

Danish nurses defy union and Labour Court and continue walkouts over pay and understaffing; numerous strikes by healthcare workers across France over pay and conditions; UK Sunday rail strikes continue; resident doctors' strike in Nigeria in danger of union sell-out

## 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 nurses continue wildcat strikes over pay and workload in defiance of Labour Court ruling and union**

Nurses at multiple hospitals across Denmark continue their one-hour wildcat strikes this week, defying a back-to-work order from the national Labour Court, and the orders of the Danish Nurses' Council (DSR) union.

The court threatened nurses with a fine of 56 kroner per hour if they continued their walkouts. *TV2 Nord* reported that nearly 200 nurses at Aalborg University Hospital held a one-hour stoppage on Thursday morning. Local papers also reported strikes on Wednesday at Herlev Hospital near Copenhagen and at Bornholm's Hospital. Nurses at the major Rigshospitalet are holding three, one-hour, strikes per week according to the *Kristeligt Dagblad*.

The government intervened on August 28 to end a ten-week strike of over 6,000 nurses and imposed a pay deal which was rejected twice by DSR members. After the intervention, nurses around the country began to hold one-hour, wildcat strikes, condemning not only the below-inflation pay offer, but continued understaffing and excessive workloads.

The nurses rejected the corporatist "Danish model" accepted by the DSR, telling the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* that "We simply cannot play by the rules, anymore."

### **Healthcare strikes held across France over pay and conditions**

Over the past fortnight, healthcare workers across France held numerous strikes to denounce understaffing and poor working conditions, and demand pay increases. GPs stopped all home visits for a day on Monday, to demand an increase in the payment for a visit, which has

remained unchanged for 15 years according to *France Bleu*. The doctors' association SOS Médecins said it is considering a further 48-hour stoppage if its demands are ignored.

On Thursday, nurse-anaesthetists held a 24-hour strike for a salary increase, *Le Figaro* reported. This is the second time the General Confederation of Labour called the approximately 10,000 nurse-anaesthetists to strike to demand their salaries reflect the amount of training they require.

An indefinite strike began at the hospital in Rouffach, France on September 8, according to *Actu*. The four unions involved raised the overcrowding in the hospital, and low staffing levels. Elsewhere, having done nothing to protect their members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the unions are now denouncing the requirement that hospital workers be vaccinated, and demand healthcare workers be forced to work alongside unvaccinated colleagues.

One-day strikes over working conditions and low staffing levels also took place at the Yves-Le Foll hospital centre in Saint-Brieuc, France on Tuesday and at the Regional Institutes of Health and Social Training nationally on September 6, *Le Télégramme* reported. According to *France Bleu*, there were stoppages of around 50 healthcare workers at the Belledonne Clinic in Grenoble, France and of teachers and students at the Nursing Training Institute of the Red Cross in Le Mans, France last week.

### **Bus drivers in Lyon, France strike against risk of violence and poor working conditions**

On Monday, bus drivers in the French city of Lyon held a one-day strike to denounce the deterioration of working conditions, especially an increase in violence toward drivers. According to *Lyon Mag*, the strike was triggered by an incident on September 1, when somebody fired a gun at an out-of-service bus in a Lyon suburb, fortunately missing the driver. A further strike is planned for September 20.

Bus drivers have faced a wave of violence during the pandemic, as they have been required to enforce hygiene measures alone. The murder in July 2020 of a driver in Bayonne, Phillipe Monguillot, as he attempted to

enforce mask wearing, met with widespread outrage in France and internationally. A group of drivers in Poland began a strike to demand staff enforce health measures. London drivers organised a fundraising campaign for Monguillot's family.

### **Portuguese teachers strike in first week of school term over pay and conditions**

This week, as the school year began in Portugal, teachers and other school staff joined a four-day strike from Tuesday called by the All Teachers Union (STOP). According to *Record TV*, STOP denounced precarious work, including competitions between teachers, and low salaries.

STOP and other education unions also denounced municipalisation plans, in which the running and funding of schools will be transferred from central government to local authorities from March 2022. They say that this will cause massive inequalities, as it will lead to funding cuts in smaller and more deprived areas.

### **National strike in Dutch childcare centres over workload**

The latest of a series of national one-day strikes of childcare workers in the Netherlands took place on Tuesday, called by the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV). The *Algemeen Dagblad* reported that workers in 660 centres stopped work, and a number joined a protest in The Hague.

The FNV began the campaign with national protests on June 18, calling strikes in "various locations" on June 23, and in two provinces on July 1. The only other national strike took place on July 8. Workers in the childcare sector denounced the high workload, and criticised a new collective agreement proposed by the employers for not addressing this.

The Christian National Trade Union Federation signed the agreement and kept its members from joining the strikes. While the FNV criticised the deal and is engaged in negotiations to amend it, it accepted that it is "generally binding" on all workers.

### **Rally in support of bus drivers' strike in Stuttgart, Germany**

Around 750 people gathered in Stuttgart, Germany on Tuesday, for a rally to support the three-day strike of bus drivers begun Monday, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The United Services Union (Verdi) called the stoppage in the private bus industry in the south-western German states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate as part of collective bargaining negotiations covering around 9,000 drivers, after a 97.9 percent vote in favour of a strike. Verdi's main demand is that drivers be paid for time spent at work but not driving, such as the wait between trips.

### **Four-day wildcat strike at Belgian waste collection company after spy camera discovered**

On September 9, a driver for Renewi, the company responsible for waste collection in Houthalen-Helchteren, Belgium, discovered a hidden surveillance camera in a vehicle, according to *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The workers immediately stopped work for several days, denouncing the company's spying.

The unions began meeting with management and relayed their excuse that the camera was "part of a specific investigation into one person." *Het Laatste Nieuws* says the camera "may have been installed in accordance with legislation and agreed collective labour agreements."

The drivers began work again on Monday, after an agreement was reached not to install hidden cameras in any vehicle. No details were made public about when and why the original camera was installed.

### **Unions call "soft" protest at Brussels Airlines over work conditions**

On Tuesday, Belgian trade unions organised a protest at Brussels Airlines which did not "annoy the passengers," i.e., not affect the company's profits, to head off their members' demands.

Cabin crew at Brussels Airlines held previous protests to denounce their working conditions, involving long hours and even sleeping on the planes rather than hotels. The unions have prevented strikes, supposedly out of concern for passengers.

*De Standaard* reports that thirty candidates from the previous union elections distributed leaflets to the 1,100 cabin crew about negotiations between the unions and management. A spokesman from the General Labour Federation of Belgium described the protest as "soft," but said it would give a "clear signal" to management.

The National Centre of Employees union told the Belga news agency in August that "working conditions were revised downwards in exchange for saving the company" in a restructuring last year. All the union requested was an "internal control body" at the Lufthansa subsidiary to monitor working conditions.

### **Scotland's ScotRail workers' six-month long Sunday strikes over pay continue**

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

The strike was the first of six consecutive 24-hour Sunday strikes after a re-ballot—stipulated under Tory anti-trade union laws because their previous dispute had run six months without resolution. The re-ballot returned an 80 percent majority to continue the dispute. The ticket examiners are currently re-balloting.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) members demand equal overtime pay with train drivers. The dispute is one of the UK's longest.

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

The team managers (Transport and Salaried Staff Association members) voted to strike against being used as strike-breakers.

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

The RMT publicised a report by Abellio, ScotRail's parent company, proposing gutting jobs and services. 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 against overtime rates. They will only work Sundays already booked.

The RMT was to meet with ScotRail for talks over the pay disputes. The RMT said it would not rule out holding strikes during the COP26 International climate change summit, taking place in Glasgow from November 1 to 12.

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.

### **Following strike vote by ScotRail engineers, over pay, union holds talks with employer**

Around 250 engineers responsible for maintaining and repairing trains on the ScotRail system voted by 78 percent on a near 69 percent turnout to strike. Following the intervention of Scottish government ministers, talks between Unite and ScotRail were to take place Wednesday.

The Unite members are seeking a pay rise, no compulsory redundancies and restoration of the rest day working agreement.

A Unite press release of September 14 stated that if no progress is made at the talks, continuous industrial action short of a strike will begin on September 24.

### **Train managers and senior conductors at the UK's East Midlands Railways company continue their 24-hour Sunday stoppages**

Senior conductors and train managers are involved in separate disputes over safety concerns about operating the four-carriage Class 360 trains on the East Midlands Railways.

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.

The senior conductors began their dispute in mid-May and are holding 24-hour strikes each Sunday up to and including September 26. Train managers are also holding 24-hour strikes each Sunday up to and including 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.

### **Protest at Waterloo rail station, London, to oppose cuts in services**

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport trade union participated in a protest at the UK capital's Waterloo rail station on Monday.

Waterloo is the London terminus for South Western Railway (SWR), which is proposing a 15 percent cut in both peak and off-peak services. The cuts are part of an attack on pay, jobs and services on SWR, described by the RMT as the biggest since the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. Rail

franchises ScotRail and LNER are also considering similar cuts to their services.

### **Further strike by teachers at London school over claims of bullying and victimisation**

Around 80 teachers and support staff at the Oaks Park school in Redbridge, London held a further three-day strike Tuesday.

The National Education Union (NEU) members accuse school management of bullying and demand the reinstatement of a sacked NEU union representative (rep).

This week's strike follows a three-day strike last week, which in turn followed on from 12 days of strikes held in June and July this year in support of four teachers victimised for raising safety concerns over COVID-19. The four used Section 44 health and safety legislation to ask to work from home. They were not given jobs after being interviewed for permanent posts.

A rally by around 100 striking teachers and supporters took place on Saturday outside Redbridge Town Hall. They accused the Labour-controlled council of supporting the bullying tactics of the school management. The school is reportedly using agency staff to cover for striking teachers.

On June 22, London bus driver David O'Sullivan joined striking teachers outside the school. O'Sullivan was sacked with the connivance of the Unite union by his employer Metrolink for raising safety concerns over the pandemic.

### **UK auto parts company workers to begin all-out strike over closure threat**

Around 500 workers at GKN's Driveline factory in Birmingham are set to begin an all-out strike on September 27.

The Unite union members are opposed to the company's plan to close the factory in Erdington, Birmingham (England) and move production to Europe. Venture capitalist Melrose, owner of the GKN factory, plans to close the Erdington site in 2022.

The plant produces drivelines for the auto makers in the UK such as Jaguar Land Rover, Nissan and Toyota. Drivelines comprise the axles, differentials, driveshaft, joints and wheels of cars. With just-in-time production, any prolonged walkout could quickly affect car production.

Unite has pursued a nationalist campaign against the closure, including protests outside the Houses of Parliament with the intervention of local Labour MP and former trade union bureaucrat Jack Dromey.

Unite was forced to call the strike after its overtures to Melrose failed. Unite's September 8 press release announcing the strike stated, "The union initially delayed issuing strike action and instead arranged a meeting with all interested parties to reach agreement on future production and support. However, Melrose GKN refused to attend the meeting after initially accepting an invitation to do so."

### **Cereal production engineers in Northamptonshire, England to strike against "fire and rehire"**

Around 80 engineers at breakfast cereal producer Weetabix in Corby and Kettering, in the Midlands, will hold a 48-hour strike on September 21.

The Unite union members will hold repeat 48-hour strikes Tuesday each week up to and including November 30. They are opposed to plans by Weetabix management to impose “fire and rehire” proposals, changing shift and work patterns that will leave the engineers up to £5,000 a year worse off.

Unite called off previous proposed strikes over the same issue, due to begin June 23, for further talks with management, resulting in revised changes to their proposals. However, the engineers rejected the proposals by an 82 percent majority in a consultative ballot.

Production workers at Kettering walked out on August 16. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) members voted 100 percent to oppose shift pattern changes and a cut in premium pay for unsocial hours. USDAW previously suspended two earlier scheduled stoppages. According to an USDAW press release September 8, the production workers voted by over 80 percent to accept a new offer from management which reinstated the 27.5 percent shift pay premium, and declared the dispute resolved.

### **Metrolink tram workers in Greater Manchester to strike over pay offer**

Around 300 UK staff at the Greater Manchester Metrolink tram system plan to walkout on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 September.

The Unite union members, who work as drivers and supervisors on Metrolink, rejected the one percent pay increase offered by Metrolink by a 97 percent majority. With inflation at 3.9 percent, a one percent pay rise is a cut in real terms. Other scheduled strike dates include October 10 and 24, but Unite said it could call additional strikes, including before September 25. The dates coincide with major football matches or sporting events.

### **Strike vote by academic staff at London art college over casualisation**

Staff at London’s prestigious Royal College of Art have voted to strike.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted by a near 83 percent majority on a 63 percent turnout to walkout. They are opposed to the increasing use of casual staff at the college. The UCU webpage announcing the strike vote gives no dates for possible action but carries an appeal to donate to their strike fund.

### **UK Ocado online supermarket delivery drivers vote to strike over pay and conditions**

UK delivery drivers working for online supermarket Ocado voted to strike over pay and conditions.

The drivers are employed by third-party provider Ryde, which Ocado contracted in June to carry out deliveries. The drivers saw their earnings cut by between 50 and 70 percent. In August, the *Observer* reported that it had seen payslips of drivers at the London West Acton depot showing pay as little as £2.91 an hour.

The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) is calling for a wage of £16 an hour, union recognition and to be brought in-house, working directly for Ocado. Ocado last week issued a statement saying it would end the third-party arrangement and offer the drivers direct employment.

### **Delivery drivers at UK firm Yodel vote to strike over pay and conditions**

Drivers at UK courier parcel and delivery firm Yodel voted by a 98 percent majority on an 84 percent turnout to strike.

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.

In a press release announcing the ballot result September 15, the GMB, which represents around 250 drivers at Yodel, said it would be consulting its members to agree a date for industrial action.

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

### **Plastic bottle manufacturer workers at Wigan, England balloting over pay offer**

Around 150 workers at the Alpha UK plastic bottle plant in Wigan are currently balloting for a possible walkout.

The Unite union members rejected a two percent pay offer, as other staff were offered three, and are also demanding the company honour a 2020 pledge to increase their pensions contributions. The ballot closes on September 22. The company makes plastic bottles and containers for firms such as Britvic, Coca Cola and Johnson & Johnson.

### **South Wales bus drivers’ pay ballot**

UK bus drivers at Stagecoach South Wales are balloting over pay. The Unite union members are seeking to be paid at least the £10.50 an hour that bus drivers working for other companies in the local area are paid.

The drivers work out of the Cwmbran, Brynmawr and Blackwood depots. The employer unilaterally cancelled pay talks scheduled in 2020 because of the developing COVID-19 crisis.

### **Cash couriers at UK firm balloting over no pay rise**

Around 1,400 employees of G4S cash services are balloting for possible strike action after the employer offered a zero pay increase this year. The GMB members are seeking a 7.5 percent rise. The G4S workers are responsible for cash deliveries to ATM machines. G4S is part of American-owned Allied Universal.

### **Company demands removal of union rep who led protest of cleaners at Facebook's London office**

According to the *Observer* September 12, the company acting as asset manager at Facebook's London office requested the removal of union rep, Guillermo Camacho from the site.

The article said the paper had seen an email from JLL, the Chicago-based asset management company for Facebook's London office asking for Camacho's removal. The email was to the Churchill Group, the company providing cleaning services at Facebook's offices.

On July 21, Camacho, a union rep for the Cleaners & Allied Independent Workers Union, led a protest outside the offices. The cleaning workers were protesting against bullying, cuts in hours and unsafe working conditions at the site. The *Observer* quoted Camacho saying, "The number of floors we have to clean has gone up from five to 12 [at Facebook's offices on Brock Street]. But they haven't brought in more staff. It's impossible—I was having to come before my shift and leave late to get it done. It's making us all really stressed and sick. That's why we had to protest."

According to the *Observer* the email was sent the day of the protest.

### **Further strike scheduled by truck drivers at Lebanese port**

Lebanese truck drivers at the port of Beirut planned to hold a further strike on Monday.

It is part of ongoing industrial action since the beginning of the month. Among their demands are a wage rise of \$125, annual leave, a transport allowance and school grants for children.

### **Protest by Israeli bus drivers over conditions and violence against them**

On Sunday, Israeli bus drivers held a protest in the country's largest city, Tel Aviv.

They were protesting attacks against bus drivers nationally, who had challenged passengers refusing to wear masks to mitigate the pandemic. A *Jerusalem Post* article on September 12 noted some of the attacks against bus drivers over the last few months. It included three youths who last week threw glass bottles at a bus and pepper-sprayed the driver. In August a driver had his nose broken by a passenger after requesting he wear a mask.

### **Union suspends Nigerian doctors' strike over pay arrears**

The strike over pay arrears by more than 300,000 resident doctors in Nigeria, begun August 2, is in danger of being sold out by the union. The Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) agreed on Wednesday to sign a memorandum of understanding with the federal government at the Labour court to suspend the pay dispute.

The government argued the strike began without proper notice and was illegal as doctors provide an essential service. The doctors continued the strike in defiance of the court, which previously ordered the strike suspended on August 23 until settlement date on Friday.

The 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 Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU) and other unions issued a 15-day "ultimatum" that they will call out other health workers on indefinite strike unless withheld salary and COVID-19-related payments are released and salaries adjusted.

### **College workers in Nasawara, Nigeria strike over pay**

Staff at three higher education colleges in Nasarawa State, Nigeria began an indefinite strike September 10.

The Joint Union of State Tertiary Institutions members at the College of Education Akwanga, the Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, and the College of Agriculture, Science and Technology, Lafia are aggrieved at their exclusion from state government consultations on salary increments and promotions. They also demand the removal of the state Head of Civil Service.

### **Court workers in Ogun, Nigeria continue pay strike**

The judiciary workers' strike in Ogun state, Nigeria which has shut courts since August 11 is having an impact, as police cells overflow with detainees and police investigations stall.

The Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria members demand salary shortfalls stretching back to October 2020. Meetings with the state government are ongoing.

### **South African metalworkers move closer to strike action in pay deadlock**

Workers in South Africa's engineering and steel industry are nearing a strike as negotiations with employers at the Metal and Engineering Industries Bargaining Council reach stalemate.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) members want an eight percent salary increase for 2021, and the rate of inflation plus two percent for the next two years.

The Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (Seifsa) and other employer bodies refuse to offer more than 4.4 percent for 2021, inflation plus 0.5 percent in 2022 and inflation plus one percent in 2023. They also want an exception to allow "struggling" companies to pay even less than the national minimum rate. This is a sticking point in negotiations.

Numsa took the first legal steps towards formulating a strike notice to be served on Seifsa and the employers' organisations.

### **Gambian commercial drivers in stoppage over work conditions**

Commercial vehicle drivers held a countrywide sit-down strike Monday in protest at working conditions.

The Gambia Transport Union members demand improvements from the government, including the provision of dedicated car parks across the country, an increase in commercial vehicle transport fares, regulated queuing systems at ports, reduction of fees at the Senegambia bridge and an alleviation of problems at the Senegal-Gambia border crossings.

### **Malawi factory workers at state-owned charity strike for pay increase**

Workers at the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA) Bangwe Weaving Factory in Blantyre, Malawi began a strike Wednesday, to demand a 12 percent salary increase as promised by government.

MACOHA, indirectly controlled by the state, say they have not received sufficient funding from the government to make a pay award and will lobby for extra money in December's budget review. Some 90 percent of workers at the factory are disabled.

MACOHA was established as a statutory corporation with a goal to "facilitate empowerment of people with disabilities to enable them to actively participate and be included in social and economic development."

### **Ugandan doctors threaten strike over pay and conditions**

Doctors in Uganda have given a month's strike notice to demand a promised salary review, increased medical insurance and improved COVID-19 precautions in the workplace.

The Uganda Medical Association members also complain that health services are understaffed, with only 40 percent of doctor positions filled.



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