documents.

The Christian-Democrat Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration refused their demand, but the hunger strikers announced their determination to continue. One woman told *RTL*, "Either we leave with our residence permit, or we leave to be buried."

### **Doctors in Belgian prisons work-to-rule to protest poor standard of care**

Doctors in several prisons in Belgium began protesting the poor standard of care provided to prisoners last week, taking part in a work-to-rule.

According to *RTBF*, one doctor denounced low staffing levels and the unreliable computer systems governing treatment and demanded responsibility for healthcare in prisons be transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health.

### **Protests and strikes follow killing of Italian trade unionist on picket line**

Italian workers in Rome took part in a demonstration this weekend to

denounce the killing of Adil Belakhdim, a coordinator for the Si Cobas trade union, while picketing June 18.

The Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) and Italian Labour Union (UIL) called for three strike days in response. Si Cobas called for a national strike of logistics workers on Thursday for four hours.

According to a report by ANSA, Belakhdim was on a picket line outside a Lidl distribution centre in the province of Novara when a truck driver inside the centre accelerated towards the pickets driving in the wrong lane. The driver killed Belakhdim and hospitalised two more strikers.

Si Cobas issued statements denouncing the attack and the downgrading of charges against the driver, who was released from prison to house arrest. The union denounced the hypocrisy of the Italian Federation of Metalworkers, which it accused of being complicit in Belakhdim's death, because of its part in helping victimise Si Cobas members in the logistics sector.

### **Turkish chemical workers at Nedex, Dilovasi strike to demand seniority bonus**

Workers at the Turkish chemicals company Nedex in the town of Dilovas? began striking on June 17, to demand seniority bonuses in their collective agreement. The Petrol-?? union demanded a 1450 lira increase for the year, and called the strike after the company would not offer more than 850 lira.

*Evrensel* quoted one worker saying, "The salary we received was already not enough, our salary has completely melted." Inflation in Turkey currently stands above 16.6 percent.

The picket line was visited by striking workers from Baldur Suspension in Kocaeli, on strike since December 2020 to demand a collective agreement at the Spanish-owned company.

### **Danish nurses begin strike to demand higher wages**

Around 5,300 nurses in Denmark began a strike on Saturday to demand higher wages, after voting by 67 percent to reject an offer tabled by the Mediation Institute. The *Aftonbladet* reports that the Danish Nurses' Organisation (DSR), with 75,000 members, excluded members in many areas of care from the strike, and accepted the claims of some municipalities that a strike would affect necessary services.

The Social Democratic Party and its allies, which hold a majority in the parliament, claimed to support the wage demands of the nurses, saying they would take political measures to raise wages in "women-dominated occupations."

### **Norwegian unions sign wage deal in oil sector, cancelling threat of limited strikes**

Planned strikes on Norwegian offshore oil rigs were called off by the three unions after they signed a deal with an average 2.7 percent pay increase, below the average inflation so far this year.

*Reuters* reports the unions have over 8,200 members covered by the deal, but during negotiations only threatened to call a strike of 1,076 workers, promising that oil and gas output would not be affected by that

limited stoppage.

### **Further walkout by staff at UK driver and vehicle registration office in Swansea**

Administration staff at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) headquarters in Swansea, South Wales walked out Tuesday until Thursday this week. The stoppage is over COVID-19 safety concerns at the government-run facility, following four-day strikes held in early April and May.

Around 1,400 Public and Commercial Service union (PCS) members voted by almost 72 percent on a turnout of just over 50 percent to strike. The DVLA employs around 6,000 staff at its headquarters and call centres across eight buildings in the city.

The dispute began after management insisted more than 2,000 staff keep working in offices despite lack of social distancing. A major COVID-19 outbreak hit the workplace in the second half of 2020, with more than 600 cases and one tragic death.

Despite the outbreak, the company insisted hundreds of staff should cease working from home and come into the office from May 17, in line with the Johnson Tory government's "road map" back to pre-COVID-19 conditions. It was lower paid staff who were most likely denied permission to work from home.

The outbreak at the DVLA is the highest number of infections linked to a single employer or workplace in the UK. The site is run directly by the government through the Department of Transport.

A PCS press release of June 21 stated, "Instead of trying to solve the dispute, DVLA senior management have instructed a private company to carry out work in order to undermine the strike."

### **Further stoppage by UK prison educators at 49 prisons over COVID safety concerns**

Around 600 prison education workers across England walked out on Tuesday, their fourth strike in two months in a dispute over COVID health and safety.

The University and College Union (UCU) members, who provide education and skills training in prisons, are in dispute with employer Novus for disciplining educators for raising health and safety concerns. Deaths in prison from the virus are three times higher than in the general population.

Talks at government arbitration service Acas took place, but the matter remains unresolved. A June 22 UCU press release noted, "At an ACAS meeting last week (Friday 18 June), Novus said the investigation had finished, but refused to share its findings with UCU or assure the union that no action would be taken against staff... Novus also refused to share the terms of reference of the investigation or the names of its investigators. Nor were the UCU members being investigated ever spoken to as part of the investigation."

Novus is the largest provider of prison education in England. According to UCU, other prison education providers were willing to discuss the enablement of safety measures with the union, but Novus refused.

### **Bristol UK protest by striking housing maintenance workers at**

## **London-based charity against bullying and victimisation**

Striking UK maintenance employees of St Mungo's housing charity held a two-hour protest beginning 12 noon on Monday. The protest took place outside St Mungo's office in Bristol.

The 12 maintenance workers employed by the property services of St Mungo's in the UK capital began an all-out stoppage on April 22. The charity runs 3,200 accommodation units in Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, London, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Reading.

The Unite union members accuse the maintenance section managers of bullying tactics by using inappropriate disciplinary measures. Currently the planned strike is restricted to the maintenance department, but the union said it could widen. It has 500 members working for the organisation.

The charity suspended a union representative on a charge of gross misconduct for raising a grievance about management bullying. One of the grounds cited was management "distress" at suggestions of bullying.

In March last year, several hundred St Mungo's workers walked out for three days against changes in sickness policy and the falling number of more experienced senior employees. They were concerned the changes were aimed at creating a lower-paid workforce with inferior conditions.

## **Further strikes announced by London Thames river ferry workers against victimisation of union representative and pay**

Fifty-seven workers on the Woolwich ferry, which operates a service across the UK capital's river Thames, walked out on Monday, Tuesday and Friday this week. The Unite members began stoppages in May, following a 97 percent ballot in favour.

They are protesting the victimisation of a union representative, and the non-implementation of an agreed new pay and reward scheme. Unite has announced nine further 24-hour strikes to take place in July. Unite also called on Sadiq Khan, the Labour Mayor of London, to intervene in the dispute to "bang heads together" at Transport for London (TfL).

TfL took over the running of the ferry from its previous owner, Briggs Marine Contractors Ltd. Under Briggs, there was also a long-running dispute over allegations of management bullying.

## **Liverpool University, UK withholds pay of academics boycotting exam marking**

Around 1,300 academic staff at Liverpool University, England walked out on May 10 in a three-week strike, following a programme of working contracted hours and boycotting voluntary activities. The UCU members voted by an 84 percent majority to protest proposed redundancies in the Health and Life Sciences Faculty.

The dispute continued with a marking and assessment boycott, begun on June 18. In an unprecedented move, the university management hit back by announcing it would withhold 100 percent of the wages of those taking part. The staff are performing all their other duties. A June 18 UCU press release explained, "it [the University] considers all other work staff carry out to be voluntary and not worthy of payment."

The university initially proposed to axe 47 jobs, subsequently reduced to 24. The university devised so-called "rank and yank" criteria to select academics deemed to be the worst performing. UCU members condemned

the criteria as "statistically innumerate."

Louise Kenny, executive pro vice-chancellor at Liverpool is cutting jobs while selling her luxury property in Ireland for 3.5 million euros. The university vice chancellor Janet Beer is paid an annual salary of £410,000, according to the *Liverpool Echo*.

The UCU sold out national strikes in 2018 and 2020 over pay and pensions, and refused to oppose marketisation and redundancies in a joint struggle across the education sector.

## **Hull University academics in England balloted for possible strike over threat to close university modern language department**

Around 450 academic staff at Hull University, England are currently balloting for possible industrial action. The ballot closes July 9. The UCU members are opposed to plans by the university to run down its modern language department, with a view to closing it down completely by October 2023, with 11 redundancies.

The University will stop recruiting new students from this September in order to run the department down. There is also a ballot in support of reinstating Keith Butler, UCU branch president, sacked after 22 years' service.

## **Planned strikes over pay by Sunrise Medical workers in Dudley, England called off by Unite union after new company offer**

On June 18, the Unite union announced that strikes by workers at electric wheelchair maker Sunrise Medical's Brierley Hill factory in Dudley, England, called for Monday and Friday, were called off. The Unite members were seeking a three percent pay increase and an additional holiday on Christmas Eve.

Unite said following Acas-mediated talks the company came back with an improved pay offer. The Unite members were voting on the offer this week. Unite stated that if rejected it would announce new strike dates.

## **Strikes by UK guards at East Midland Railways over contracts to begin Sunday**

Rail guards at East Midland Railways, serving the route between London and the midlands, are to hold strikes on eight consecutive Sundays, beginning June 27.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) members oppose attempts by the company to impose inferior contracts on some guards.

The last scheduled strike would be held Sunday August 15. The stoppages follow three 24-hour strikes in May. On June 18, the RMT announced around 200 train managers at the same company voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action over the same issue. The union said the ballot result will be considered by the RMT executive committee.

## **Strikes by teachers at school in UK capital over safety concerns**

Teachers at the Pimlico Academy in the UK capital were to begin a three-day walkout on Tuesday, following a two-day strike last week, and a one-day strike the previous week. Picket lines were supported by parents.

The National Education Union (NEU) members are protesting the chaotic management at the school, who fail to communicate with staff over serious incidents, and say the school does not provide a safe working environment.

The school principal, Daniel Smith, was forced to resign in May after imposing a strict school uniform code, which some pupils and parents described as racist. It led to walkouts by some pupils. The trust running the academy backed the former principal up to his resignation. Teachers are seeking an apology from the trust. They demand an independent inquiry into the running of the school, which has led to safety and safeguarding issues.

According to an *Education Uncovered* website article of June 22, the strikes may be called off in return for a staff representative being able to sit on the board of governors.

### **Teachers at Derbyshire UK, schools to strike in July over reorganisation plans**

Teachers at the Lees Brook Community School in Chaddesden and the Merrill Academy in Derby are to strike for three days in July. The dates are July 1, 13 and 14. The two schools are run by the Nottingham-based Archway Learning Trust, which took over the running in February this year.

The NEU members are protesting a planned reorganisation by the trust, which will lead to staff cuts, curriculum changes, pay cuts, replacement of teachers by less qualified staff and an increase in class sizes.

### **Walkout by teachers at London school over pension attack**

Teachers at the Bishop Challenor school in Bromley, London held a two-day stoppage on June 15. Four further strike days are planned.

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) members are opposed to plans by the school to withdraw from the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and impose an inferior scheme.

The Bishop Challenor school is an independent Catholic school and educates children from age 3 (nursery) to 18 (sixth form). NASUWT accuses the school management of refusing to engage in discussions. According to NASUWT, independent schools across the country are looking to withdraw from the TPS as part of a post-pandemic restructuring of teachers' terms and conditions.

### **Further strike by logistics workers announced at Long Eaton, England over redundancy terms**

Staff at DHL logistics Long Eaton in Derbyshire, England who held 24-hour strikes last week and the previous week are to hold a further 24-hour strike on July 1.

They voted by over 90 percent for industrial action for improved redundancy pay. The warehouse supplies retailer, Marks & Spencer.

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers members are demanding higher payments for long-serving staff, who will be redundant at the end of July when the site closes.

### **Protest by sacked electricians at construction site of new Amazon facility in Gateshead, England**

On Monday, around 40 electricians protested at the site of a new Amazon facility being built in Follingsby Park, Gateshead in England. The mainly Unite union members were dismissed by their employer contractor, SIS Systems. On Friday last week they were told it was their last day on the site and to take all their tools.

One of the sacked workers speaking to the local newspaper *The Chronicle* said, "No reason was given. We believe that is because we staged a protest last Wednesday [June 16] about companies bringing in unskilled labourers to do the work of skilled trades people, however the company hasn't said that."

On June 16, around 60 workers at the site stopped work and held a protest claiming a contractor SSE Enterprise Contracting was using unskilled labourers to carry out electrician roles.

Previous protests were held at construction sites over plans by companies to introduce an electrical support operative grade to replace the use of fully trained electricians in many roles.

### **Food preparation workers at London hospital to strike against new rotas**

Food preparation workers at the Royal London Hospital in the capital began a five-day strike on Monday, with a further five-day strike to start July 5. The Unite union members are opposed to a new rota system imposed by outsourced employer Serco.

They accuse management of bullying in relation to sickness absence and allocation of shift and holiday days. The rota disrupted their lives, making childcare arrangements and attending part-time education courses difficult. Irregular work shifts are spread over 15 days, and include having to work part of designated rest days.

Serco cancelled all services for the proposed strike period.

Unite was involved in Acas-mediated talks with Serco after the overwhelming strike vote in April, but was unable to resolve the issue. In a press release Unite stated, "Further strike action can still be called off provided Serco returns to the negotiating table and puts forward concrete proposals to end the bullying and develop a workable roster system."

A demonstration in support of the strikers was planned outside the hospital on Thursday.

### **Concierge and cleaning staff at London luxury flats ballot for possible strike**

Staff providing concierge and cleaning services at the luxury accommodation block, West End Quay in London are to ballot for a possible strike. The United Voices of the World union members have been outsourced to First Port UK a major property services company. Their issues include sick pay, bullying and the cutting of their Christmas bonus.

## **Middle East**

### **Strike by Iranian oil workers over cut in hours and pay rise**

Contract oil workers in Iran have been holding strikes for a pay rise, a reduction in working hours and payment of wage arrears. The strike movement began on Saturday, when contractors at the Bid Khun powerplant in Busheir province walked out.

On Monday, they were joined by 400 workers in Assaluyeh in Busheir province. Oil contract workers at the Sadaf Petroleum Company in Assaluyeh walked out on Tuesday. A rally outside the oil ministry's offices in Tehran is called for June 30.

## **Africa**

### **Lesotho garment workers back at work after unions accept below inflation pay rise**

Most garment workers in Lesotho returned to work after the unions accepted a below inflation pay increase of 14 percent. The 38,000 workers walked out on May 14, after the government refused to increase the minimum wage for two consecutive years, leaving workers unable to pay their bills.

The employers' Lesotho Textile Exporters' Association threatened the strikers with the sack if they did not go back to work.

The ultimatum was sent in a June 4 letter to the Independent Democratic Union of Lesotho, National Clothing, Textile and Allied Workers Union, United Textile Employees, Lentsoe La Sechaba Workers Union and Lesotho Workers Association. The unions passed the threat on to the workers with no strategy to oppose it.

During the dispute demonstrators were attacked by baton-wielding police using tear gas and rubber bullets. Two workers were killed.

### **Nigerian hospital workers at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital hold warning strike against poor conditions**

Staff at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin in Nigeria walked out on June 16 for three days, to oppose their lack of promotions and bad work conditions.

The Joint Health Sector Union listed poor conditions of service, decaying buildings, obsolete equipment, and the non-payment of three years of promotion arrears for experience.

### **Ugandan medical staff on sit-down strike at border crossing with Rwanda**

Ugandan medical staff who screen people for COVID-19 at the border

with Rwanda went on sit-down strike on June 17, to protest non-payment of allowances since October. The strike brought border crossings to a standstill.

Truck drivers crossing from Rwanda must have a negative test for COVID-19 before being allowed to enter Uganda. A queue of more than 400 trucks built up at the border entry zone.

The head of the border medical team reported that the medics have received no payment other than their basic salaries, out of which they buy their own personal protective equipment. Prior to deployment, they were promised accommodation, meals and allowances, but these were provided for only a few months.

Uganda has 74,260 reported COVID-19 cases and 752 deaths; Rwanda has 33,260 reported cases and 397 deaths.

### **Adult Basic Education lecturers demonstrate over pay and conditions in City of Tshwane municipality, South Africa**

Lecturers at Community Learning Centres across Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa protested this week outside the Pretoria offices of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

The lecturers are demanding permanent salaried employment of eight hours a day after being on a variety of temporary hourly-paid contracts for the last five years. They also protest a recent drop in wages.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**