

Danish government announces bill to break nurses' pay strike; Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency staff in Swansea, Wales in fourth week of month-long strike over COVID safety; strike by more than 300,000 Nigerian doctors over pay arrears continues

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.

Danish government announces bill to break nurses' pay strike

As thousands of nurses continue their stoppage, begun June 19, the Danish government announced Wednesday a bill to break the strike. The *Sjællandske Nyheder* reported the government's intention to impose the terms rejected twice by members of the Danish Nurses' Organisation (DSR).

Around 5,700 nurses walked out, with hundreds more scheduled to join over the next few weeks, after rejecting a five percent pay offer over three years. There were constant calls from the media for the government to shut down the strike. Both the employers' negotiator and the DSR said outside intervention was necessary.

The ruling Social Democrats and their allies presented the dispute in terms of gender. The unions refused to call for a broader struggle in the working class. The Socialist Peoples' Party (SF) proposed an annual sum of two billion kroner over the next 10 years for so-called "women's professions," and the Unity List (EL) proposed 5 billion annually. These proposals have almost no chance of being implemented.

While claiming to oppose the bill, the SF will vote for the bill to be fast-tracked, requiring a 75 percent majority. This means the bill will be passed as the Social Democratic minority government together with the right-wing opposition has a large enough majority in parliament. The SF cynically say they want the bill fast-tracked to reduce the backlog of operations.

Deutsche Bahn drivers in Germany begin second national strike over pay

Train drivers at the German state-owned rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB) held a second national strike this week, following a two-day strike on August 11 and 12. The German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) called for

passenger train drivers to strike for two days from Monday, and freight train drivers for four days from Saturday.

The GDL rejected a pay offer of 3.2 percent over 40 months, far below the rate of inflation, but demanded only a below-inflation 3.2 percent increase over 28 months and a one-off 600-euro bonus. The larger Railway Workers' and Transport Union accepted a pay freeze for 2021.

Emergency telephone operators in Catalonia, Spain begin indefinite strike against insecure contracts and privatisation

The 200 workers in Catalonia who operate the 112 emergency phone number began an indefinite stoppage on Saturday against insecure contracts, reported *Crónica Global*. There was also a protest outside the offices in Tarragona.

In June, strike committees at the two 112 offices called a 24-hour strike and demanded the service be taken back into public ownership. The emergency number is currently operated by multinational services company Ferrovial.

The Ministry of Business and Labour in June declared the strike could only go ahead if 100 percent of the service remained operational, effectively banning it. It demanded the current indefinite strike maintain 85 percent of normal services.

Forest firefighters hold partial strikes in Aragón, Spain over working conditions

On Wednesday, firefighters in the Aragonese forest management company Sarga began three days of partial stoppages to demand the reinstatement of a government directive improving working conditions. According to *el Periódico*, an indefinite strike is also planned at the public company from September 2.

The unions state that government directive number 1/2021 contained many of the demands they put forward over the years. The directive was suspended by the Minister of the Environment in the Aragonese

government and president of Sarga's Board of Directors, Joaquín Olona, a member of the ruling PSOE party, who claimed it would "compromise Sarga's financial stability."

Siemens Energy workers in Germany protest against layoffs

On Monday, 1,000 workers marched in Berlin against plans by Siemens Energy to cut 750 jobs at its gas turbine plant in Moabit, Berlin. The *Berliner Morgenpost* reported that the IG Metall union called the protest after the company called for arbitration, calling on the company to "return directly to the negotiating table."

Siemens Energy, which split from Siemens last year, employs 4,800 people in Berlin. According to the *Berliner Morgenpost* it is planning to cut a total of 7,800 jobs worldwide. A representative of IG Metall said the union had "made many constructive suggestions to the board of directors as to how they can achieve the same savings without downsizing," indicating that they would accept cuts to pay and conditions.

Strikes planned by supermarket workers in Barcelona, Spain over working conditions

Supermarket workers in the Glovo chain's stores in Barcelona, Spain begin the first of nine days of strikes on Friday over working conditions and insecure contracts. The Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union called for stoppages on nine days spread out over the next two weeks, following a two-and-a-half day strike last week, reported *Crónica Global*.

Metrópoli Abierta also reported that after a new law was passed obliging companies to hire delivery riders as employees, Glovo announced that it would only hire around 20 percent of its 10,000 riders, and was encouraging riders to accept lower pay than their colleagues in return for jobs. Fifty riders gathered for a protest in front of the company's headquarters on August 13.

Border inspectors continue partial strike in Portuguese airports

Inspectors in the Portuguese Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) began a partial strike on August 14, scheduled to last until August 30. The stoppages delayed a number of flights, with *Lusa* reporting delays of up to four hours at Lisbon airport.

The Union of Investigation, Surveillance and Border Inspectors (SIIFF) called the strike to demand the government begins collective bargaining over pay and conditions for SEF inspectors. The SIIFF has threatened "tougher forms of struggle" after the partial strike if the government ignores its demands.

Portuguese cleaning workers strike over unpaid wages

On August 20, workers at cleaning company Ambiente e Jardim, which provides cleaning services for public institutions in Portugal, held a 24-hour strike to demand the company pay them their wages. The Union

of Concierge, Surveillance, Cleaning, Household and Miscellaneous Activities Workers (STAD) told *Lusa* that 500 workers at the company are owed wage arrears.

Protests were arranged at railway stations in Lisbon, Faro and Coimbra and a hospital in Porto, all of which use Ambiente e Jardim's services. In June, STAD called a strike at the company over unpaid wages.

Workers strike at instant noodles manufacturer in Turkey over collective bargaining

Nearly 100 workers at the AdkoTurk instant noodles factory in Çerkezköy, Turkey began an indefinite strike on Monday, according to *Evrinsel*. Tekg?da-?? union members joined the walkout to demand the company join collective bargaining talks. AdkoTurk management refused to negotiate and fired 20 workers who joined the union.

Evrinsel reported the company offered a bonus to workers if at least half of the 550 workers crossed the picket line, and a further bonus if 98 percent did. They also reportedly phoned over 200 workers the night before the strike to say, "there is a situation at the factory." Police blocked strikers from picketing outside the gates, pushing them away from workers entering the factory with riot shields.

Workers at Serbian furniture company protest over pay and pensions

On Monday, over 100 workers from Simpo-Šik, a subsidiary of the Serbian furniture company Simpo, protested and blocked the road to the factory for an hour in Kuršumljija, reported *Nova*. They denounced salaries which barely reach the minimum wage, a lack of pay increases for long service, and unpaid tax contributions.

The company threatened to report the workers to the Labour Inspectorate if the blockade was held during working hours, so the union at Simpo-Šik Kuršumljija moved the protest to the end of the shift. The union organised a similar blockade in July and is threatening to call an indefinite strike.

Strike notice filed at Brussels Airlines, Belgium over workload while unions tell media there will be no strikes

Three trade unions represented at Brussels Airlines, Belgium filed a strike notice on August 19, over excessive workloads suffered by cabin crew. While the indefinite notice legally allows them to call a stoppage, the unions admitted to the media that they have no intention of doing so.

RTBF quoted spokespeople for the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV/CSC) and General Labour Federation of Belgium (ABVV/FGTB) who ruled out any strike. The ACV/CSC spokesman said, "The goal is not to annoy the passengers," and the ABVV/FGTB representative suggested refusing to run the in-flight shop or working to rule.

On August 2, the unions organised a leafleting campaign to inform passengers of the working conditions of cabin crew. A spokesperson for the company, a subsidiary of Lufthansa, condemned strike threats that could "endanger the company's progress and financial stability." The unions told the *Belga* agency that last year "working conditions were

revised downwards in exchange for saving the company.”

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency staff in Swansea, Wales in fourth week of month-long strike over COVID safety

This week marked the fourth week of a month-long strike ending August 31 by Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) staff in Swansea, Wales. They are fighting for workplace safety.

The stoppages are part of a series over COVID-19 safety, ongoing since April. Workers want to work remotely, as social distancing is impossible in the office.

The section currently on strike is the Drivers’ Medical Department, which makes decisions on whether drivers with medical conditions are fit to drive. The stoppage, along with previous action, led to a backlog of over a quarter of a million applications for driving licences.

Management responded to the strike by threatening to cut annual leave of those taking part. It then withdrew the threats after talks with the Public and Commercial Service union (PCS).

The PCS is running a consultative ballot, to close September, asking if members are prepared to take further strike action or action short of a strike over COVID-19 safety. Throughout the dispute the union has kept isolated from any other section of workers strikes it has been forced to call. The DVLA strikes are the only action officially sanctioned by a British union over the lack of COVID-19 safety provision.

Further strike by workers at East Midlands Railways company in England over safety concerns

Train managers and senior conductors at the UK’s East Midlands Railways company held a further 24-hour stoppage Sunday. They are in dispute over safety concerns operating the four-carriage Class 360 trains.

The four-carriage units can be coupled together to make eight- or 12-carriage trains. With no connecting passage between each carriage unit, it represents a danger to safety with only one manager or senior conductor on board. Further strikes are planned every Sunday until September 26.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, which refuses to unite the growing disputes in the rail industry, said the use of scab-operated trains resulted in safety breaches, citing doors being opened on the wrong side of the train, for example. The union says the strikebreakers are given one day’s training and a £270 bonus for the shift.

Further walkouts by rail catering workers in Scottish capital over management bullying and harassment

Staff at Rail Gourmet, at Edinburgh Waverley train station, Scotland, began a 72-hour walkout on Saturday.

The RMT members held a series of 24-hour strikes throughout July, with picket lines mounted at Waverley station. Rail Gourmet provides food and drink on the LNER rail service between Edinburgh and London.

The workers, who voted 100 percent to strike, are protesting bullying and harassment by management which led to a breakdown of industrial relations.

UK rail union declares dispute at rail company over Legionella outbreak

The RMT union declared a dispute with Thameslink rail company in southeast England. Seven toilets on four Thameslink trains were identified as harbouring potentially lethal Legionella bacteria.

The union accused the company of a cavalier attitude to the discovery, and said it will proceed to a ballot unless the company proposes serious action to address the potential threat.

RMT rail union suspends further planned strike by London underground rail staff over abolition of night grade driver posts

After calling off a 24-hour strike by drivers on the London underground rail system, due to take place August 3, the RMT rail union called off a four-day strike planned to begin August 24.

The drivers oppose employer Transport for London’s (TfL) plans to eliminate the grade of night driver. The RMT said this could lead to around 200 job losses, with TfL disputing the claim. Eliminating the grade will impact on part-time drivers, mainly women, who are able to incorporate part-time working as part of their work/life balance.

RMT declared a suspension of the August 3 strike to allow talks with TfL held under the auspices of the government mediation service Acas. In a press release issued August 20, the RMT stated further progress meant they would suspend the proposed four-day action, but would remain in dispute while talks continue.

Bus drivers in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales walk out over pay

Drivers working for Merthyr Tydfil bus depot of transport conglomerate Stagecoach in Wales will hold a one-day strike September 6, coinciding with schools reopening.

The GMB union members voted overwhelmingly to strike for a pay increase. The company walked out of talks saying the drivers’ demand was unaffordable. The drivers want to be paid the same rate as drivers at the nearby Stagecoach depot in Porth. Drivers at all six of the company’s local depots are currently paid around one pound an hour less than drivers in Porth, only 16 miles away.

Second week of cleaners’ stoppage at London’s Royal Parks over pay, conditions and job cuts

Cleaners working for contractor Just Ask in London’s Royal Parks were due to complete a two-week strike Friday.

Just Ask provides cleaning services for facilities in the Royal Parks. The cleaners are PCS and United Voices of the World union members. The workers oppose proposed job cuts and are seeking parity in pay and conditions with staff directly employed by Royal Parks.

Just Ask discussed with union officials postponing the strikes until

September 9. However, meetings of the cleaners demanded the strike begin August 16 as planned. A protest was due at 10am Friday, to mark the end of the strike. A mass protest in support of the Just Ask workers is planned for Monday, a bank holiday, at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London.

Staff at leisure centre in Sandwell, UK hold further strike against fire and rehire ultimatum

UK staff at the Sandwell Leisure Trust in the Midlands held a one-day stoppage, Monday and a picket line at the Portway Lifestyle Centre. They are threatened with "fire and rehire" if they do not accept an inferior contract.

The strike is the third this year by the Unison union members. Nearly 300 staff including swimming instructors, lifeguards and receptionists oppose the imposed contracts that eliminate nationally agreed pay rates.

Staff at University of Sheffield Archaeology department in England vote to fight department closure

Academic staff at the University of Sheffield Archaeology department voted in favour of striking in a consultative ballot to oppose the department's closure.

The University and College Union (UCU) members indicated by a 79 percent majority they are prepared to strike, and by 89 percent to take action short of a strike against the university's plans to close the department.

Despite a campaign and online petition signed by 45,000 people, the university plans to go ahead with the closure.

On July 13, the University Executive Board officially ratified recommendations made by the University's Senate that the department cease to exist in spring 2022.

Jobs have been reduced in the department for years, with only 11 remaining. An unspecified number of staff will be retained, with management proposing they are attached to other university departments to focus on specialist areas of postgraduate study. Undergraduate study will cease.

The UCU has accepted thousands of redundancies at universities and further education colleges, and refuses to mobilise its membership in united action against continuing attacks on jobs and conditions.

Campaign against closure threat of Archaeology department at University of Worcester, UK

A petition was launched against University of Worcester's plans to close its archaeology department, accepting no new students from September.

A petition was signed by 4,000 people. The Council for British Archaeology described the proposed closure as "another significant blow to archaeology in the UK."

Woolwich ferry workers in London announce further walkouts over bullying and use of agency staff

The 57 workers on the Woolwich ferry service across the Thames in the UK capital have held 30 days of stoppages since they began action in May. Unite announced further strikes on each Monday, Wednesday and Friday throughout the month of September.

The Unite union members oppose the victimisation of two Unite union reps, the excessive use of agency staff and the failure to give health and safety training to new hires. They are also demanding their employer TfL begin negotiations over pay.

In August, Unite suspended strikes to allow for talks with TfL. When these broke down, the scheduled strikes went ahead.

TfL took over the running of the ferry from Briggs Marine Contractors Ltd in January. Under Briggs, there was a long-running dispute over alleged management bullying.

The ferry service, providing free crossing of the Thames for pedestrians and vehicles, has operated since 1889. Prior to the pandemic around 20,000 vehicles and 2.6 million passengers a year used the service.

Local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to hold consultative ballot over pay

Around 70,000 local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will take part in a consultative ballot over pay.

Unite along with the GMB and Unison unions rejected the 1.75 percent and 2.75 percent (for those on the bottom pay point) offer by employers' body the Local Government Association. They are calling for a 10 percent rise.

Due to the unions' favoured policy of holding consultative actions, aimed at delaying any industrial action for months, it could be the end of the year before any action is sanctioned. If a Yes vote takes place in the consultative ballot, this can be ignored by the unions. A further ballot on actual industrial action means delay for weeks longer.

The Unite ballot to ascertain if the membership are willing to ballot for industrial action will run from September 1 to October 4.

Unison began consulting its members on Tuesday, with the consultation ending late September. GMB will begin a consultative ballot on September 1.

Ballot of drivers working for UK delivery firm Yodel over pay and conditions begins

A ballot of drivers working for the UK courier parcel and delivery firm Yodel began on Wednesday. The ballot will run until September 15.

The GMB union members are protesting against differences in pay rates and incentives paid to agency drivers compared to directly employed drivers, lack of company adherence to anchor time schedules, unworkable rotas, alterations to statutory leave, failure to implement a pay rise agreed last year, and lack of adherence to contractual obligations for shift and holiday pay.

Yodel is one of the UK's largest courier and delivery firms, with around 10,000 permanent drivers delivering 145 million parcels a year.

Tram workers in Greater Manchester UK to ballot for strike action over pay offer

Around 300 UK staff at the Greater Manchester Metrolink tram system are balloting for possible strike action over pay.

The Unite union members work as drivers and supervisors on Metrolink. The ballot opened Thursday, and runs until September 10. Strikes could begin at the end of September. Following months of discussion between Unite and Metrolink, the company offered a derisory increase of one percent.

Unite regional officer Dave Roberts tweeted, “Unite has no option but to ballot its members after Metrolink refused to make an acceptable pay offer despite six months of talks. If workers vote for strike action, then Greater Manchester will effectively grind to a halt.”

Unite union calls off strike by refuse workers in London borough of Bexley after new offer by employer

The Unite union called off a strike by around 140 refuse workers in the London borough of Bexley, begun on July 12.

Workers voted in principle for a deal with employer Serco. The outsourcing company is contracted to provide refuse services on behalf of Bexley council.

The workers walked out in opposition to 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 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. Refuse workers in neighbouring Greenwich are on £13 an hour. Those who walked out are responsible for collecting recyclable and garden waste. The collection of non-recyclable waste was not affected.

A Unite press release of August 24 noted, “The deal includes a one-off £750 payment for 19 staff, contract changes that will reduce pay disparities and steps to prevent the weaponisation of the drug and alcohol policy.”

The press release added the deal has to be ratified in full, and that until that happens the strike is suspended but could resume.

The contract for refuse collection for Bexley currently held by Serco expires in October, when it will be taken over by Countrystyle Recycling. The council told workers they will then be paid the London living wage of minimum £10.85.

Workers at vinyl floor manufacturer in Manchester, England end dispute agreeing new pay deal

Around 100 UK workers at the Polyflor company in Whitefield, Manchester accepted a pay deal following strike action.

The GMB union members staged several walk outs to demand a substantial pay rise to make up for miserly increases the last two years. The company previously offered a two percent rise. Under the new deal the workforce will get three percent backdated for 12 months, and five percent from July.

According to the GMB, Polyflor paid out a £20 million dividend during the COVID-19 pandemic and its directors got pay rises of up to 25

percent.

Week-long strike declared by Lebanese workers unions against rising cost of living

The Union of Independent Business Employees and the Union of Private and Public Institution Employees announced a week-long strike Monday. The strike is in protest at the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon.

The strike is due to end August 30. The unions put forward a list of demands, including either an increase in travel allowances and the minimum wage or grants to cover the increases in the cost of living.

Israeli medical technicians begin industrial action

Beginning Tuesday, 1,500 Israeli medical technicians including 150 ventilator and heart-lung machine operators will only work until 3 p.m. and will not be available for night shifts.

The action will mainly affect hospitals outside central Israel. The technicians are taking the action over a longstanding dispute, saying they are not paid for night shifts and being on-call.

Striking medical staff at independent Israeli hospitals demand the government pays owed funds

Medical staff at seven independent Israeli hospitals held a partial strike Wednesday.

Jerusalem’s two emergency hospitals were among those affected. The medics provided emergency and life saving measures, but refused to carry out elective procedures, with patients being turned away.

The medics took the action over the NIS 300 million (\$93m) owed to the hospitals by the government. The Israeli health minister was hopeful that following discussions the financial situation could be resolved.

Israeli trade union federation declares dispute of aviation workers over unpaid leave during pandemic

On Tuesday, the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut declared a dispute by aviation workers over the impact of the pandemic on their jobs.

In two weeks, aviation workers could take industrial action, including strikes. Throughout the pandemic thousands of aviation workers were on unpaid leave.

Earlier this year, Israeli airline El Al laid off 2,000 workers as a result of a government bailout. Now El Al, Israir and Arkia are planning to lay off some workers, extend unpaid leave for others, impose inferior contracts and outsource some work roles.

On August 19, hundreds of aviation workers held a two-hour protest at Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion airport to protest their situation resulting from the pandemic. They were joined by Israeli Airport Authority workers.

Protest march by Israeli guides over lack of work

Israeli tourist guides are taking part in a 120km protest march from Caesarea to Jerusalem. The lack of tourists as a result of the pandemic has led to a dearth of work.

One guide on the march told the *Jerusalem Post* that three of his colleagues have taken their own lives because of their dire situation. The lack of work was compounded for some of the guides by changes to employment law. Workers under 45 are no longer eligible for unemployment benefit. In addition, grants for independent workers were withdrawn.

Strike by over 300,000 Nigerian resident doctors over pay arrears continues

The strike over pay arrears by over 300,000 resident doctors in Nigeria, begun August 2, is continuing for its fourth week.

The members of the Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) are owed from four to 19 months' arrears by state employers following the introduction of a new payment system. They also want payment of the COVID-19 inducement allowance and increased hazard allowance.

The industrial court refused a government attempt to get the strike ruled illegal, adjourning until September 15 to hear the case from both the sides.

The Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), the umbrella body that represents dentists as well as doctors, signed a memorandum of understanding with the government to end the previous stoppage in April over the same issue. NARD leaders refused to sign the agreement but are working closely with the NMA.

A minority of doctors resigned, taking appointments elsewhere. Recruiters from Saudi Arabia are in Nigeria to attract doctors, desperate after years of low pay and missed salary payments. Reports confirm many doctors, including at senior level, leave the country every year.

The Chief Medical Director of the Federal Medical Centre, in Makurdi, Benue state, Dr Peter Inunduh said the exodus of doctors was of great concern and could leave hospital wards unable to function: "...these doctors [who are] leaving have experience. You can replace them but you can't replace that experience and it is scary."

Kenyan university staff ready for national strike next week over unpaid salaries

Nearly 20,000 staff at 35 Kenyan sites for higher education are expected to take part in national strike action from Monday, August 30, over unpaid salary enhancements and broken agreements.

University and Academic Staff Union secretary-general Constantine Wasonga said the union's efforts at negotiation failed, on issues going back to 2017. Educators walked out for 76 days in 2018.

More than 600,000 students will be affected.

South African public service workers in nationwide demonstrations over pay and conditions

Public service workers in South Africa took part Tuesday in a National Day of Action in Defence of Collective Bargaining and Workers' Rights. Government offices, including the South African Revenue Service and the Agricultural Research Council among others, reneged on agreements made in 2018.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union members picketed the Constitutional Court, National Treasury, Department of Public Service and Administration and the nine provincial legislatures.

In Cape Town, 100 workers protested outside the Western Cape premier's office demanding the previous wage agreements be upheld, risk allowances be paid to frontline workers and for temporary community health workers to be absorbed into the Department of Health.

South African teachers in KwaZulu-Natal threaten further protests over staff shortages

Teachers in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa are working to rule until the provincial government meets their demands over understaffing in schools. The province has 2,000 unfilled substitute posts, and over 200 schools have fewer than four teachers. Last week, 150 teachers marched to the provincial premier's office in Pietermaritzburg.

The South African Democratic Teachers Union members threatened further protests if they did not receive a response from the premier by Tuesday. They want all vacant positions in schools filled, permanent appointments for substitute teachers and temporary teachers given full back pay.

Truckers in protest at South Africa/Mozambique border over delays

Truck drivers in Mpumalanga province, South Africa protested at the Lembobo border post Monday, disrupting all traffic entering Mozambique. The drivers are made to wait up to three days without toilets or showers while tanker lorries are given preferential treatment. They accuse customs officers of accepting bribes.

Over 100 on strike at Mountains of the Moon University in Uganda to demand state takeover

Teachers and other staff at the Mountains of the Moon University in Fort Portal City, Uganda are continuing the strike begun August 9. The workers want the state to run the university, citing lack of funding and low salaries.

A petition by the university lecturers announcing the walkout, sent August 2, stated, "We have a number of grievances as we are much disappointed by the so many empty promises, the lack of Transition Task Force to prioritise staff in the takeover by government and taking staff for granted."

In 2015, the university chancellor wrote to President Yoweri Museveni requesting the government run the university. The strikers want a speed-up of the transition to a state university and an end to discriminatory practices.



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