

Strike wave of airport and airline workers continues across Europe; UK Post Office staff to strike over pay as Royal Mail postal workers ballot for action and managers vote to strike over job cuts; Danish construction workers in wildcat strike over pay equality for Polish migrant workers; South African power station workers in wildcat strikes over pay and conditions

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.

Massive strike wave continues among airport and airline workers across Europe

Workers in airlines and airports across Europe, who suffered job losses and cuts to terms and conditions during the COVID pandemic and are now overwhelmed by high passenger numbers and understaffing, continue a widespread fightback.

In some cases, this battle is fought in direct opposition to the unions. In all cases the unions are working to suppress what strikes do break out and prevent the growth of a movement to regain the concessions the unions made to “save” airlines during the pandemic.

Spanish cabin crew at Ryanair will walk out for a three-day strike this Friday. This follows three days’ action last week, when Ryanair workers from France, Belgium, Italy and Portugal also stopped work. Workers have faced a strikebreaking campaign from Ryanair and the PSOE-Podemos government, which imposed minimum service levels of up to 82 percent, only allowing the strike to go ahead if this level of service was guaranteed.

The unions report that Ryanair in Spain has gone further, issuing notices that 100 percent of the planned schedule should go ahead. On the first day of last week’s strike, Ryanair summoned almost twice as many staff as usual to stand by in the airports.

The union response to this strikebreaking has been to appeal to the courts, without calling on members to defy orders it describes as “illegal.” Any court ruling could take years. Only in December 2021 did the National Court rule that strikebreaking measures by the government and Ryanair during a September 2019 pilots’ strike were illegal.

Cabin crew also held strikes in national airlines Air France, Transavia and Brussels Airlines last week, and will begin the first of nine days of

strikes at EasyJet in Spain on Friday. Belgian unions said Brussels Airlines was undermining the right to strike, as it sent many crews on long-haul flights the day before the strike, so they would be stranded when they stopped work.

Spanish EasyJet workers will again be isolated, as a dispute between German workers and the company was shut down by the United Services Union (Verdi) with a two-year below-inflation pay deal. A pilots’ strike at Scandinavian airline SAS, due to begin Wednesday, was postponed to allow negotiations to run into the weekend. Two hundred mechanics at SAS in Denmark also issued a notice that they would begin a sympathy strike next week, to prevent the company from operating flights with scab crews.

Aircraft technicians in Norway were forced back to work after 10 days on strike on Tuesday, when the Arbeiderpartiet (Labour Party) minister of labour cited a “danger to life and health” deliberately created by the employers’ association, and sent the employers and Norwegian Aircraft Technicians’ Organisation (NFO) to compulsory arbitration.

The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) announced a lockout last week, rejecting requests by the Norwegian Aircraft Technicians’ Organisation (NFO) union to exempt medical services from the lockout. The arbitration board is likely to impose a settlement according to the “Norwegian model,” in which pay rises cannot exceed those granted to export industries. This would be a 3.7 percent pay rise for this year, while inflation is already at 5.7 percent.

At Schiphol airport in the Netherlands, where a wildcat strike in April cancelled flights across Europe, baggage handlers employed by KLM Ground Services have threatened a new walkout if a satisfactory new collective agreement is not signed by this Friday. The unions said they would not call a strike, but *Noordhollands Dagblad* quotes one worker saying, “We also did the previous work stoppage without a union and we are prepared to do it again.”

Last Friday, flights were affected at Lille airport in France by a stoppage of firefighters, and air traffic controllers walked out for 48 hours from last Saturday in Marseille. More workers plan to strike at Marseille airport between July 1 and July 4, according to *BFMTV*, and 10 percent of flights

at Roissy airport near Paris were cancelled on Thursday by a strike over pay. In Germany, technicians who maintain the runways and baggage-handling systems will join a 24-hour warning strike at Hamburg airport on Friday called by Verdi over pay.

Turkish family doctors hold two-day strike against working conditions, staffing levels and legal penalties

Family doctors throughout Turkey walked out for two days from today, the anniversary of the implementation of the Family Medicine Payment and Contract Regulation. The president of the Family Medicine Employees Union (AHESEN) told *BirGün* that the regulation contained “penalties that do not comply with reason, logic, science or the law. For example, if you fill a notebook incorrectly, you can go to prison. ... if you make a statement to the press, you will receive 50 penalty points” and can be fired on reaching 150 penalty points.

AHESEN predicted that 55,000 doctors would join the strike, and demanded the reversal of the regulation, as well as improvements to staffing levels and pay, and measures to protect doctors from assault.

Metalworkers' strikes continue in Spain

Spanish metalworkers continue a series of strikes this week over pay and conditions. Following a one-day stoppage last week by around 44,000 metal workers in the Basque Country, a further two-day walkout is planned from today. Unions say the employers' association has not responded to any of their 17 demands.

The series of metalworkers' strikes in the province of A Coruña ended on Tuesday, after the employers' association and unions accepted a deal proposed by the national mediator. An officer from the Galician Union Confederation (CIG) claimed that “purchasing power for the entire sector is maintained” for the period between 2020 and 2025. The total pay increase is 15 percent across five years while annual inflation is currently 10.2 percent, although there are provisions to adjust the pay deal for inflation, according to *Europa Press*. Metalworkers in A Coruña held a total of seven days' strikes during the negotiations.

Auto workers strike at Mercedes in Vitoria, Spain against flexible working and pay cuts

Thousands of auto workers in Vitoria, the capital of the Basque Country in Spain, have joined strikes against the imposition of a 1.2 billion euro “investment plan” by Mercedes-Benz which is conditioned on pay cuts and an increase in “flexible working.”

The Workers Commissions (CCOO) union told *Radio Euskadi* that workers would be notified of shifts only two days in advance, and would not be told in advance if they had the weekend off. The union did not oppose the changes in principle, offering to consider “each and every one of the issues” raised by the company, but “with conditions.”

Europa Press reported that 4,700 workers joined the first day of the strike, which took place last week, called by the CCOO and General Workers' Union (UGT) as well as three Basque nationalist unions. The ELA, LAB and ESK unions have struck a more radical pose in claiming to

reject all of the company's demands. The ELA, LAB and ESK had planned a four-day strike from Monday, but called off the first two days to more closely align with the CCOO and UGT's one-day stoppage on Thursday. Another walkout is planned for July 6.

Teachers in Berlin, Germany hold warning strike for smaller classes

On Wednesday, 2,500 members of the Education and Science Workers' Union (GEW), teachers and other school workers in Berlin, joined a 24-hour warning strike and a rally in the German capital to demand a new collective agreement which includes smaller class sizes. The GEW pointed to a shortage of teachers as the profession becomes less attractive, and called for the Berlin Senate to negotiate.

Green Party's finance senator Daniel Wesener refused to negotiate over class sizes, claiming that Berlin could not do so without the approval of other states.

FedEx workers in Hesse, Germany on indefinite strike against termination of collective agreement

Five hundred workers at FedEx in the Germany state of Hesse are on an indefinite strike, which began last week following several shorter stoppages against the company's decision to terminate the collective agreement and impose a new one, including lower salaries. According to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, FedEx formerly had a collective agreement between itself and Verdi, but cancelled that when it joined the Transport Industry Association and imposed the inferior sectoral agreement.

One works council member told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that the change could cost workers between a few hundred and 1,500 euros per month.

Wildcat strike of construction workers in Denmark

Around 300 construction workers, Polish and Danish, walked out on a wildcat strike and picketed a construction site on the Danish island of Lolland on Tuesday, demanding that Polish migrant workers be paid the same as Danes.

The Fehmarn Link Contractors (FLC) consortium, set up to build the 17 km undersea tunnel between Lolland and Germany, reportedly pays Polish employees 140 Danish kroner (18.82 euros) as well as room and board. Danish employees are paid 185 kroner (24.87 euros). According to *TV2 Øst*, this is below the average wage of 191.25 kroner.

Workers also protested that a pay increase agreed in May has not yet been applied. The company said the strike was “a big surprise to us,” as the unions representing Polish workers had already agreed to unequal pay deals. The Danish 3F union said, “We have encouraged them to resume work, but they seem very steely, and it is difficult to imagine that they will return to work if there is no breakthrough in the negotiations.” The company has sought a judgement from the Labour Court, which can impose fines for every hour on strike. The striking workers say they will not resume work until they have received a 25 kroner pay rise.

Strike of machinery workers in Northern Ireland now in third month as company bypasses union with offer

Workers at the US-based heavy construction machinery manufacturer Caterpillar in Northern Ireland are in their third month of strike action. On June 14, the Unite union announced a further eight weeks of strikes following the previous eight weeks' action.

Workers have rejected an unacceptable pay offer predicated on compulsory overtime. According to Unite, Caterpillar was offering bonuses to office workers from other locations to cross picket lines and continue production. The union reported that Caterpillar booked rooms at the five-star Culloden Resort Hotel and Spa to accommodate the strikebreakers. Rooms can cost up to £850 a night.

On Monday, Caterpillar circumvented Unite, writing directly to workers with a take-it-or-leave-it offer. According to BBC News, the offer is a nine percent rise from April 1 this year, plus a one-off lump sum comprising 2.6 percent of wages earned from April 1, 2021 to April 2022. The offer is tied to a compulsory overtime condition.

Caterpillar has sites at Springvale Business Park in Belfast and at Larne. It recorded surging profits last year after COVID-19 measures were abandoned, with worldwide cash reserves of around £7 billion. It paid out £1.75 billion to shareholders. Its highest paid director was paid £900,000.

Strike by lecturers at Richmond upon Thames College, London against fire and rehire

Staff at Richmond upon Thames College in the UK capital struck Tuesday, which was an open day for prospective students and their parents. Staff also held a strike on June 21, another open day.

The action is over plans to sack every tutor at the college and force them to reapply for their jobs on inferior terms and conditions, including the loss of ten paid holidays.

The 127 University and College Union (UCU) members walked out for five days from May 23. The college pays them on average £26,000, lower than other colleges and schools in London. The annual pay gap between college lecturers and teachers averages £9,000.

Further action is planned to consist of 14 days of stoppages between August 22 and September 9. The action will cover enrolment, induction and the first week of teaching. Earlier in the month, workers voted 97 percent in an 88 percent turnout to strike.

The UCU offered to suspend action if management withdraws dismissal notices against those who refuse to sign the new contract. The UCU leadership recently ended strikes in opposition to university employers' attacks on lecturers' pay, pensions and conditions in Higher Education.

Further walkout by rail maintenance workers in Doncaster, UK over fire and rehire threat

Around 200 rail maintenance workers employed by US-owned Wabtec Corporation at its Doncaster depot began a second round of stoppages Monday, due to last until Sunday. It follows a four-day stoppage begun June 10.

The members of the Unite and RMT unions are opposed to Wabtec's plans to impose new contracts which would reduce breaks and increase working hours for no extra pay. The company threatens to use fire and

rehire to impose the changes.

Some workers have been pressured into signing up to the new contracts, coerced by management at one-to-one meetings. This was facilitated by the unions' delaying industrial action.

Fifty hospital ancillary workers in northwest England walk out seeking pay parity

Around 50 workers employed by outsourcing firm OCS, working as caterers, cleaners and porters for Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation, began a three-day strike Wednesday.

The Unison members want to be paid extra for working nights, weekends and bank holidays in line with staff employed directly by the National Health Service. They also want to be paid occupational sick pay in line with NHS colleagues. They currently only receive statutory sick pay of £100, meaning many workers cannot afford to take time off sick and keep working while ill.

The OCS workers provide ancillary services to hospitals and mental health units and clinics in Blackburn, Blackpool, Ormskirk and Preston.

Traffic wardens in Wandsworth, London to hold further strike over pay

Traffic wardens in the London borough of Wandsworth are to hold a third week of stoppages from July 4 to July 8.

The GMB union members are employed by outsourcer NSL Parking Enforcement. They are seeking an improved pay offer and want pay parity with traffic wardens in neighbouring boroughs.

UK: Further strike planned by Royal Mail Crown Offices workers

Following walkouts by UK Post Office staff in May and June, Post Office workers at the UK's 114 Crown Offices (those directly operated by the Post Office) are set to stage another one-day stoppage on July 11. They had previously held one-day stoppages on May 3 and June 4.

The May 3 strike also involved clerical, administration and call centre workers, who then separately held a one-day strike June 6. These staff will not be involved in the July 11 stoppage. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) said they "are standing by and awaiting the announcement of strike action involving them."

The CWU members voted for strike action in March by a majority of 97 percent, against a miserly two percent rise from April 2022 plus a £250 lump sum. This followed a pay freeze imposed last year.

The CWU paused further action after the June 6 strike to allow for talks, but the Post Office only upped its offer by a half a percent.

Ballot of UK postal workers over pay claim gets underway

This week, strike ballots were sent out to 115,000 UK postal workers employed by Royal Mail. The CWU members face having a two percent

pay increase imposed, when RPI inflation is 11.7 percent and set to rise. Walkouts by postal workers would see one of the biggest bouts of industrial action in Britain. The result of the ballot is expected July 19.

UK Royal Mail managers to walk out over job cuts

Around 2,400 Royal Mail managers across 1,000 workplaces have voted by an over 85 percent majority to strike.

The Unite union members oppose Royal Mail's plans to cut over 500 frontline delivery managers, on top of the previous loss of 450 posts.

The threatened job cuts come as a Unite survey shows a majority of managers work unpaid overtime and do not take sanctioned breaks in efforts to keep up with work demands. Strike dates will be announced later this week.

Refuse collectors in south London set to strike over pay and conditions

Around 100 refuse collection workers employed by Countrystyle Recycling to collect refuse for Bexley borough council in south London are to begin a two-week strike on July 12.

The Unite union members have rejected the company's below-inflation pay deal. In addition, Countrystyle wants to abolish a "job and finish" clause in their contracts, requiring workers to remain in depot even when they have finished their rounds.

Strike of care workers in Bristol, UK over "fire and rehire"

Over 100 workers at Bristol-based care company St Monica Trust held a one-day stoppage Wednesday, over proposed cuts to pay and sick pay.

The Unison union members who work as care workers, registered nurses and residential home staff are scheduled to take further action on July 2, 5, 10, and 11. Under the Trust's proposals senior care workers will see weekend pay rates cut by 21 percent. Other staff will see a 10 percent cut, with workers losing around £400 a month.

The trust threatened to use fire and rehire tactics to enforce the changes.

Israeli bus drivers walk out over pay and staff shortages

Bus drivers in Israel held a three-hour stoppage from 6 a.m. on Sunday, the start of the working week.

Members of the Organisation of Israeli Bus Drivers at several bus companies, including Afikim, Extra and Tnufah, took part in the action. Areas affected included Ashdod, Jerusalem and Tikva, as well as parts of the West Bank and Ben Gurion International Airport link. The drivers were protesting the Transport Minister's refusal to meet with them.

Drivers say they have to work double shifts to earn a decent wage, and a shortage of 5,000 drivers increases the pressure. They are also protesting the bus companies' refusal to address passenger attacks on drivers. The nationwide strike marked an escalation of action from their previous

smaller-scale stoppages.

Israeli teachers return to normal working after a week of intermittent strikes over pay

Israeli teachers returned to normal working on Monday, after intermittent stoppages the previous week over pay.

They agreed to return to normal working after the Teachers' Union head, Yaffa Ben-David, met with Finance Ministry officials, who agreed to open negotiations on pay. The Ministry made a "concrete offer" to increase pay, but Ben-David admitted that "significant" disagreements remained.

Strike by Israeli pharmacy workers to oppose attacks by patients

Pharmacists working for the Israeli Clalit Health Organisation held a one-day strike Sunday.

The Pharmacists' Union members were protesting attacks on them by patients. After the latest attack on Thursday in Pelah Tikva, a pharmacy manager had to be taken to hospital and her hand put in plaster.

Strikes by Iranian petrochemical workers over pay

Last week, scaffolding workers in Iranian oil, gas and petrochemical plants held two days of strikes. Called by the Organising Council of Oil Contract Workers, they were pushing for a wage increase with a minimum wage of \$5,900 a month and a more structured working week.

They demand a 20-day working period followed by 10 days off each month. The strike affected 13 companies across nine major petrochemical entities.

Palestinian workers arrested for demanding labour rights

On June 22, Israeli Occupation Forces arrested 50 Palestinians in the Salfit area in the West Bank. It was reported they were arrested for demanding labour rights.

Those detained were aged between 20 and 40, and work within the Green Line. Three were later released.

Call for second Tunisian nationwide strike

On Monday, the Tunisian General Labour Union announced its intention to hold a second nationwide strike of public sector workers.

It is to protest the austerity measures being introduced by the Tunisian government as it seeks International Monetary Fund loans to overcome its financial crisis. The measures would include cutting public sector wages, subsidies cuts and privatisation of public enterprises.

Contract miners' strike at South African platinum mines called off by union

South African miners at Impala Platinum (Implats) in North West province who walked out on indefinite strike over pay parity on June 20 are set to return to work.

The National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), representing 4,000 miners, called off their strike after two Implats contractors obtained a court injunction against it and talks resumed with the third contractor.

The contracted workers are paid a fraction of the pay of permanent employees who do the same job. A rock drill operator earns a minimum R17,000 month plus benefits, while a contract worker earns R5,000 top, without benefits.

Meanwhile, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union has made a five-year deal for its Implats members, rumoured to be in line with inflation, which is currently at 6.5 percent.

A NUMSA shop steward at Implats' Rustenburg mine was murdered at his home by two unknown gunmen on June 24. This follows a similar killing of an Implats shop steward last year.

South African energy workers in wildcat strikes over pay and conditions

Power station workers at Eskom, South Africa's state-owned utility company, are taking unprotected wildcat strike action in Mpumalanga province after talks between unions and the employer collapsed last week. The energy supplier has been forced to use controlled blackouts to manage the subsequent power shortages.

NUMSA and the National Union of Mineworkers, representing most of Eskom's 42,000 workers, and the Solidarity union have distanced themselves from the strike after Eskom obtained an injunction on June 24 against any disruptions, citing it as an essential service. Police have been used to enforce the interdiction at eight different power stations in Mpumalanga province.

Despite this, hundreds of workers are continuing their industrial action for a 10 percent pay rise and improved allowances, while Eskom offer one percent.

South African nurses in Eastern Cape continue pickets over allowances

Protests for a R1,200 rural living allowance by up to 3,000 nurses and nursing assistants in Eastern Cape, South Africa continued this week. About 500 nurses stopped work at six hospitals in the Raymond Mhlaba municipality on June 27, and others picketed outside the Fort Beaufort provincial hospital.

On June 15, hundreds of nurses from hospitals and clinics in the rural areas of Eastern Cape picketed the provincial Department of Health in East London.

The provincial health department says the protesting nurses cannot benefit from the allowance as they are not categorised as professionals. One nurse said, "We need the rural allowance; the roads are impassable

and repairs for our cars hit our pockets hard."

Zimbabwe nurses told to return to work without any improvement to pay or conditions

Nurses in Zimbabwe have been told to return to work without any change in the their pay or conditions. The health associations that called the strike said that this was based on the "hope" that "the employer will immediately table a meaningful offer."

A statement released by the Health Apex board on Friday June 24 claimed that "[t]he leaders of the Health associations after considering the plight of the public, have resolved to temporarily adjourn the industrial action and request the healthcare workers to resume service."

Previously, nurses stated that there were no medical supplies in the hospitals and returning to work would not resolve the crisis facing the health service.

Only two days before the call for a return to work, police prevented a petition being delivered to the employers. Health Apex Council leader Tapiwanashe Kusotera insisted then that nurses would not go back to work without an improved offer.

Government promises of inflation-adjusted wages for the state sector have been honoured only for military officers.

Sudanese health workers and teachers continue strike amid wave of uproar

Thousands of health workers, teachers and others in Sudan are maintaining strikes to demand improvements in wages or the delivery of promises on the 2022 salary structure. Many other protests are being held against police violence and government policies.

In West Kordofan on June 22, health workers employed by the Ministry of Health and Social Development began a four-day strike to demand implementation of a salary structure promised for January. An emergency service is still operating and care is still being provided to hospital patients.

Teachers in Kassala and other areas are also involved in strikes against low salaries.

Ogun State workers in Nigeria on indefinite strike over unpaid money

Workers employed by the Ogun State government began an indefinite strike on June 27 against the failure to pay into their pensions for over 13 years. They are also protesting eight years' worth of unpaid leave allowances, and unpaid salaries and pensions.

The list of grievances with the state government can also be taken as a list of failures by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), which has allowed the state government to get away with neglecting its workers for so many years.

Chairman of the NLC Ogun State chapter, Emmanuel Bankole, said that state employees would be retiring into penury and uncertainty, but could only cite their pleas and letters sent to the government in response. "We wrote previously giving the government [a] two-week ultimatum but no response. We wrote another letter giving seven days, no response still.

Seventh day shall be by Monday.”

On the government cuts, Bankole said “some of those pensioners take as low as N5,000 [\$12] as pension; you can imagine in that old age, even their drugs they buy monthly, some of those drugs are more than N5,000.”



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