Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 November 2021

Europe

Warning strikes continue in German public sector pay dispute

Public sector workers across Germany are continuing a campaign of warning strikes to support pay demands in the current collective bargaining round.

The unions have been negotiating a pay rise of five percent or 150 euros since early October.

Thousands of workers have joined warning strikes in hospitals, day-care centres, schools and other public services since the start of November.

On Monday, workers at the university hospital in Essen stopped work, along with workers across the states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland on Tuesday. Teachers were on strike in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on Wednesday. The *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported that over 4,000 workers in Hamburg joined the strikes, and there was a rally of 1,000 people. A further 4,000 workers joined the stoppages in Hanover and Bremen.

German Verdi union settles bus industry dispute with real-terms pay cut

On Tuesday, the United Services Union (Verdi) and the employers' association representing private bus companies in the German state of Baden-Württemberg announced the signing of a new collective agreement covering 9,000 bus drivers.

The details of the deal published on Verdi's website make clear that it involves a massive real-terms pay cut, and leaves intact the system of unpaid waiting times and long shifts. Only a 2.25 percent pay rise was offered between now and April 2023, effectively a 1.7 percent annual increase, while inflation is currently 4.5 percent. The agreement provides a "step-by-step" reduction in unpaid waiting time over five years, from a possible 19 percent of a shift being unpaid waiting in 2022, to 13 percent in 2026.

Verdi's own statement points out that a driver working a ten-hour shift in 2026 will still work 78 minutes for free, in violation of a law limiting unpaid breaks to one hour.

Hundreds of bus drivers took part in warning strikes. In a ballot in July, 98 percent voted to authorise an indefinite strike, but Verdi only ever called limited stoppages for "painful concessions on both sides", although the drivers have gained little for their pain.

French midwives continue strikes over pay and staffing

Midwives in France continued strikes this week over low pay and staffing levels, in a dispute involving national stoppages and demonstrations.

Midwives at a private hospital in Amiens, who have been on strike since October 22, were effectively locked out on November 18, after the ward was closed and patients were directed elsewhere. One striker told *France Bleu* they intended to continue their fight.

On Monday evening, midwives at another private hospital in Vannes resumed the strike they suspended last week, denouncing the "betrayal" of a promised pay improvement by management. Eighteen of the 24 midwives at the hospital, on strike since October 7, suspended their strike on November 17 after a new pay offer. They told *Le Télégramme* midwives in the private sector are paid 25 percent less than in the public sector.

The majority of healthcare unions signed an agreement on Monday to increase midwives' monthly salary in the public sector by 500 euros, but the National Organisation of Midwifery Unions (ONSS) pointed out that 183 euros was already allocated last year, and about 20 percent of the workforce are on contracts which exclude them from another 78 euros of the pay rise. An ONSS official told *Ouest France* that a planned strike will still go ahead this weekend, despite the deal signed by the other unions which does not change staffing levels, and midwives will protest in Paris on December 4.

Mass protests and one-day strike against layoffs at Spanish bank Unicaja

On Tuesday, thousands of workers across Spain joined protests against mass layoffs at Unicaja, one of Spain's largest banks, ahead of a one-day strike on Friday.

The bank announced it will make 1,513 job cuts and is negotiating redundancy terms with the unions. The unions have declared compulsory layoffs a "red line" and demanded voluntary redundancies and early retirements.

With these same demands for "voluntary" redundancies on slightly improved terms, the Spanish trade unions agreed this year to the destruction of 6,452 jobs at CaixaBank, 2,725 jobs at BBVA and 1,380 jobs at Banco Sabadell. In each case, any fight by workers in defence of jobs was strangled, as the unions called token one-day strikes—or shorter, like a 15-minute stoppage at Sabadell in October.

© World Socialist Web Site

Spanish unions call off planned meat workers' strikes and accept below-inflation pay offer

Last week, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union (UGT) called off a strike of 115,000 meat workers across Spain scheduled to begin this Thursday. The unions signed a new collective agreement for the sector.

El Periódico reported that while average inflation this year is five percent, the deal only provides a three percent pay rise for 2021, and even lower base levels for the next two years, although it provides a means for modifying the later figures if inflation remains high.

El Periódico pointed out that the meat industry did not cease operating throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased production levels by 5.1 percent during 2020. CCOO and UGT described the agreement as "successful," since it is higher than the average below-inflation pay rise of 1.4 percent forced on Spanish workers this year.

National one-day strike in the Portuguese postal service

On November 19, workers at the Portuguese postal service CTT joined a one-day strike over wages and conditions, and to defend the quality of the service.

The National Union of Postal and Telecommunications Workers (SNTCT) and Federation of Transport and Communications Unions (Fectrans) reported that over 60 percent of the service's 12,000 workers joined the strike, although the management claimed that the figure was as low as 12 percent.

According to *Lusa*, the SNTCT and Fectrans demanded pay rises, the hiring of permanent workers and renationalisation of the service. CTT was listed on the stock market in 2013, and in 2014 the state sold the last of its stake in the company.

Workers at social care institutions on pay strike in Lisbon, Portugal

Workers at Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa joined a 24-hour strike on November 18, walking out in day-care and social care institutions in the Portuguese capital.

The Public and Social Service Workers' Union in the South and Autonomous Regions (STFPSSRA) called its members to the one-day stoppage to demand pay increases after a two-year pay freeze, according to *Lusa*. The STFPSSRA also raised issues over staffing levels and career progression, which was frozen.

Care workers at Misericórdia institutions across Portugal held stoppages over recent months, over workload and pay. In October, around 2,600 workers joined a two-day strike in the Azores Islands, while the employers' association provocatively described the unions' demand for a three percent pay rise as "disconnected from reality."

Coal miners in Bosnia and Herzegovina begin new strike against pay cuts

Coal miners from pits across Bosnia and Herzegovina suspended all mining on Tuesday and announced at a protest in Sarajevo they would not resume work until their demands were met.

According to *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, the miners oppose new regulations on work performance that would reduce basic salary from around 425 euros to 285 euros and require working more. They also demanded the removal of the energy company's directors. The stoppage involves around 6,800 miners.

Miners working for the national energy company, Elektroprivreda, held numerous strikes and protests this year over working conditions in the mines, and over months-long delays in paying wages.

Italian taxi drivers strike against deregulation

Taxi drivers across Italy held a one-day strike on Wednesday, to oppose a new "competition bill" which further removes regulations on the sector.

Strikers denounced the regulation as a gift to multinational corporations, and warned the bill was ultimately aimed at "destroy[ing] the public service, 40,000 businesses and 40,000 families."

According to *ANSA*, around 3,000 taxi drivers, travelling from all over the country, joined a rally in Rome.

Emergency phone operators in Belgium walk out over understaffing

On Monday, workers operating the 112-emergency phone line in Antwerp, Belgium, walked out on a spontaneous strike over staffing. They were joined later that day by colleagues in the Ghent centre which covers all of East Flanders, *Nieuwsblad* reported.

Workers report staffing levels have fallen dangerously low, with callers made to wait in queues of up to seven people. The immediate trigger for the walkout was that they were also told they would cover the 1733 out-of-hours GP phone number, for medical non-emergency matters, adding to an already unbearable workload.

The workers have not had a pay rise in 20 years, and are forced to work with outdated equipment, including a computer system that frequently goes down completely. The strike, which will last a week, involves refusing to carry out administrative tasks, but emergency calls are still being answered.

Protests across England and Wales by midwives organised on social media highlight staff shortages

On Sunday, protests took place across England and Wales highlighting the dangerous shortage of midwives.

Protests, organised independently of the unions by midwives and midwife students social media groups, took place in cities and towns including Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Huddersfield, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield, Swansea and York. They were attended by hundreds of protestors carrying homemade posters, with slogans such as "Safe Staffing Saves Lives" and "We Need A Break." A rally in Parliament Square in London attracted 400.

According to a recent Royal College of Midwives survey, 60 percent of midwives are considering leaving the profession. For every 30 newly qualified midwives entering the profession, 29 leave.

© World Socialist Web Site

Academic at Goldsmiths University, London strike over redundancies

Academic staff at Goldsmiths University in the UK capital began 15 days of stoppages on Tuesday.

The University and College Union (UCU) members oppose plans by the Senior Management Team to push through 52 redundancies as part of a restructuring plan. It would involve losing 20 academic posts from the Creative Writing, English and History departments, and 32 professional service staff posts.

Strikes by staff at electrical appliance depot in Cardiff, Wales over pay

Around 100 staff at Panasonic's depot in Cardiff, Wales held a second day of strikes on Monday.

The GMB union members had their pay frozen last year. This year, the depot's management offered one percent, a cut in real terms. When the workforce turned it down, Panasonic withdrew the deal and put forward a pay freeze for a second year. The workers are demanding a five percent pay rise.

Further strikes are planned for November 29 and December 6.

London underground train drivers set to strike over conditions

Train drivers on the Central, Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria London Underground (LU) lines will hold a 24-hour walkout on Friday.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members oppose the way the overnight LU service is being reintroduced. Previously the overnight service was staffed by a dedicated workforce who only worked overnight and were able to adopt a lifestyle that fitted in with their work hours.

The reintroduced service will be staffed by workers on a rota basis rather than having a dedicated team, allowing LU to cut posts and costs.

A further 24-hour strike will take place on December 18. There will also be a series of eight-hour strikes on the Central and Victoria lines between November 27 and December 17.

Pallet workers in England to strike over pay

UK workers at Chep UK Limited, which produces and repairs pallets, are set to strike. The Unite union members at the company's depot in Trafford Park, Manchester voted by a 75 percent majority to strike, rejecting a two percent pay offer.

Strike dates were announced for December 3, 6, 10 and 13, and if there is no resolution a continuous stoppage will begin December 17. An overtime ban will also begin from December 3.

Chep produces and repairs pallets for prominent companies including food producer Heinz.

subhead]Logistics workers in Bellshill, Scotland plan stoppage

Around 90 workers employed by logistics firm DHL at Bellshill, in Scotland plan to walk out over pay and conditions.

The Unite union members, currently paid £12.50 an hour, rejected an initial offer of nine percent over two years. Following talks brokered by the government mediation service Acas, DHL made an improved offer but it was rejected by 88 percent of the 95 percent who took part.

Offshore service workers in Scotland set to strike over cuts to pay and conditions

Around 300 workers employed by Ponticelli UK Ltd and Semco Maritime Ltd, Scotland are to hold seven 24-hour strikes between December 6 and 20.

The Unite, GMB and RMT union members will also carry out an overtime ban. They service offshore oil platforms in the North Sea and are opposed to cuts in pay and conditions.

Education Welfare Officers in Northern Ireland plan strike over pay

Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) in Northern Ireland will begin 15 days of stoppages from November 29.

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) members are seeking pay parity with Health and Social Care Trust workers. They have carried out industrial action short of a strike since May. A shortage of EWOs led to a backlog of cases. In July, it was reported that around 800 cases remained unallocated.

London bus drivers ballot over shift schedules

London bus drivers working for Abellio are balloting over shift schedules. The ballot of Unite union members at Battersea, Beddington, Hayes, Southall, Twickenham and Walworth depots will close December 21.

A driver's schedule is set for a year at a time. Previously the union was involved when schedules were drawn up. However, the company centralised its scheduling system, precluding the input of union representatives.

First Bus drivers in Greater Manchester, UK to ballot over pay and conditions

Around 350 UK bus drivers at Oldham-based First Bus in Greater Manchester, England are to ballot over pay and conditions.

The Unite union members are seeking a substantial increase to their current rate of £12.40 an hour.

They are also raising concerns over current work patterns and shift rotas. The latest financial results for First Group, the second largest bus operator in the UK, showed a £224 million profit. The ballot began Thursday and runs until December 23.

© World Socialist Web Site

Unite calls off strike of bus drivers on Teesside, UK as drivers accept new pay offer

Around 200 drivers working for Stagecoach on Teesside, England ended their strike after accepting a new pay offer.

The drivers based at Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees took four days of stoppages, seeking improved pay. According to a Unite press release announcing the cancellation of the strike, the deal means that "workers will receive a minimum pay increase of 8.5 percent paid in several stages over the next 10 months.

Unite has negotiated below-inflation pay deals at most bus companies across the UK, refusing to mobilise drivers in a struggle for pay parity and an above inflation pay rise.

Fragrance factory workers in Haverhill, UK ballot over pay offer

Around 100 UK workers at the International Flavours and Fragrance (IFF) factory in Haverhill, Suffolk are balloting over a pay offer of 1.8 percent. The ballot of Unite members runs until December 11, the first in twenty-five years.

Ballot of workers at dumper truck manufacturer in Leamington Spa, UK over pay

Workers at dumper truck manufacturer Thwaites Ltd in Leamington Spa, England are balloting over pay. The Unite union members rejected a three percent pay offer. The ballot closes December 7.

Workers at Portadown, Northern Ireland, to ballot over back pay

Workers at Ulster Carpets Holdings Ltd, based in Portadown in Northern Ireland, are to ballot over back pay. Nick Coburn, the company Managing Director, refused to backdate a pay deal to May.

The loss of back pay cost the Unite members around £700 each. A Unite union press release of November 18 announced the ballot but did not give any proposed dates.

London animal charity workers ballot for stoppage over service cuts

Around 60 workers at the Mayhew animal charity in the UK capital are balloting over attacks to the service. The ballot for industrial action, following a consultative ballot, closes on December 10.

The animal charity workers face drastic cuts in veterinary nurses, animal welfare officers and reception staff along with cuts to hours for cleaners. They also face a pay and recruitment freeze. The workers demand union recognition.

The charity relies on volunteers to make up any shortfalls.

UK supermarket distribution staff at Tesco ballot over pay

Staff at Tesco supermarkets at nine distribution centres across the UK are balloting over pay. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) members overwhelmingly rejected Tesco's pay offer.

While Tesco and USDAW gave no details of the offer, a report in *The Scotsman* newspaper of November 19 said the increase was an additional 50p an hour.

The ballot runs until December 6. The distribution centres involved include those at Daventry, Goole, Peterborough and Southampton in England, Livingston in Scotland and Magor in Wales.

Around 3,500 drivers and warehouse staff at Tesco's depots in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Didcot near Oxford, Doncaster in South Yorkshire and Thurrock near London were also balloting over the pay offer. They are Unite members. The results are due this week.

UK teachers in school trust to ballot after "fire and rehire" threat over pensions

UK teachers working for the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) will ballot over the trust's proposal to withdraw from the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). The GDST runs 23 independent schools across England and Wales.

The National Education Union (NEU) members are taking part in an indicative ballot, closing on December 6. NEU members represent 65 percent of teachers across the GDST trust. The ballot is the first in the GDST's 149 history.

Ballot of dock workers at Sheerness, UK over job cuts

Dockers working for GB Terminals at Sheerness in Kent, England are balloting for strike action over the threat of job cuts.

The Unite union members are responsible for unloading VW cars off ferries arriving at the terminal. GB Terminals seeks to cut around 50 jobs and reduce overtime rates. The ballot, begun Thursday, closes December 9.

Biomedical scientists at Lancashire hospital trust in England ballot for third tranche of strikes over pay

Around 20 biomedical scientists at the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust in Burnley and Blackburn, England are balloting for further walkouts. The ballot closes November 30.

The long-running dispute is over the hospital trust reneging on a 2019 agreement to upgrade the pay. The biomedics are seeking a lump sum payment to cover the loss of pay. They are owed up to £8,000. The scientists are responsible for analysing patient blood samples.

The Unite members carried out a series of strikes between May 31 and

© World Socialist Web Site

July 28, and again between August 20 and November 11.

Glasgow council workers to ballot over pay

Two ballots of Glasgow council workers in Scotland will take place in December and January. In December, GMB members working in cleansing and refuse collection will ballot. Those working in education and social care will ballot in January.

At the beginning of November, refuse and cleansing workers held an eight-day strike over pay, coinciding with the COP26 climate change summit taking place in Glasgow.

GMB union calls off strike of Sheffield, UK refuse workers over pay

The GMB union cancelled an indefinite strike by around UK 100 refuse collection workers in Sheffield employed by outsource company, Veolia due to begin November 22.

The union agreed a two-year pay deal. Workers will get a three percent pay rise in year one backdated to May. They will also get a £250 one-off payment and a 3.5 percent pay rise in the second year.

The workers held a four-hour strike on November 8 which was postponed from November 1. A proposed strike due to take place on November 15 was suspended.

Unite union ends strike of scaffolders at Billingham, UK chemical plant over pay

The Unite union called off a strike of around 35 scaffolders, insulators and painters who are employed by Altrad to work at height at the Mitsubishi chemicals' plant on Teesside, England.

Workers voted unanimously to strike. They wanted their pay brought in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering and Construction Industry (NAECI) rates of £17.45 an hour. Their basic pay was £12.06 an hour. They took part in a series of walkouts beginning November 4, and due to last until December 4.

Unite accepted a new offer, including a one-off £250 payment on top of 2.5 percent pay rise for this year backdated to June. From January 2022, scaffolders will get a rise of between 6.5 and 7.5 percent, with painters and insulators getting five percent. From January 2023, pay will rise by 2.5 percent.

GMB union calls off planned strike by tram drivers in Nottingham, UK over pay

The GMB union called off a strike by tram drivers working for the Nottingham Express Transit (NET) in England.

The strike planned for November 23 was called off following a new pay offer the union will put to the drivers. The GMB press release announcing cancellation of the strike gave no details of the offer.

The GMB union members have already rejected two pay offers from NET.

Middle East

Protests across Tunisia over axing of job creation measures

Tuesday saw protests by unemployed university graduates across Tunisia, after President Kais Saied revoked the law providing for job creation.

Law 38 allowed for the creation of job schemes in the public sector, offered to the long-term unemployed including graduates. Saied is now saying it is up to the private sector to create jobs.

According to government statistics, 29,000 over-35s were unemployed for 10 years or more.

Student protests in Iraqi Kurdistan over cuts to student allowances

Students in the Sulaimani region of Kurdistan in Iraq held daily protests this week, demanding the reinstatement of student allowances.

On Wednesday, the protestors were attacked by security forces who tried to disperse them using tear gas. On Tuesday, students in Ebril protested outside the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research demanding reinstatement of the allowance. Similar protests by students also took place in the governorates of Garmian, Halabja, Raparin and Soran over the issue.

Protests by non-contract public service workers in Kurdistan over pay parity with permanent workers

Last week, non-contract public service workers in Kalar and Qaladze in Kurdistan held protests.

They were demanding to be paid the same pay and benefits as their permanent colleagues. Strikes and protests over the issue have taken place since early October.

Mass protests over dried-up riverbed in Iran

Mass protests have taken place since November 8, on the dried-up bed of the Zayandeh Rood River in Isfahan in central Iran. Organisers claim that around half a million protested on Saturday.

While Iran has suffered droughts over the last few years, the protestors accuse the Iranian government of exacerbating the situation by river diversions for irrigation upstream.

Africa

Thousands of dairy industry workers across South Africa start indefinite strike over pay and jobs

© World Socialist Web Site

An estimated 2,000 South African workers employed by the Clover food and beverage group went on indefinite strike Monday, in protest over pay cuts, redundancies and longer working hours.

The General Industrial Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA) and the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) members stopped work at factories in Clayville, Durban, Gqeberha, Polokwane and Cape Town. Clover wants to save R300 million by retrenching 1,000 workers and introducing 12-hour days, worked over four days in every six, without overtime pay.

After mediation, they offered workers a 4.5 percent rise but also gave a Labour Relations Act restructuring notice that talks of a 20 percent reduction in wages to avoid some of the redundancies. The firm intends to increase workloads by reducing the number of delivery assistants from two per truck to one.

Several inland factories were threatened with closure and, according to GIWUSA, the transfer of operations to port areas for the distribution of imported goods from Israel, location of Clover's owners, the Central Bottling Company. Meanwhile, FAWU are appealing to the government to take over Clover and turn it into a state-owned enterprise.

South African Massmart shop workers continue indefinite strike for pay and jobs

Thousands of employees at 229 stores of Walmart-owned Massmart, the largest general merchandise, liquor and DIY retailer and wholesaler of basic foods in South Africa, continued their indefinite strike this week. They are demanding wage increases, reductions in working hours, an end to redundancies and improved treatment in the workplace.

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) members are striking for a 10 percent pay increase at Massmart's Builders division, reinstatement for staff retrenched at Game stores and improved allowances for Makro store employees.

They say Massmart tried to demoralise them by sending text messages using scare tactics belittling the effects of the strike so far, and encouraging a return to work to avoid further wage losses. One striking single mother said, "They are telling us there are a certain number of people who are working inside. It doesn't matter to us because we are a majority, and we are wanting what we believe is right."

SACCAWU ask that workers at other retailers join the stoppages and consumers boycott Massmart-owned stores.

African National Congress staff demonstrate outside National Executive Committee meeting over pay in Pretoria, South Africa

African National Congress (ANC) staff picketed a meeting outside the St. George's Hotel, Pretoria, South Africa Sunday, over late salary payments for the last three months and failure to make medical aid and provident fund contributions.

The special meeting of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) discussed coalition talks after the discredited ruling party's poor results in the recent local elections.

The staff were joined by several NEC members, also employed at ANC headquarters in Johannesburg.

The employees' spokesperson pointed out the recent exposure of the ANC leadership's use of investment withdrawals to fund the local election campaign, saying the money should have been used to pay staff wage arrears.

Nigerian oil workers ready to strike over salaries and benefits

Nigerian oil and gas workers plan to walk out at the end of November over salaries and benefits. The Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG) issued a two-week strike notice on November 15. The companies involved include oil giants Chevron and Italian company Eni.

The union has suppressed action, in some cases for years. Workers made redundant by Chevron in 2012 were not given compensation. The state oil company subsidiary NPDC owes its workers' salaries and allowances for at least eight to 10 months. NUPENG repeatedly declares strikes only to agree a sell-out deal at the last minute.

Nigeria is Africa's biggest producer of oil and gas, which account for 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings.

Nigerian railworkers stoppage over low pay

Nigerian railworkers went on "warning strike" for three days on November 18, to oppose low pay and lack of promotion. Many issues go back years.

The Nigerian Union of Railway Workers, which uses warning strikes to delay all-out strikes, said it would call an indefinite walkout unless the government changed its stance.

School teachers in Nigeria's Federal Capital territory walk out over pay arrears and promotions

Teachers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria began a five-day on November 18, against non-payment of arrears and lack of promotions.

This was in spite of a promise by the FCT National Union of Teachers (NUT) chairman to the education minister that it would finish early. The NUT said it will call an indefinite strike unless the demands are met.

Nigerian air traffic controllers delay flights for two days over death at work

Nigerian air traffic controllers held a two-day action, slowing down flights by up to 20 minutes, starting on November 23. This followed the death of Anniekan Effiong on November 22, in the early hours of the morning while on duty at Abuja tower. The action exempted international flights.

The union said Effiong's death was bound up with neglect of the workforce, blaming the managers without addressing their own role as their junior partners. There were no reports of the union announcing any detailed investigation of how Effiong's death came about, nor of them listing demands to prevent a recurrence.

© World Socialist Web Site

Retired local government workers in Osun State, Nigeria protest non-payment

Retirees from local government in Osun State, Nigeria descended on the state government secretariat in state capital Osogbo, demanding immediate payment of money owed to them. They carried placards with slogans such as “Gov. Oyetola, Stop this lying and fake promises. Pay us our money,” and “We are dying of hunger.”

One of those protesting, Adebayo Micheal, said Governor Oyetola refused to pay their (contributory) pensions and 29 months of half-salary arrears from 2016 onwards. “Hunger forced us to the street to embark on protest.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site