

Third national rail strike over pay at Deutsche Bahn in Germany; UK rail strikes at ScotRail, East Midlands Rail and Rail Gourmet continue; Nigerian resident doctors' pay strike enters fifth week

## 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.*

### Third national rail strike over pay at Deutsche Bahn in Germany

On Wednesday, train drivers at the German national rail company Deutsche Bahn began a third strike in their pay dispute. The German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) called a week-long strike, their longest to date, according to *Reuters*.

Passenger train drivers held two-day strikes in two previous weeks, after rejecting a below-inflation pay offer of 3.2 percent over 40 months. The company reportedly made a slightly improved offer of a 600-euro bonus and 3.2 percent wage increase over 36 months, still a real-terms pay cut, which was rejected by the GDL.

The union demanded the same rise over a 28-month period, which is still below inflation. The larger Railway Workers' and Transport Union accepted a pay freeze for 2021.

### Strike at private psychiatric hospitals in Brandenburg, Germany over collective bargaining

On Monday, workers at three psychiatric hospitals owned by Asklepios in the German state of Brandenburg began a four-day strike during collective bargaining negotiations, reported *rbb*.

The United Services Union (Verdi) called the stoppage to support its demand that workers at the private clinics be included in the same collective agreement as healthcare workers in the public sector. Workers also joined a demonstration in Brandenburg an der Havel.

Verdi cited a pay difference of between 350 and 440 euros, and a one-and-a-half-hour difference in working time between the Asklepios clinics in Brandenburg and Hamburg.

*rbb* reported there were previous warning strikes in June and August. Verdi threatened more strikes before the federal elections on September 26.

On Monday, Verdi called a separate one-day strike of non-medical staff at the Pleißenental Clinic in Werdau, Saxony, for the same demand of

inclusion in the public service collective agreement.

### Municipal workers in Lyon, France strike against new laws

Municipal workers in the city of Lyon, France began a week-long strike on Monday against two new regulations by the city government, *Lyon Mag* reported. Six unions criticised plans to extend annual working hours for municipal employees and new restrictions on the right to strike.

Workers in municipalities across France have walked out at various times to oppose the implementation of a 2019 working-time reform, which will cost many workers a week of leave. The Lyon city government is reportedly considering restricting the ability of workers in schools and crèches to go on strike.

### Strike at French bus manufacturer against closure plan

Ninety workers at the factory of electric bus manufacturer Aptis in Hangenbieten, France held a strike on Monday to protest the company's closure plan, according to *Le Figaro*.

A delegate for the French Democratic Confederation of Labour told the *AFP* news agency they called the stoppage due to the company's refusal to negotiate seriously.

Aptis is owned by the multinational vehicle manufacturer Alstom, which reported 301 million euros in profit in the year before March 2021.

### French civil servants' union calls for month-long strike over cuts, pay and conditions

French civil servants' union Solidaires Fonction publique (SUD-FP), announced last week it was calling its members to strike for the entirety of September, over a range of issues. SUD-FP is one of the smaller unions in the French civil service, receiving 6.4 percent of the vote in the previous professional elections.

The union denounced cuts to resources and jobs in the public service, and continual real terms pay cuts for over a decade.

The unions have done little to ensure workers' safety during the pandemic. SUD-FP opposes mandatory vaccination and raises only token demands for better personal protective equipment. In the press release announcing the strike, SUD-FP demanded an end to all "coercive and repressive" measures related to vaccination.

### **Greek gold miners in Halkidiki strike against firing of union president**

Miners at the Eldorado gold mines in Halkidiki, Greece held a three-hour strike on Friday last week to oppose the firing of Nikos Tzanetis, the president of the Union of Mines and Quarries in Northern Greece, reported *Ef.Syn*.

This was the second time the multinational company EDILMAC, which operates the mine, had attempted to dismiss Tzanetis for alleged breaches of contract. Five months ago, they were forced to reverse the decision after miners walked out.

According to *Ef.Syn*, Tzanetis was victimised by the company after reporting illegal safety breaches at the Halkidiki mines. In his position as a security technician, he had raised the alarm about poor ventilation in the mines, damaged machinery being used, a number of workers falling from height in the past few months, and a lack of protections against the spread of Covid-19.

### **Strike at electronics factory in Istanbul, Turkey after union members fired**

Workers at a recently opened Xiaomi-Salcomp electronics factory in Istanbul, Turkey walked out on August 27, after around 25 of their colleagues—who had joined the Türk Metal union—were fired by the management, reported *Evrensel*. Around half of the 800 workers in the factory are striking.

One worker told *Evrensel* they were forced to work 10 to 11 hours for the minimum wage, despite having an 8-hour day in their contracts. The president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his Minister of Industry celebrated the opening of the factory with the investment of two China-based multinationals, Xiaomi and Lingyi ITech, which owns the Finnish Salcomp.

### **Wildcat strike in Belgian community institution over working conditions**

On August 26, workers at the Ruiselede campus of Belgian community institution De Zande walked out, denouncing intolerable working conditions. De Zande is a community institution for young people, who have either committed a crime or have behavioural issues.

According to *Het Laatste Nieuws*, the wildcat strike began shortly after the arrival of a boy with complex problems which staff were not trained to deal with. "When a second problem case came up," a union official said, the staff could no longer cope. Staff at De Zande's other two campuses, he said, "share that opinion."

Workers did not return to work on Friday, but protested outside the gates. Police, external psychologists and staff ran the institution.

After negotiations between the unions and management, staff were sent back to work with an agreement the government would "meet with a delegation from Ruiselede in the coming weeks to look for how [they] can structurally deal with such very complex cases in the future."

### **Strike at social care charity in Portugal over working conditions**

On August 27, workers at the Portuguese social care charity Santa Casa da Misericórdia in the city of Vila Nova de Gaia held a one-day strike to denounce their working conditions, *Observador* reported.

The Northern Hospitality, Tourism, Restaurant and Related Workers Union said that staff at the charity suffered from "intense" work rhythms and an excessive workload, and demanded the hiring of more workers. The union said the charity was trying to break the strike, reporting it to the Authority for Working Conditions for hiring workers to replace strikers.

### **Forest firefighters' strike in Aragón, Spain called off by unions after agreement**

An indefinite stoppage by Spanish firefighters at the Aragonese forest management company Sarga, scheduled to begin Thursday, was called off by the unions after they reached an agreement with the company's management, reported *Diario del Alto Aragón*.

Sarga workers held partial strikes last week after the Aragonese government suspended an agreement which the unions say contained many demands firefighters had put forward over the years. The Workers' Commissions union said the new agreement substantially improves the conditions of firefighters, including an increase in choice when workers' take their vacations, and removing the duty to pull up weeds.

### **Scotland's ScotRail workers continue Sunday strikes over pay as train conductors vote to extend the action**

Several hundred train conductors and ticket examiners at ScotRail walked out again on Sunday. The conductors' strikes began in March, while ticket examiners joined the dispute at the end of April.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) members are demanding equal overtime pay with train drivers. The dispute is one of the UK's longest. Under anti-trade union law, workers whose disputes have lasted six months must be re-balloted. The RMT re-balloted its conductor members, who voted by an 80 percent majority to continue the stoppages.

They will hold a further six consecutive 24-hour strikes each Sunday, beginning September 12. A planned strike on September 5 under the remit of the previous ballot will go ahead. The ticket examiners are currently being carried re-balloted.

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

The team managers (members Transport and Salaried Staff Association (TSSA), voted to strike in protest at being deployed as strike-breakers.

Train cleaners at ScotRail began an overtime and rest day working ban on July 13.

The RMT noted publication of a report by Abellio, ScotRail's parent company, outlining job and service cuts. The plans include closing 140 ticket offices and cutting 85,000 rail services leading to a loss of 1,000 jobs.

From August 11, ScotRail gateline workers, also RMT members, began an overtime ban, refusing to act up or work rest days to protest overtime rates. They will only work Sundays already booked.

The RMT betrayed the five-year struggle of rail workers against the introduction of Driver Operated Trains, reaching agreements with train operators that undermined the safety-critical role of conductors.

### **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.

The dispute of senior conductors is now in its fourth month. The workers are involved in separate disputes over safety concerns about 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 RMT 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 strike-breakers are given one day's training and a £270 bonus for the shift.

The RMT refuses to unite the growing disputes in the rail industry.

### **Further walkout of rail catering workers in Scottish capital over management bullying and harassment announced**

Rail catering workers working for Rail Gourmet at Edinburgh Waverley train station, Scotland began a 72-hour walkout on Saturday.

Following a 72-hour strike by staff on August 21, they will hold a 24-hour strike September 17.

The RMT members previously 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. According to the RMT, the bullying continues.

### **Further 24-hour strike by pharmaceutical workers in Nottingham, England against "fire and rehire"**

Workers at BCM Fareva's plant in Nottingham, England began a further 24-hour strike on Monday, the fifth walkout in the last two months.

A ballot of the 300 Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) members returned a 90 percent majority in favour of walking out against a "fire and rehire" ultimatum resulting in inferior terms and conditions.

The French-owned company produces pharmaceutical and beauty products for Boots pharmacy chain and Bodyshop.

USDAW previously expressed its willingness to help the company impose the changes if it lifted the fire and rehire threat. USDAW national officer Daniel Adams said, "USDAW has consistently reiterated its willingness to talk should the threat of dismissal be removed, including under the auspices of ACAS if necessary. Sadly, this has been consistently rejected by the company. However, the offer remains, and the company could still prevent industrial action if they withdraw their 'fire and rehire' threat."

An USDAW press release August 27 stated, "Members have been forced to accept significant reductions in their terms and conditions or be dismissed...Usdaw continues to call on the business to sit down with the union and talk to try and resolve the ongoing dispute."

### **Strike by refuse collection workers in Sandwell, UK over bullying allegations**

UK refuse collection workers employed by outsourcing company, Serco on behalf of Sandwell council, West Midlands were on strike Tuesday over allegations of bullying and harassment by the company.

Around 70 GMB union members and supporters held a picket line outside their depot. Further strikes are planned for September 7, 14 and 21. The workers first indicated their willingness to take action in an indicative ballot in June. The union is continuing Acas-mediated talks with Serco to head off further strikes.

### **Ballot of Scottish local government workers in response to pay offer**

A ballot of Scottish local government workers union began on Wednesday.

The Unison members earning less than £25,000 a year were offered just £800 per year, later increased to £850 by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla) representing the 32 local authorities.

Unison represents around 80,000 members working in Scottish local authorities, the largest union representing Scottish local authority staff. The ballot runs until September 22. Unison is only balloting certain workers, including school catering and cleaning staff as well as refuse workers, in planned targeted strike action.

### **London lorry drivers' at Booker Retail Partners strike ballot over pay enhancement**

Lorry drivers at Booker Retail Partners, a wholesale company delivering to around 1,500 convenience stores in London and the southeast of England, are balloting for strike action. The ballot closes September 3.

The 30 Unite members at Booker's Thameside depot demand the £5 an hour temporary pay increase given to drivers at the Hemel Hempstead depot also be paid to them. The Hemel Hempstead drivers were awarded

the temporary increase in response to the nationwide shortage of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers.

Booker, owned by Tesco, tried to head off industrial action by the Thameside staff by offering concessions, including a £70 a week increase for HGV drivers and bonuses in December and March next year. Unite said the bonuses have so many strings attached it is unlikely they would be paid.

### **UK grocery retail chain lorry supply drivers at DHL, Dartford indicate willingness to strike over pay**

Around 200 UK drivers at logistics firm DHL's Dartford distribution centre have indicated they are willing to strike over pay offer.

The Unite union members voted by a 98 percent majority in a consultative vote to be willing to ballot for strike action. They rejected a one percent pay offer from DHL. Action by the drivers, responsible for delivering supplies to grocery retail chain Sainsbury's in the southeast of England could empty shelves.

A Unite press release last week gave no indication when a full ballot would take place, instead quoting Unite regional officer Paul Silkstone: "Our members have signalled that they are willing to take strike action and we will now be moving to opening a formal industrial action ballot. Unless Sainsbury's and DHL...get their acts together there will be empty shelves in Sainsbury's stores across London and the South East of England. That...can be avoided by coming up with an offer that reflects the hard work and dedication shown by these drivers."

### **Strike vote by parking wardens in Westminster, London over pay**

Parking wardens in UK capital voted by a 100 percent majority to strike against a pay offer. The GMB union members rejected a 21-pence an hour rise in a three-year deal put forward by employer NSL.

NSL runs parking service for Westminster council in London. The pay offer would mean a cut in real terms. According to the GMB, only an offer twice the current one would maintain the wages in real terms. The wardens are also calling for an increase in their allowances, which have not been increased in the last 10 years.

The GMB has yet to announce dates for any strike action.

### **London Royal Park cleaners end two-week strike with protest march**

Cleaners working for contractor Just Ask in London's Royal Parks held a march through Hyde Park on bank holiday Monday August 30, to mark the end of a two-week strike. A rally was held at Hyde Park speakers' corner.

The workers were supported by members of the public walking through the park.

Just Ask provides cleaning services for facilities in the Royal Parks. The cleaners are Public and Commercial Services (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 PCS news bulletin said, "The next stages of the campaign are being discussed."

### **Protests by care workers planned in four UK cities**

UK Care and Support Workers Organise (CaSWO) network has called for protests on Saturday.

The CaSWO advocates for care workers in the private and charity care sectors. The protests will take place outside Department of Health and Social Care offices in London, Manchester, Newcastle and Preston.

Their demands include a £15 an hour wage rate with pension provision in line with public sector workers, work contracts to include a minimum number of hours and the right to union recognition.

### **Protest by Israeli medical staff over lack of funding**

Thousands of medical staff including doctors and nurses demonstrated outside Israel's Ministry of Health on Sunday. They were protesting the underfunding of seven public hospitals, including the two emergency hospitals in Jerusalem.

A partial strike began on August 25, in which medical staff are only offering emergency cover.

The public hospital is owed NIS 300 million by the Israeli government.

### **Protest by Israeli child care staff over COVID-19 guidelines**

Around 200 care staff looking after young children up to the age of three protested Monday in Tel Aviv, Israel.

The workers were protesting staff shortages in child care centres, and lack of clear guidelines over COVID-19.

### **Nigerian doctors' pay strike continues**

The strike over pay arrears by more than 300,000 resident doctors in Nigeria, begun August 2, is beginning its fifth week. The government is calling on all its agencies, including the unions, to break the strike.

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

The government attacked the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), with which it has just signed a Memorandum of Understanding, for giving the government 21 days to meet their demands. The Minister of Labour and Employment, Senator Chris Ngige accused the NMA of going against the terms of the Memorandum. He demanded that "NMA should play its role as the guardian of its affiliate associations..."

The governors of the Nigerian states are also proposing to intervene to end the strike. This was the first item on the agenda at the Nigerian Governors' Forum (NGF) on August 26. A previous strike by health

workers was concluded by the union based on assurances from local leaders.

### **Nigerian tricycle taxi riders hold warning strike in Minna, Niger State against police harassment**

Motorised tricycle riders who act as taxis in Minna, the capital of Niger State in Nigeria, held a warning strike on August 30, to protest being harassed.

Policemen stop them to extort money, and officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps and Vehicle Inspection Officers detain the drivers and then demand payment.

One driver explained that in addition to rules imposed by local governments, "...Police, Road Safety and [Vehicle Inspection] officials also extort us daily. If you are arrested and taken to their office, you will be made to pay N5,000 before they release you. It is getting too much."

Trade union officials of the Amalgamated, Commercial Tricycle and Motorcycle Riders Association of Nigeria said they "just woke up to the strike action by our members."

### **Nurses and midwives in Gambia in nationwide strike over pay shortfall**

Gambian nurses and midwives began an indefinite national walk out Wednesday, demanding to be paid their due allowances.

The National Association of Gambian Nurses and Midwives members say they have been waiting since May 11 for the pay issue to be resolved.

### **African National Congress staff national strike over pay grievance**

African National Congress (ANC) administrative staff went on indefinite strike nationwide August 26, after party managers could not afford to pay them for July or August.

The ANC staff, including National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) members, previously picketed the ANC offices and then worked to rule in protest at late wages, unemployment insurance and hospital fund arrears and four years without salary increments.

The ANC blame their financial problems on the pandemic and the newly introduced Political Party Funding Act, designed to increase regulation of political funding.

### **Hospital workers in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa protest work conditions**

Around 350 hospital staff at Town Hill Hospital, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa stopped work August 25, in protest over shift work and the bullying behaviour of a manager.

The Nehawu members closed the main gate, leaving patients stranded in the hospital after management refused to deal with their grievances.

### **African truck drivers' stoppage at Ugandan-South Sudanese border over security threats**

A strike by hundreds of truck drivers from Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi entered its second week on Monday. Hundreds of trucks are parked in Elegu on the Ugandan side of the border, with South Sudan disrupting any movement between the countries.

The East African Truck Drivers Association and the Long-Distance Truck Drivers Association members are demanding South Sudanese and Ugandan authorities provide greater security on the road from the border to Juba, the capital of South Sudan. In the last year, 20 drivers have been killed in attacks by armed militias.

### **Kenyan university staff union calls off strike and enters negotiations**

The Universities Academic Staff Union (Uasu) called off the national strike due to begin on August 30. Nearly 20,000 staff at 35 Kenyan sites for higher education planned to walk out from August 30, over unpaid salary enhancements and broken agreements.

The union admitted the issues went back to an agreement made in 2017 that was never implemented, but still agreed to enter further talks with government representatives. The decision came after a meeting of Uasu's top members with Principal Secretary for University Education and Research Simon Nabukwesi, the day before the strike was to begin.



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