

Danish nurses' one-hour wildcat strikes over pay and understaffing win support from other sectors; public transport workers strike across France over pay, conditions and safety; Scottish rail workers continue Sunday stoppages over overtime rates; South African metalworkers' indefinite national strike impacts auto manufacturing; Iranian sugar plant workers strike at Haft Tappeh over pay arrears enters week three

## 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' one-hour wildcat strikes over pay and understaffing win support from other sectors**

Nurses in Denmark continue to hold one-hour wildcat strikes, defying the orders of the Danish Nurses' Council (DSR) union and fines by the national Labour Court. The strikes followed the shutdown of the national nurses' strike in August.

On October 7, 250 nurses at Sydvestjysk Hospital in Esbjerg joined the campaign of hundreds of other nurses at the Rigshospitalet, Herlev Hospital, and other hospitals across Denmark. *Jydske Vestkysten* reported that the picket line in Esbjerg was visited by local dock workers and scaffolders, who expressed their support for the nurses.

Throughout the 10-week national strike of nearly 6,000 nurses, shut down at the end of August by the government, the DSR refused to call for broader support in the working class, appealing instead to female politicians of all parties on the basis that nurses were underpaid because of gender discrimination. Since the campaign of wildcat strikes began in September, the nurses have received support from other workers, with international donations to help pay fines imposed on strikers, and a group of social workers in Silkeborg holding what *Politiken* described as an "unprecedented" sympathy strike in defiance of their own union.

### **French public transport workers strike over pay, conditions and safety**

Workers in public transport across France continue a wave of strikes to demand improved pay and conditions, and to denounce the health effects of their jobs.

Bus drivers in the city of Brest began a third one-day strike on Monday, after going on strike for two days last week. The drivers, at a subcontractor of RATP-Dev, protested in September about the increasing number of speed bumps along their routes, which are causing back injuries, according to *Le Télégramme*. Another one-day strike is planned for Friday.

Last week, drivers for Transdev in Nîmes held a one-day partial strike, to denounce decisions such as changes to routes being made without consulting workers. *France Bleu* reported that the CGT called the strike after drivers were on the receiving end of anger from passengers affected by these changes.

Bus drivers in Moselle and drivers on both the buses and trams of Nancy are holding indefinite partial stoppages. After a day's walkout on October 1, drivers employed by Keolis in Moselle took part in one-hour stoppages twice per day, called by the CGT to demand improved wages and working hours. Drivers in the Nancy bus and tram service operated by Keolis are stopping work for 55 minutes at the start of each shift. The CGT called the partial stoppages from Monday to demand the hiring of more staff.

On Tuesday, school bus drivers in Deux-Sèvres held a one-day strike to protest against working conditions, regular overruns of the working day, and to demand a pay increase. The CGT called for the stoppage and asked for a 4 percent pay rise.

### **French civil servants oppose mass layoffs and closures**

Civil servants in the agricultural employment service (MSA) of France held a national partial strike last week, to oppose restructuring plans that

would eliminate 750 jobs by 2025, reported *Le Télégramme*.

The MSA workers also denounced high workloads making it impossible to provide a decent service, and which will be aggravated by further layoffs. The French Democratic Confederation of Labour called a strike in all 30 of the service's sites, but limited the walkout to a single hour, according to *Ouest France*. A spokesperson for the French Confederation of Management—General Confederation of Executives union said that the service lost 4,152 jobs over the past 15 years.

### **Workers at Spanish Banco Sabadell oppose mass layoffs**

Last week, Spanish workers at Banco Sabadell joined a one-day strike to oppose plans to cut hundreds of jobs, according to *Europa Press*. The unions at the bank estimate that 80 percent of its employees walked out on October 8 against the layoffs.

Banco Sabadell made successive reductions to the number of redundancies it is seeking. It is now asking for 1,555 job cuts, after initially seeking 1,936.

The unions called only a limited campaign against job losses, including a one-hour strike on October 5, and a 15-minute stoppage on October 4. They openly state the bank can make the cuts it wants through “voluntary” redundancies by “offer[ing] sufficiently attractive exit conditions,” but the management continues to insist it will make compulsory redundancies.

The unions refuse to mount a united campaign to oppose job cuts, and have long accepted redundancies. In July, they agreed to 6,452 job losses at CaixaBank, and in June accepted 2,725 redundancies at BBVA, in each case organising only short token strikes to demand better redundancy terms.

### **Street cleaning workers begin indefinite strike in Mallorca**

Waste collection and street cleaning workers on the Spanish island of Mallorca began an indefinite strike on Thursday, following a unanimous strike vote in September and another this weekend. The Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union is involved in negotiations with the local government, which it said are “blocked,” according to *Europa Press*.

A number of workers in municipalities on the island held strikes in August, which ended with the signing of deals or were called off and “postponed” by the unions for further negotiations.

### **Spanish unions call off rail strike over staffing levels**

The Train Engine Drivers and Workers Union (SEMAF) and the Railway Union (SF) in Spain called off a planned eight-day strike scheduled to continue this week, after reaching an agreement with the company over staffing levels, according to *Europa Press*.

On September, 30 workers at the state-owned rail company Renfe began the first of eight strike days after SEMAF and SF denounced the company for using the pandemic as an excuse to cut 700 jobs. A deal was announced on October 8 between Renfe and SEMAF, who called off the strike planned for that day, while SF went ahead with partial strikes on October 8 but also called off subsequent stoppages.

Renfe claims that it will take on 924 new staff, although the Minister for Transport said on Twitter the deal merely “endorses measures that Renfe already had in place.”

### **Walkout at Belgian national rail company Brussels depot over wage arrears**

Last week, workers at the Brussels depot of the Belgian state-owned rail company SNCB walked out on in a spontaneous strike against late payment of wage arrears, reported *RTBF*.

On October 8, after the SNCB announced it would pay what it owed for overtime in two instalments in December 2021 and February 2022, workers responded by stopping work.

A spokesperson from the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions said there was a backlog of years for overtime payments, but praised the company's management, saying, “The SNCB has made an effort, so the volume of arrears has gone down considerably, but a large part is still owed.”

### **Public servants strike in German state of Hesse during collective bargaining**

Workers in public services such as universities and courts, and municipal workers such as street cleaners joined a state-wide strike in Hesse, Germany on Tuesday, during collective bargaining with the state administration.

Multiple unions called for the day's stoppage and organised rallies in four Hessian cities, according to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. In the collective bargaining negotiations, covering 45,000 workers, the unions are calling for a five percent pay increase and more secure contracts in universities, saying the collective agreement should regulate conditions for workers working from home.

### **Workers at ScotRail, Scotland continue Sunday stoppages over overtime rates while balloting over pay**

The Sunday pay strikes by several hundred train conductors and ticket examiners at ScotRail, Scotland continue. At the same time, 2,000 rail workers at ScotRail are balloting over pay.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members walked out on Sunday, in one of the UK's longest-running stoppages. The conductors' stoppages began in March, and were joined by ticket examiners at the end of April, who will strike until October 31. They are demanding equal overtime pay with drivers.

The pay ballot result will be announced before the climate change COP26 talks in Glasgow between October 31 and November 12. A large majority in favour of strike action is expected. The RMT will use the result as a bargaining chip, with the threat of travel disruption during the COP26 talks.

The RMT betrayed the five-year struggle of rail workers against the introduction of Driver Operated Trains. The union reached agreements with different train operators, undermining the safety-critical role of thousands of conductors.

### **Unite union calls off first tranche of pay and conditions strikes by ScotRail engineers**

Unite called off a 24-hour strike over pay and conditions by ScotRail engineers due to begin October 18.

The Unite members want a pay rise, no compulsory redundancies and restoration of the rest day working agreement. They have carried out industrial action short of a strike since September 24.

A further three 24-hour stoppages are planned for November. 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.

Unite called off the October 18 strike after “most progressive” talks with ScotRail.

### **Cereal engineers at Weetabix, UK factories hold further strike after rejecting latest offer**

Around 80 engineers at the Weetabix plants in Kettering and Corby, England held their fourth consecutive 48-hour walkout Tuesday, against the threat of fire and rehire.

The Unite union members began their series of 48-hour stoppages on September 21. Further 48-hour strikes are due each Tuesday up until November 30.

The engineers oppose pay cuts and restructuring of their contracts that would roster them to work more days, with the loss of shift allowance. The changes mean the engineers losing up to £5,000 a year. The threat of dismissal hangs over those workers refusing to accept the changes.

The engineers were to strike at the end of June, followed by weekly 24-hour strikes throughout the summer. Unite suspended the strike to allow “meaningful talks.” This resulted in new proposals from Weetabix. However, Unite was unable to sell the new proposals to the workers, who rejected them by an 82 percent majority, forcing Unite to launch the current round of stoppages.

### **Walkout of scaffolders at Scunthorpe British Steel plant enters second week**

Around 60 scaffolders employed by contractor Actavo at the British Steel plant in Scunthorpe, England are in the second week of an all-out strike.

On Monday, they marched around the steel plant. The Unite union members have been in dispute over pay since 2019. They struck previously and are demanding payment in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) rates. They are paid between 10 to 15 percent less than NAECI agreed rates.

### **Second round of strikes by London College of Art staff over workload and casualisation**

London College of Art staff in the UK capital held a three-day strike on Tuesday. It follows a two-day strike last week over casualisation and excessive workloads.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted by an 83 percent majority to hold the stoppages. They also began a programme of industrial action October 4, that includes a boycott of student assessments and marking, and refusing to reschedule work not completed because of the industrial action.

According to the UCU, over the last two years the college employed over 1,000 temporary lecturers on zero-hour contracts with restricted employment rights.

### **Strike by refuse and cleaning staff over work conditions at Brighton council, England enters second week**

The strike of refuse and cleaning staff working for Green Party-controlled City of Brighton council in England begun October 5 enters its second week.

The GMB members voted by a 100 percent majority on a near 80 percent turnout to walk out. There is an ongoing dispute over management removing drivers from long-established routes. The workers interpret the changes as management imposing unofficial punishment or control of staff.

The action will end October 17, but another round of stoppages is planned to begin October 21. The dispute led to bags of uncollected rubbish piling up on the streets of Brighton.

### **London Royal Park cleaners striking over pay hold rally at half marathon**

London park cleaners striking for parity with directly employed staff held a rally at the start of a half marathon at St James Park on Sunday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members at contractor Just Ask Services, which provides facility management services in the Royal Parks, began a month-long strike on October 1. They are demanding an occupational sick pay scheme in line with staff directly employed by the London Royal Parks.

### **Second week of strike by staff at UK shoe distributor against fire and rehire threat**

Around 100 UK workers at the Clarks shoe manufacturer’s Westway distribution centre in Street, Somerset are continuing their strike over a fire and rehire threat.

The Community union members voted by an 88 percent majority for the strike, which began on October 4. The firm was taken over in February by Lion Rock, a Hong Kong-based private equity firm. Lion Rock is seeking to cut overtime rates, reduce pay, cut sick pay, reduce parental leave and cut redundancy and call-out pay.

Workers anticipate a pay cut of over £1.50 an hour, and the abolition of 30-minute paid lunch breaks and 10-minute paid coffee breaks.

Staff at Clarks HQ, also in Street, are similarly affected by the fire and rehire threats, but are reported to have accepted the changes.

December 14. This will be followed by an all-out strike between December 20 and January 8, the Christmas/New Year holiday period.

### **Plastic manufacturer workers in St Asaph, Wales strike over pay freeze**

Around 50 workers at Goodfish plc plastic manufacturer in St Asaph, Wales held a one-day strike on Wednesday.

The GMB and Unite union members are protesting the firm's refusal to offer a pay increase for the second year in a row. Other walkouts are planned. The company, which makes PVC mouldings, responded to the action by cancelling bonus payments for the quarter ending in September, and threatening to cancel the Christmas bonus.

### **Further walkout 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 Sunday evening, the sixth walkout in the last three months.

A ballot of the 300 Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers members returned a 90 percent majority to strike against a "fire and rehire" ultimatum resulting in inferior terms and conditions.

A moderated proposal from the company, still an attack on terms and conditions, was overwhelmingly rejected in a ballot.

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

### **Staff at Scottish bus company reject pay offer and vote to walk out**

Drivers, engineers, cleaners and administrative staff at Stagecoach East in Scotland have voted to strike.

The Unite union members employed by the company in Fife, Perth and Strathtay rejected the company's offer of 2.4 percent backdated to May 2021. Around 600 workers balloted, rejecting the offer by more than 90 percent at each depot.

Unite's demand is for a pay rise in line with the current Retail Price Index inflation figure of 4.8 percent plus one percent. Latest profits registered for Stagecoach are £58.4 million. In a press release on October 8, announcing the rejection of the offer, Unite gave no dates for action. Instead, it noted, "We want to emphasise that our ambition has been to resolve this dispute amicably, and without our members having to take strike action ... The company know what our members are asking for, and it's now up to them."

### **Stagecoach bus workers in Chesterfield, England announce strike dates over pay**

Drivers and cleaners working for the Yorkshire Traction bus company in Chesterfield, England rejected a company pay offer and will walk out.

Around 50 Unite members at the Stagecoach firm at the Stonegravels depot in Chesterfield will take 13 strike days between October 18 and

### **Unite union suspends strike of bus workers at company in northwest England over pay**

Unite suspended the three-day strike of around 250 bus workers employed by Ribble Motor Services Ltd, due to begin Thursday.

The company, part of the Stagecoach group, operates buses from its Preston and Chorley depots covering parts of northwest England. The workers wanted a substantive pay offer and improved sick pay provision.

The suspension follows an improved offer, not publicly disclosed by the union, on which the workforce will ballot. If rejected, a 48-hour strike is planned from October 22.

Last week Unite suspended a planned stoppage of around 300 tram drivers and supervisors at the Metrolink tram system in Greater Manchester that was scheduled for October 10. On Thursday, it called off another 24 hour strike planned for Friday, after it managed to push through a below inflation deal of three percent this year and next year on its members.

### **Bus drivers in Loughborough, UK balloting over low pay**

Around 50 UK bus drivers working for Kinchbus in Loughborough are balloting over low pay.

The ballot closes October 22. The Unite members, among the lowest paid bus drivers, were offered an unacceptable pay rise. Strikes could begin in early November.

### **Local government and school staff in England reject below inflation pay rise**

Local government staff, refuse and school workers in England rejected a miserly 1.75 percent pay offer.

GMB members voted by a 75 percent majority to reject the offer. The GMB, Unison and Unite unions are calling for a 10 percent pay rise. According to the GMB, local government workers saw a more than 20 percent fall in pay in real terms over the last decade. Following the rejection of the offer, the GMB will organise a consultative ballot to gauge workers' willingness to take industrial action.

### **Scottish nurses in consultative ballot over pay**

Nurses in Scotland are taking part in a consultative ballot to determine whether they are prepared to take industrial action over pay.

The ballot of Royal College of Nurses (RCN) will close November 8. In May, more than two thirds of Scottish RCN members voted to reject the pay offer of four percent from the Scottish government.

## **Ballot of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency staff in Swansea, Wales over COVID safety**

A ballot of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) staff in Swansea, Wales began on Tuesday.

The PCS union members have been involved in a series of stoppages since April, over COVID-19 safety concerns. Workers want to work remotely, as social distancing is impossible in the office, but management insists on more workers returning to the office.

The DVLA strikes were the only actions officially sanctioned by a UK union over the lack of COVID-19 safety provision. The ballot closes November 10.

## **UK workers at Birkenhead railway equipment manufacturer strike ballot over pay**

UK workers at Faiveley Transport in Birkenhead are to ballot over pay. The 47 Unite union members work for Faiveley, which manufactures railway equipment. They rejected a two percent pay offer with strings. Balloting began Tuesday and will continue until October 22.

The workers voted by 100 percent in a consultative ballot to ballot for industrial action. If the latest vote is in favour of industrial action, Unite said it could begin in November.

## **Strike by Iranian sugar plant workers at the Haft Tappeh plant over pay arrears now in third week**

Workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane processing plant in Shush, Iran who began an open-ended strike on September 28, protested outside the Khuzestan governor's office on Saturday.

Their demands include payment of wage arrears. They have not been paid for three months. Other demands include reinstatement of sacked workers and renewal of seasonal contracts.

The Haft Tappeh workers have been involved in a long-running dispute over several years, including strikes over pay and conditions at the plant, and demands for the revoking of privatisation. The previous private owner of the plant was dismissed following a corruption case. The current status of ownership and management remains in limbo. The lack of clarity is adding to the chaos and mismanagement at the site.

## **Workers strikes and protests in Kuwait**

On Saturday, around 300 employees of a company in Farwaniya governate, Kuwait walked out protesting they had not been paid for three months.

They also raised problems renewing their work visas. Responding to the strike the police called services of the Kuwaiti government labour mediation service PAM to try and resolve the dispute. In a separate dispute, workers recently held a sit-in at the Electricity and Water ministry over non-payment of allowances.

## **Protests by teachers in Kurdistan region of Iraq**

On Tuesday, non-contract teachers in the Iraqi Kurdistan sector held protests across the region.

The protest, part of an ongoing campaign, is for non-contract teachers to receive the same pay and benefits as contract teachers. An estimated 21,000 non-contract teachers are employed in the region.

## **Planned strike by Israeli airline staff over job security**

The Israeli trade union body Histadrut announced a strike at the Israeli airline El Al beginning October 18.

The airline workers fear plans by El Al to restrict flights of its cargo operations and flights of its leisure arm, Sun D'Or on the Sabbath will lead to job insecurity.

## **Libyan oil workers' strike threat**

Libyan oil and gas workers demanding a pay increase and medical insurance are threatening to strike.

The General Union of Oil and Gas Workers called on the National Unity government to meet the demands. The union assured the government it would do all in its power to undermine any strike by ensuring oil and gas production are not greatly affected.

Staff at the recently revived South African Airways (SAA) struck Tuesday, protesting outside the airline's offices in Johannesburg.

The South African Cabin Crew Association and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members are aggrieved over cuts in pay and benefits at the airline, which resumed flights less than three weeks ago. SAA was in a business rescue plan for 17 months following bankruptcy proceedings.

## **Bakery workers' wildcat strikes cause bread shortages in Johannesburg, South Africa**

Workers at the Tiger Brand bakery in Germiston, Johannesburg, South Africa began wildcat strikes October 4, causing bread shortages across the city.

Tiger Brand obtained an order from the Labour Court to declare the strike legally "unprotected" and called for a return to work. The employer-recognised Food and Allied Workers Union say they tried to contain the dispute, and that the strike was called by the Economic Freedom Fighters, a bourgeois populist political party.

## **Temporary casual workers in North West province, South Africa protest over state benefit cuts**

Protests by Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) casual workers employed by the Department of Public Works (DPW) in North West

province, South Africa shut down two local offices.

The workers had their child support grants cut by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). The DPW notified SASSA that the workers earn R7000 a month, when they actually earn between R1300 and R1500. The EPWP casual workers want their grants reinstated, and to be paid the R7000 they supposedly earn.

SASSA classify the EPWP workers as government employees, and say they are currently investigating allegations that some public servants are receiving grants to which they are not entitled.

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme introduced in 2003, in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector but without the salary or benefits afforded to direct employees.

### **Laundry workers in Johannesburg, South Africa strike for union recognition**

Workers at Spot On Dry Cleaners and Launderers, Johannesburg, South Africa began a strike Monday, to continue until the employer gives their union organisational rights in the workplace. The firm provides laundry and cleaning services to hospitals and hotels across the Gauteng province.

The 120 NUMSA members say the country's constitution permits workers to join a union of their choice without intervention from employers.

### **South African miners' union threatens strike over collective bargaining rights**

As part of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) day of strikes and demonstrations against job losses, pay freezes and budget cuts October 7, COSATU in Gauteng province called for a shutdown of the country's mining sector by the National Union of Mineworkers. The union wants mine owners to accede to centralised collective bargaining and other demands in a memorandum given to the provincial premier and the Minerals Council South Africa.

Mining contributes 9 percent to the South Africa's GDP and employs 500,000 workers.

### **Workers in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria on indefinite walkout over minimum wage**

Workers in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on October 12, to demand payment of the agreed minimum wage and 12 other demands. Other issues include lack of promotions, non-payment of gratuities, and failure to reinstate 33 workers wrongly deleted from the payroll.

The strike was called by the Cross Rivers branches of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress. NLC chairman Ben Okpepi said, "During the implementation of Minimum Wage in 2019, organised labour agreed with the state government on a certain percentage and after a year, the minimum wage would be implemented in full but up till now, that has not been done and even the agreed percentage is done haphazardly."

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

### **Nigerian researchers begin indefinite strike to oppose misuse of COVID funds**

Workers at 63 different research institutes in Nigeria began an indefinite strike on October 13, to oppose the lack of funding and misuse of funds for COVID research. Part of the funds were meant to fund research on locally made vaccines.

The action was called by the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions, Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Associated Institutions and the Academic Staff Union of Research Institutions (ASURI).

Secretary General of ASURI, Theophilus Ndubuaku said: "When COVID-19 started, organisations pooled resources in excess of N1 billion... nothing has been heard of that money [held by the government]."

### **Union calls off Nigerian tanker drivers' safety strike**

The union called off the tanker drivers' strike in Nigeria at the last minute. Petrol tanker drivers in Nigeria were about to walk out on October 11, when the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) called off the action for further talks with the government.

For years, tanker drivers have demanded safety valves are fitted to all tankers, an end to overloading of tankers and for roads to be improved to reduce risks of spillage and deaths. Countless agreements on these issues were made and then ignored by the government.

NUPENG's president and secretary general signed a statement claiming, "The suspension of our planned action is predicated on our belief that the understanding reached with the government today ... will be fulfilled to the letter[s]."

### **Health workers go on strike at hospitals in Embu, Kenya**

Health workers at hospitals in Embu, Kenya walked off the job on October 12, in protest at the bad conditions they are working in.

Workers described Embu Level Five Hospital as filthy, and without drugs to treat patients. The workers also complain about unsatisfactory food and drink for patients.

### **Local government workers in Kenyan capital to strike over pay and conditions**

Thousands of local government workers in Nairobi, Kenya will strike from Wednesday October 20 over non-implementation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement going back to 2013.

The Kenya County Government Workers Union has sat on workers' grievances for years, including lack of promotions, repeated delays in salary payments and failure to remit statutory deductions. At least 12,496

workers have been without medical cover since July.

The local authority failed to pay overtime, uniform allowances, and payments for retirees. Another grievance is the lack of personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of COVID-19.



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