

Mass protests in Sudan's capital Khartoum against inflation and the removal of fuel subsidies; workers in Nigeria still fighting for minimum wage; warning strikes in retail sector in Germany over pay; childcare sector workers' stoppages in Holland and Belgium; railworkers' strikes continue in Portugal

## 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.*

### Protests in Khartoum, Sudan, as government and International Monetary Fund step up attacks

Mass protests took place in the Sudanese capital Khartoum on June 30, against high inflation and the removal of fuel subsidies, which are increasing food prices and causing further cuts in living standards. Inflation hit 341 percent in March. Fuel will increase from around 35 cents to nearly 70 cents per litre, and the price of diesel will more than double.

On June 29, the International Monetary Fund approved a \$2.5bn loan, with strings attached.

Demonstrators outside the presidential palace shouted, "We want the fall of the regime," and "Bread for the poor." Police used tear gas against crowds who burned tyres in the streets.

Prolonged conflict in South Sudan combined with natural disasters, including drought, has produced famine and malnutrition for many.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok warned of a descent into chaos and civil war. Two years ago, mass protests toppled the 30-year-old dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, which was replaced by a military/civilian transitional government.

### Strike by workers in Nasarawa, Nigeria to demand minimum wage

Workers in Nasarawa State, Nigeria have been on strike since June 15, to demand payment of the N30,000 minimum wage.

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress umbrella groups also said that, despite the state government agreeing to pay a backlog of workers' promotion allowances from 2011 to the

present, nothing has been done.

The NLC said other complaints include lack of promotion, lack of annual salary increments, lack of training, non-payment of gratuities, lack of housing for workers, non-payment of local government staff including primary school teachers, lack of implementation of the minimum wage, non-payment of salary arrears and lack of confirmation of workers appointments.

Nasarawa State Governor Abdullahi Sule announced on June 25 that the state government would not borrow to pay the minimum wage. He said those on strike would be subject to the "no work, no pay" rule—which can only be applied when a strike is illegal or unjustified—without giving a reason.

Workers in Nigeria went on strike in 2019 to secure a raise in the national minimum wage from N18,000 to N30,000.

### South African municipal workers reject national pay offer and ballot for strike

South African municipal workers voted nationally to reject a deal proposed by the South African Local Government Association in talks with the South Africa Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU).

The three-year wage proposal was a four percent rise in the first year, consumer price index less one percent for the remaining years, with a freeze on pension and other benefits for two years. The union will now ballot members over a possible strike.

### Municipal workers in George municipality, South Africa stop work in protest over COVID-19 risk payments and restructuring

Over 200 workers at George municipality in Western Cape, South Africa marched to the municipal offices June 23, and continued their walkout when management refused to accept their grievance statement,

citing COVID-19 restrictions and the illegality of previous stoppages.

The SAMWU members are demanding outstanding COVID-19 compensation payments and an end to unfair job evaluations and unilateral restructuring.

### **Kenyan hospital workers in Nyamira mount protest over police attack on nurse**

All activities at the Keroka Sub-County Hospital in Nyamira, Kenya halted on June 28, in protest against a police attack on a nurse. Samson Mariba was going home after a shift when police enforcing a curfew set upon him with clubs. The nurse sustained head and leg injuries, and is receiving treatment in the hospital where he works.

Another nurse quoted by the Kenyan website *The Nation* said, "Police must respect health workers. Our colleague was attacked with rungs [clubs]."

It comes a month after a four-month-old baby died, when police quizzed a taxi driver trying to get the child to the hospital.

### **ExxonMobil oil workers at Doba oilfield, Chad walk out after company refuses to guarantee termination benefits**

Oil workers in Chad at the Exxon Mobil's Doba oilfield went on strike on June 25, after the company refused to guarantee workers' entitlements if they are made redundant.

Exxon announced its involvement in talks with Savannah Energy to sell its 40 percent interest in the field and a similar stake in the Chad-Cameroon oil transportation pipeline. Last year, the Doba field produced 33,700 barrels of oil per day. There was a spike in mergers and acquisitions in the energy sector with companies cutting their oil and gas investments due to increasing risks.

### **Warning pay strikes in German retail and mail order sector**

Last week workers in German retail and mail order businesses took part in numerous warning strikes as part of collective negotiations in the sector.

The United Services Union (Verdi) is calling for a monthly wage increase of 4.5 percent plus 45 euros, as well as a minimum hourly wage of 12.50 euros. The *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported stoppages in supermarkets such as H&M and Douglas, whose workers recently walked out against planned redundancies and store closures. *NOZ* reported that hundreds of workers joined protests as well as the strikes, but the unions worked to minimise the impact, ensuring that no stores were completely closed.

Warning strikes also took place in the wholesale and foreign trade sector, where Verdi is negotiating a separate collective agreement, and has demanded a 5.5 percent pay increase and a 155-euro one-off bonus, according to the *Hamburger Abendblatt*.

### **Hospital workers at clinic in Bad Lippspringe, Germany, strike for**

### **collective agreement**

Hospital workers at a clinic in the German town of Bad Lippspringe held another stoppage on Monday, after a five-day strike last week. Verdi announced it was calling the strikes of around 200 workers in the operating theatre, anaesthesia and sterilisation departments to demand the clinic's management sign on to the collective agreement for workers in the public service, according to *Westfalen-Blatt*.

### **Isolated "relay strikes" begin in Dutch childcare sector against workload**

A campaign of "relay strikes" in the childcare sector spread across the Netherlands beginning last week, called by the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) to protest excessive workloads. *Algemeen Dagblad* reported on June 23 that childcare workers in "various locations" were on strike, following national protests on June 18.

This Thursday there were regional strikes in North Holland and part of the province of Flevoland, and a national stoppage is planned for July 8.

Workers in the childcare sector have denounced the high workload, and criticised a new collective agreement proposed by the employers for not doing enough to reduce the pressure. The Christian National Trade Union Federation signed the agreement and kept its members from joining the strike.

### **Strike in public sector nurseries in Belgium over work conditions**

Childcare workers in the Belgian French-speaking Brussels-Wallonia Federation took part in strikes and protests on Monday, demanding improved working conditions and implementation of a planned reform.

In a sector where many are employed on temporary or insecure contracts, the government promised to move everyone to a permanent contract by 2024. According to *RTBF*, some nurseries closed and in others workers stayed at work but handed out leaflets to parents.

The strike was originally called by three unions in the sector in both public and private sector nurseries. The unions excluded private sector workers at the last minute, after the government promised to move all workers to permanent contracts by 2025 and pay a 250-euro bonus to private sector workers.

### **Portuguese railway workers continue strikes over pay and staffing levels**

This week, workers at the two state-owned companies responsible for running the railways in Portugal continued a wave of strikes begun June 2. Infraestruturas de Portugal (IP) workers were on strike Monday and Friday this week, following a strike at both IP and Comboios de Portugal (CP) on June 25, reported *Lusa*.

The strikes are in support of demands for safe staffing levels and an increase in pay, which the unions involved say was pushed down to almost the minimum wage.

The CP and IP stoppages have largely been separated from each other

by the Railway Union of the Itinerant Commercial Review and the National Union of Railway Workers and Federation of Transport and Communications Unions. IP workers held the first strike on June 2, followed by a three-day strike of between 800 and 1,000 CP workers begun June 6.

### **Wave of stoppages against wage cuts and redundancies at French state-owned airports company**

Workers at Aéroports de Paris (ADP), the company responsible for maintaining Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports, took part in multiple strikes to oppose ADP's restructuring plans, including a five-day strike begun July 1.

From June 18 to 20, workers joined a strike called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (UNSA), to oppose plans which include a pay cut of between 4 and 8 percent, and 1,150 redundancies, according to *Le Figaro*. The paper reports that the CGT, UNSA, and French Confederation of Management-General Confederation of Executives (CFE-CGC) have already agreed to the job losses.

On June 25, hundreds of workers walked out on a three-hour wildcat strike and picketed both airports. One union representative told *Le Figaro*, "The employees are angry, we can no longer control them." The company announced that it is looking to save 668 million euros, and has become heavily indebted during the pandemic. Despite the French state being the majority shareholder, *BFM Business* reports that the company "borrowed on the markets to face the [COVID-19] crisis."

### **French metalworkers fight against plant closures**

Hundreds of metalworkers threatened with the loss of their jobs by planned liquidations and plant closures are on strike in France. On June 17, the Fonte du Poitou foundry began liquidation proceedings in the courts, threatening 280 job losses, and the workers walked out on strike on June 25, reports *France Bleu*.

The unions began negotiations with Renault, the main customer of many foundries, which is also threatening to close the Fonderie de Bretagne in Caudan, where workers have been on strike since April 27. Workers at the MBF Aluminium foundry are also opposing plans to close their factory, with some going on hunger strike, and threatening to dynamite the factory.

### **Plastics workers in Turkey continue strike to demand wages match real inflation**

The strike of over 400 workers at Hakan Plastik in Turkey continue their strike, begun June 11, to demand a pay rise matching the real rate of inflation.

*Evrensel* reported that the strike began at the factories in Urfa and Çerkezköy after management offered a pay rise matching the official rate of inflation of 17 percent. The Lastik-?? union demanded a 30 percent increase in pay, as this is the rate at which prices are increasing.

### **Hospital cleaning workers strike at Polish hospital to demand agreed COVID bonus**

Cleaning workers at the hospital in Gi?ycko, Poland, began an indefinite protest on June 25, after the management of their company refused to pay agreed bonuses for working in the COVID-19-affected areas of the hospital.

The company promised a 5,000 z?oty bonus, but the manager only agreed to grant this to eight of the company's fifty-two employees, reported *Gazeta Olszty?ska*.

On June 25, the workers gathered to protest, and announced they will indefinitely be wearing black and replace their name badges with the word "strike."

### **Doctors in psychiatric hospital in Cyprus hold warning strike against poor standards of care**

Doctors at the Athalassa hospital in Cyprus, which provides mental health care, held a three-hour warning strike on Wednesday, after hospital management refused to listen to warnings about deteriorating standards of care.

*Cyprus Mail* quoted the state doctors' union PASYKI saying, "Doctors...are unable to provide the appropriate services to patients under the conditions provided to them," and denouncing the delay in implementing hygiene measures necessary to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This led to another warning strike of nurses on June 7, after nurses were disciplined for refusing to treat a patient when it required breaking hygiene rules.

### **Walkouts at UK Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency office in Swansea, Wales over COVID-19 safety fears continue**

Following a three-day walkout by administration staff at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) headquarters in Swansea, South Wales last week, further stoppages took place this week.

The stoppages are over COVID-19 safety concerns at the government-run facility, and come on top of four-day strikes held in early April and May. Sectional stoppages took place each day this week by contact centre staff, Input Services Group staff and others. Some days saw more staff out on strike than others. Further sectional stoppages are planned for July 12, 15 and 16.

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.

According to the PCS, management are continuing with plans to get more staff working in the office, with a planned further 150 due to return Tuesday. This would represent the largest phased return to date this week. The PCS state that following previous social distancing measures, there are not enough desks, resulting in staff having to share desks.

### **Stoppages by ScotRail staff in Scotland for equal overtime pay continue as union demands intervention of Scottish First Minister**

Several hundred train conductors and ticket examiners at Scottish rail transport company ScotRail held a further one-day strike on Sunday. They are demanding equal overtime pay with train drivers.

Conductors in the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union began their programme of Sunday stoppages at the end of March. Ticket examiners later joined the series of Sunday walkouts over the same issue.

The RMT accuses ScotRail of endangering safety by drafting in managers, who lack safety training and knowledge, to replace the strikers. The union warned the dispute could continue throughout the summer, and called on the Scottish government to intervene.

Transport Minister Graeme Dey met with the RMT on June 24, but no progress was made. The RMT is calling for a summit meeting with the participation of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

### **Strike by parking enforcement staff at London borough as employer targets union members**

Following a three-day stoppage last week, traffic wardens in the London borough of Ealing began a two-week strike Wednesday. They have taken intermittent strike action since May 5.

The Unite union members are employed by outsourcing company Serco to provide traffic warden services for the London borough.

The workers oppose Serco's offer of severance to wardens identified as union representatives or activists. They accuse the company of trying to undermine union organisation among the workforce. They also accuse the company of aggressive use of a new absence procedure to target workers for dismissal. A rally was planned for Wednesday outside Ealing town hall.

### **Strike by UK capital taxi-hailing app workers over pay and unsafe conditions**

Drivers working for the phone app hiring service Bolt, which operates around London within the M25 circular motorway, held a one-day strike on June 22. They launched a mass legal action in defence of their conditions.

The App Drivers and Couriers Union (ADCU) members are demanding Bolt recognise them as workers, not self-employed. The ADCU is an arm of the Independent Workers of Great Britain union.

They are demanding at least the minimum wage, holiday pay, to be paid £2 a mile for fares and an end to unfair dismissals. They want employee status in line with the Supreme Court Ruling against taxi-hailing app

company Uber, earlier this year. They also want improved safety measures. A Bolt driver, Gabriel Bringye, was murdered at work in February. A survey by the union found 71 percent of the drivers have been physically assaulted while working.

### **Teachers at London school strike over pay cuts**

On Wednesday, teaching staff at the two sites of Valence Primary school in Dagenham, east London walked out.

The National Education Union (NEU) members oppose proposed restructuring which would see around 15 of 46 staff facing pay cuts and demotions. The school argues the restructuring follows a fall in roll numbers and subsequent financing. The NEU proposed further strikes on July 7, 8, 13, 14 and 15.

### **Strike by leisure centre staff at Sandwell, England over fire and rehire threat**

UK workers at Sandwell Leisure Trust held a one-day strike on June 25. The trust runs leisure centres for Labour-controlled Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The Unison union members oppose plans by the trust to remove staff from the NJC negotiating body, which determines their pay and conditions

### **Unite union calls off strike by Sunrise Medical workers in Dudley, England after workers vote for new pay offer**

Workers at electric wheelchair maker Sunrise Medical's Brierley Hill factory in Dudley, England voted to accept a new pay offer following Acas-mediated talks.

The Unite members demanded a 3 percent pay increase and an additional holiday on Christmas Eve. They held several strike days to support their claim. A Unite press release stated the company agreed an improved pay offer, an additional day's leave on Christmas Eve and that talks with the company would take place, "on improving the pay structure for workers at the company." It did not, however, give details of the improved pay offer.

### **Refuse workers to strike in London borough over pay**

Around 140 refuse workers in the south London borough of Bexley will walk out for two weeks beginning July 12. The Unite union members work for outsourcing company Serco, providing refuse collection for Bexley council.

The workers oppose a 1.5 percent pay offer, the removal of industrial sickness benefit and Serco's refusal to implement a pay progression scale over the last five years. This has led to a backlog of pay for about 50 workers, who are owed thousands of pounds. Refuse workers in Bexley are on a minimum of £10.25 an hour, which is below the London Living Wage. By comparison, refuse workers in nearby Greenwich are on £13 an

hour.

### **Cereal production workers in Kettering, England ballot for possible strikes**

Production workers at breakfast cereal maker Weetabix in Kettering, England are balloting for strike action. The ballot closes July 13.

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) members are threatened with a change in shift patterns and a cut in premium pay for unsocial hours. USDAW states a 24-hour strike would be called in the week beginning July 28, followed by further 24- or 48-hour strikes.

Around 80 engineers working for Weetabix faced the imposition of “fire and rehire” contracts. The Unite members voted to strike. Instead of unifying engineers and production workers, Unite called off a planned strike on June 23, to allow for two weeks of talks between the union and the company.

### **Further strikes by hospital security staff at Reading, England hospital**

Twenty security staff working for outsourcing company Kingdom Services Group Ltd, which supplies security services at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, England announced a further series of strikes. The strikes will take place between July 12 and July 31.

The Unite members voted by an 84 percent majority to walk out. They want a pay increase and improved working conditions. They rejected a derisory offer of £9.30 an hour for security officers and £10.30 an hour for supervisors. Unite is calling for the contract for security services to be taken back inhouse when the current contract expires in December.

The new strikes are the latest in a long-running dispute. A march and rally are planned for Saturday, starting off from the hospital

### **Lecturers at Scottish agricultural college strike vote against poor pay**

Lecturers at the Rural College of Scotland, based in Aberdeen, voted by an 86 percent majority on a 65 percent turnout to strike.

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) members oppose a below-inflation pay rise proposed by the college management. They point out they are already paid less than lecturers at other Scottish higher education and further education colleges.

EIS General Secretary Larry Flanagan said, “The EIS would urge the management... to return to the negotiating table with a significantly improved offer, in the hope that strike action may yet be avoided.” The EIS statement gave no strike dates.

### **Wheel manufacturer workers in Telford, England to strike over cuts to redundancy packages**

Workers at GKN Wheels and Auto Structures based in Telford, Shropshire will hold three one-day strikes on a weekly basis, beginning

July 5.

The Unite and GMB union members oppose attempts by the company to tie a proposed pay increase to detrimental changes to the terms of a collective redundancy agreement. The factory makes wheels for off-road vehicles such as tractors, and among its clients is digger manufacturer JCB. The company was acquired by private equity firm Aurelius in 2020.

### **Security staff working for OCS in UK courts to ballot over possible strike after employer reneges on pay offer**

Staff working for outsourced facilities management company OCS providing security at HM Courts and Tribunal Services are to ballot for a possible strike. The PCS members are angry that OCS reneged on an agreed pay deal.

### **Unions call off planned pay strike by Tyne and Wear light rail maintenance staff in England**

A planned week-long strike from June 28 by around 120 UK workers maintaining the Tyne and Wear Metro light rail system was called off by the unions.

The RMT and Unite union called off the strike after talks held on June 25 between them and Stadler came to an “amicable solution.” According to press reports, the agreement is subject to ratification by the union executives.

The RMT and Unite union members oppose a pay freeze imposed by Swiss-based train building company Stadler, responsible for maintaining the Metro system. Stadler took over maintenance of the Metro in October last year.

The 120 workers at the public body Nexus were transferred to Stadler under a TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) arrangement. Stadler, which signed a 35-year contract to maintain the Metro saw its profits rise by eight percent last year.

### **Further strikes announced by London Thames river ferry workers as second union representative victimised**

Fifty-seven workers on the Woolwich ferry, which operates a service across the UK capital’s river Thames, will take part in nine 24-hour strikes in July. This comes after the victimisation of a second union representative by the ferry management.

The Unite members, who began stoppages in May following a 97 percent ballot in favour, have held eight days of stoppages to date. The ferry workers are also opposed to the failure to agree a new pay and bonus scheme.

Unite 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.

## **Strike ballot of council staff in London borough over contract terms**

Staff at Labour-run Tower Hamlets council in London are currently balloting for possible strikes. Last year, the council imposed new contracts that worsened terms and conditions. The Unison members are demanding the council improve the contracts. The ballot will close on July 22.

Last summer, the Unison union members held several days of stoppages against the new contract known as “Tower Rewards,” imposed on July 6. Two-thirds of the workforce of around 4,000 were sacked and reemployed on the inferior contract. Newly employed council staff are on lower pay rates, receive lower night-working and incremental payments. Severance pay was cut by 80 percent.

## **Sacked UK electricians reinstated at Gateshead Amazon construction site**

Around 30 sacked electricians at SIS systems on the new Amazon fulfilment centre in Gateshead, England were offered their jobs back last week. They held protest pickets each day Monday through to Wednesday against their dismissal.

The electricians were among a group of around 60 workers who stopped work on June 16, to protest against contractor SSE Enterprise Contracting using unskilled labourers to carry out electrician roles.

## **Strike threat by Israeli hospital workers over job cuts**

Around 13,000 support and administrative workers at 30 government hospitals threaten to strike from July 13. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, 200 extra hospital workers were employed for the increased workload.

The workers are calling for the posts, due to expire in June, to be retained.

The posts provided administrative support, cleaning, maintenance and food preparation. The Israeli trade union federation Histadrut, which is in discussion with the Finance Ministry, argues that even with the additional posts, there is a shortfall of around 1,000 hospital workers across the 30 hospitals for them to run efficiently.

Among the hospitals that could be affected are Galilee, Hillel Yaffe and Rambam.

## **Protests in Lebanon over cuts in fuel subsidy**

Protests in Tripoli, Lebanon over the weekend were attacked by security forces, leading to 20 people being injured. More protests took place on Monday in Beirut and other major cities. Protestors blocked roads with barriers of burning tyres.

The protests were against rising prices and the government’s announcement of a possible cut in fuel subsidies. People inundated fuel stations in anticipation of the cut, leading to many closing after running out of supplies. Many Lebanese rely on home generators to supply electricity because of regular power outages.



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