

Strikes by airport and airline workers continue across Europe; UK Post Office staff to strike over pay as Royal Mail managers strike over job cuts; unions call off Danish construction workers' wildcat strike for pay equality with Polish migrant workers; Jordanian port workers strike over safety after fatal gas leak

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.

National strike by Portuguese healthcare workers

Last Friday July 1, healthcare workers in Portugal joined a one-day national strike called by the National Federation of Workers' Unions in Public and Social Services (FNSTFPS) and other unions over career and pay development, and collective bargaining. The unions reported that more than 70 percent of workers eligible to join the strike—mainly technicians, as doctors and nurses were not included in the strike call—stopped work in mainland Portugal and the Azores. Health workers in Madeira joined a strike the day before, as July 1 was a public holiday.

The unions have postponed further strike calls until after a meeting with the government on July 27.

Further warning strikes at university hospitals in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Healthcare workers at six university hospitals in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia will walk out on another 24-hour warning strike this Thursday, in a months-long dispute over low staffing levels. The United Services Union (Verdi) is calling for a “relief collective agreement.” Modelled on one reached in Berlin, this would not eliminate understaffing but regulate it through “relief” measures such as additional days off for workers in understaffed hospitals.

In negotiations with Verdi, the employers have offered additional days off to workers if the hospital as a whole is understaffed. According to *dpa*, Verdi is calling for this to be extended to individual departments within the hospital.

48-hour stoppage by Italian taxi drivers against deregulation

Taxi drivers throughout Italy stopped work for 48 hours from Tuesday, opposing a new law which would open up the market to competition, including further access to multinational companies such as Uber. According to *ANSA*, thousands of taxi drivers participated in a protest in Rome on Tuesday, bringing traffic to a standstill.

National rail strike in France

Rail workers in the French national network SNCF walked out Wednesday in a nationwide strike over pay. The state-owned company offered a pay rise of between 2.2 and 3.7 percent, less than half the current inflation rate of 6.5 percent. French media reported a large participation in the strike, cancelling services across the country.

Strikes continue at French airports

Workers in French airports continue a wave of strikes against the high workloads they are experiencing due to job cuts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and increased passenger numbers. They are also demanding pay rises to compensate for rising inflation.

At Charles de Gaulle Airport in Roissy near Paris, workers begin a new three-day walkout on Friday, called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) to demand a six percent pay increase for all workers, and an additional rise for the lowest paid. This follows another strike at Roissy last weekend, and another five-day stoppage is planned for next week. *Aéroports de Paris*, which runs the airport, has offered a mere four percent pay rise. In June, inflation reached 6.5 percent.

Strikers at Roissy told *AP* passenger numbers had reached 95 percent of pre-pandemic levels, but there were 20,000 fewer employees at the

airport.

Last week, security guards at Lyon St Exupéry airport also stopped work as part of the same national strike, according to *Lyon Mag*. This Tuesday, security guards at Beauvais airport walked out over pay and conditions at the company Sécurité Air, the *Courrier Picard* reported.

Strike extended at Ryanair in Spain

Cabin crew at Ryanair in Spain will strike for 12 more days in July in a dispute over pay and working conditions, which have deteriorated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The USO and SICTPLA members will walk out July 12-15, 18-21 and 25-28. Around 2,000 Ryanair workers participated in the strikes in June. EasyJet crew also stopped work for three days from July 1, and will walk out again Friday July 15.

The PSOE-Podemos government imposed high minimum service requirements of up to 82 percent on the strike, effectively forcing most Ryanair workers to cross picket lines. The unions have accused Ryanair of going even further and attempting to run 100 percent of its services, making an appeal to the courts for an injunction which may take years before a ruling, and in the meantime abiding by the government and company's strike-breaking.

Pilots' strike begins at Scandinavian airline SAS, mechanics hold sympathy strike

On Monday, around 900 pilots from Denmark, Norway and Sweden at Scandinavian airline SAS walked out on strike while the unions are demanding a new collective agreement. SAS is planning further attacks on working conditions. The day after the strike began SAS announced it was seeking Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the United States, a cynical move which led much of the media to suggest the airline provoked the strike to accelerate its restructuring plans.

Two hundred mechanics in Denmark began a sympathy strike on Tuesday in support of the pilots, refusing to service SAS aircraft until a collective agreement is reached. In an attempt to undermine the strike, SAS set up staffing agencies for its subsidiaries SAS Connect and SAS Link, and is setting up another agency during the strike, *Ritzau* reported.

The unions have not opposed cuts to pay and conditions in principle, with *Reuters* reporting this week that they have "said they would consider pay cuts" and have "offered concessions" in negotiations before the strike.

Aircraft refuelling workers at Heathrow airport, London announce strikes in opposition to pay freeze

Workers employed by Aviation Fuel Services (AFS) Ltd at Heathrow airport are to mount a 72-hour stoppage from 5am on July 21.

The Unite union members are protesting a three-year pay freeze which has left them 15.5 percent worse off in real terms. AFS is a joint venture operation whose partners include BP and Total Energies. It is responsible for refuelling over 70 airlines using Heathrow, including American Airlines, KLM and Virgin Atlantic.

Renault workers in France strike against cuts to pay

On Tuesday, between 150 and 200 workers at the Renault plant in the French city of Le Mans joined a 24-hour strike following the abolition of paid breaks for new hires, according to *Ouest France*. A CGT representative told the paper this was an effective pay cut of 80 euros per month, and that basic pay at Renault had not been increased in years. A large number of temporary workers also participated in the walkout.

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

On Wednesday, thousands of auto workers at Mercedes-Benz held another three-day strike against the imposition of a 1.2 billion euro "investment plan" conditioned on pay cuts and increased "flexible working." The Basque nationalist ELA, LAB and ESK unions called the stoppages after the larger Workers Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers' Union (UGT) suspended their strike calls following an offer of a minor compromise by the company. The ELA, LAB and ESK report that 95 percent of the almost 5,000 workers at Mercedes-Benz joined the strike, and "there has been no production."

The CCOO and UGT have accepted all along the imposition of flexible working, and told *Europa Press* that the company should just make "a leap" that workers would perceive as a "sufficient" compromise.

Bus drivers begin strikes against cuts to bonuses in Thessaloniki, Greece

Bus drivers at the Thessaloniki Urban Transport Organisation (OASTH), the state-owned bus company in Greece's second-largest city, this week began the first of several partial strikes. Throughout July, they will walk out for six hours each Tuesday and Thursday. The union at OASTH is calling for management to sign a new collective agreement, and to restore bonus payments for health and the level of responsibility for passengers held by drivers, which were cut in March.

Four more six-hour strikes are planned in the coming weeks, and there will be two 24-hour stoppages in the week of July 18. OASTH employs around 2,600 workers.

Postponed strike of bus workers in northwest England over pay goes ahead

Around 370 bus drivers and engineers working for Stagecoach Merseyside at its Gilmoor depot walked out on Monday.

The strike of Unite union members was planned to start June 30, but Unite suspended the stoppage and balloted its members on a revised pay offer. The workers overwhelmingly rejected the offer, and the strike took place on Monday.

Further strikes are planned for July 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 28 and 29.

Outsourced cleaners at London, UK hospital plan further walkouts over pay and conditions

Unions bring wildcat strike at Fehmarn tunnel construction site in Denmark to an end with vague promise to “improve” wages

On Saturday, a wildcat strike by hundreds of Polish and Danish construction workers which began Tuesday June 28 in Denmark was ended after what the unions presented as a “huge victory.” According to *Arbejderen*, the newspaper of the Stalinist Community Party, the agreement with the Fehmarn Link Contractors (FLC) consortium is that before June 12 FLC will “improve” wages in an unspecified way. Workers were demanding equal pay for Danish and Polish workers, and wanted a pay rise of 25 kroner per hour (3.36 euros).

Arbejderen also reports an agreement being reached that salaries will be paid every 14 days, and the 25 kroner deducted for room and board from migrant workers’ wages would appear on their payslip so it would count towards their pensions.

The striking workers were fined by the Danish Labour Court. According to the crowdfunding appeal which has so far raised over 6,700 euros to pay the fines, each may be fined 3,000 Danish kroner (400 euros).

Workers at At??kan plaster company in Turkey continue strike for collective agreement

Workers at the At??kan plaster company in the Turkish city of Eski??ehir walked out on an indefinite strike on June 30, after the Kristal-?? union did not reach a new collective agreement with the company. Workers at At??kan are paid only 200 to 300 lira above the minimum wage each month, and Kristal-?? is also demanding an increase in additional payments, such as fuel allowances.

The union has emphasised that it is willing to reach a compromise which would see workers’ living standards fall, telling daily paper *BirGün* “Our demands are not very high numbers. We demanded a net 30 percent increase in the salary we received in 2022.” The latest official figure for inflation in Turkey is 78.6 percent, but the independent Inflation Research Group (ENAG) said that year-on-year inflation in May was 160.8 percent.

Engineers in Fife, Scotland walk out over pay offer

Around 240 engineers working for Bosch Rexroth in Glenrothes, Fife walked out on Tuesday for a week-long strike. Bosch Rexroth part of the German-based Bosch group makes parts for the construction industry, including brakes, gears and forklift truck parts.

The Unite union members rejected by a 74 percent majority a company pay offer the union says would leave them £7,000 a year worse off. The offer was a six percent pay increase, when RPI inflation is nearly twice that. In addition, the company is refusing to backdate the offer to January 1 and would impose changes to shift patterns and shift allowances.

Last year Bosch Rexroth generated £5.4 billion in sales. After the week-long strike the workers are set to strike each Monday and Tuesday, as well as implementing an overtime ban.

Cleaners and hostesses employed by outsourcing company Mitie at St Georges Hospital in Tooting, London, who have already held 10 days of stoppages, plan to strike on July 17, 20-21 and July 23-24. They are also carrying out a work-to-rule.

The GMB members are taking the action over low pay and working conditions. They are seeking parity with directly employed staff, and are also protesting wage arrears accrued when Mitie changed its payroll system in April.

UK: Further strike planned by Royal Mail Crown Offices workers

Following earlier walkouts, 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 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. They will not be involved in the July 11 stoppage, but will strike separately on July 14.

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 half a percent.

Dates announced for walkouts by UK Royal Mail managers over job cuts

Around 2,400 Royal Mail managers across 1,000 workplaces will take part in a work-to-rule protest July 15-19, followed by a strike July 20-22.

The Unite union members voted by a more than 85 percent majority for the industrial action. They are opposed to Royal Mail’s plans to cut over 500 frontline delivery managers, on top of the previous loss of 450 posts. They also face pay cuts of up to £7,000 a year according to Unite.

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. Unite says Royal Mail is “awash with cash,” saying it paid out £400 million to shareholders last year and recorded a £311 million profit.

Lecturers at Richmond upon Thames College, London announce further strikes against “fire and rehire”

Staff at Richmond upon Thames College in southwest London are continuing their programme of walkouts. They were on strike on June 28, coinciding with an open day at the college. A further 14 consecutive days of stoppages have been announced between August 22 and September 9. The stoppages cover the enrolment period and first week of the new term.

The 127 University and College Union (UCU) members are opposing plans by the college management to sack and rehire them on new

contracts under which they lose 10 days holiday. The college pays them on average £26,000, lower than other colleges and schools in London.

The UCU offered to suspend action if management withdraws dismissal notices against those refusing 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.

Unite union calls off strike of flooring manufacturer workers in Craigavon, Northern Ireland, as workers accept new pay offer

The continuous strike by around 100 workers at commercial flooring manufacturer, Interface Europe in Craigavon, Northern Ireland over pay, begun June 26, has been called off by the Unite union. This was after the workers voted overwhelmingly for a new pay offer from the company.

According to Unite, the new offer represents a 15.2 percent consolidated pay increase, described as an "inflation-busting pay increase." The Unite union members had rejected an earlier 5.25 percent pay offer, voting to walk out by an 88 percent majority.

Strike of UK petrol pump engineers over pay

Engineers working for Gilbarco Veeder-Root Ltd began a 36-hour strike beginning 6am on Thursday.

The Unite union members are responsible for servicing petrol pumps at petrol forecourts. They rejected a four percent pay offer which, with RPI inflation at 11.7 percent, represents a real term cut. The engineers service pumps for companies such as Tesco, Esso and BP. The Jersey-registered company recorded a £4 million profit according to its latest accounts.

UK barristers hold second week of strikes

Following a two-day strike last week, UK barristers this week walked out for three days from Monday. They will hold a four-day strike next week, and a full week's stoppage beginning July 18. Following this, they are planning full week strikes on alternate weeks beginning August 1. Rallies of striking barristers took place outside crown courts in London, Liverpool and Birmingham.

The barristers belonging to the Criminal Bar Association (CBA) are demanding a 25 percent increase in fees paid for doing legal aid work. Legal aid allows access to representation and legal advice for those unable to afford it. Previous cuts to legal aid have left criminal barristers in their first three years earning as little as £12,200 while working a 70-hour week. A quarter of criminal barristers have left the profession in last five years. Newly qualified barristers from less advantaged backgrounds have found it particularly difficult to remain in the profession.

Further protests by social security retirees in Iran over austerity

Further protests of social security retirees took place outside provincial

governors' and social security offices in several cities across Iran on Saturday. The cities included Ahvz, Karaj, Shushtar and Isfahan.

At some protests slogans were shouted against president Raisi. All the protests raised demands for improved pensions to meet the increasing cost-of-living crisis and for free health care, education and access to housing.

Strike by Jordanian port workers after horrific gas leak

On Sunday, port workers at the Jordanian port of Aqaba came out on strike to protest poor safety precautions that resulted in a chlorine gas container being dropped on the dock. The container ruptured, sending clouds of poisonous gas into the air. Nine port workers and four Chinese seamen died after inhaling the gas. Over 300 were injured, and around 40 ended up in intensive care.

The accident could have had more widespread consequences had dozens of port workers not left the scene of the accident after their shift shortly before the accident. In addition, the wind blew the gas away from the city and its population.

Following the accident, the Jordanian government sacked the director general at the state-run port and other senior managers.

Protests in Lebanese capital over price hikes

On Tuesday, hundreds of protestors marched from the Lebanese government Energy Ministry in Beirut towards the city centre. They were protesting electricity power outages and steep rises in the price of telecom access. The protestors banged on the doors of the Association of Banks in Lebanon to express their anger over the increasing cost of living crisis. They also protested outside the offices of Lebanese telecom company MTC Touch. From July 1, new telecom prices came into effect. These have to be paid in US dollars at a higher rate to the Lebanese currency than the official rate.

Gambian public health workers stand up to dictatorial government threats

Gambian public health workers belonging to the Association of Public and Environmental Health Officers of The Gambia (APEHOG) are continuing strike action, in spite of government threats against them.

The workers began a sit-down "no pay no work" strike in mid-June, after the government failed to honour promises to pay their allowances following an earlier protest in May.

The government accused the strikers of not having the interest of the association or the country at heart. It threatened strikers with administrative action from June 29, including being struck off the payroll.

APEHOG responded by saying that following engagements with the authorities, the executive was willing to compromise once allowances have been approved by the cabinet.

Workers in Ogun State, Nigeria oppose NLC sell-out, as one worker dies during commotion

On Friday June 30, as Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) leaders in Ogun state tried to address a crowd of members on their talks with the state government, chants of “we no go ’gree” rang out against a return to work. The workers insisted that the government had not met their demands, so they should not end their strike.

Security officers were called in to subdue the angry workers. According to media reports, one member of the crowd, Sunday Ogunjimi, collapsed during the commotion. He died later, despite being rushed into hospital by his colleagues.

There are conflicting reports on whether the members’ opposition caused any change of position by NLC leaders on the return to work. According to one, the return to work was delayed, while another reports that NLC leaders issued an immediate return to work order that evening.

Local government workers in Nairobi County, Kenya walk out over salary delays, missing remittances

Local government workers in Nairobi County, Kenya walked out on indefinite strike on July 4, after the expiry of a seven-day notice by the Kenya County Government Workers Union.

Nairobi staff branch secretary Festus Ngari said “Don’t expect any services from the county. At 8 am, the services will be at a standstill.” Grievances include salary delays, failure to effect the promotions of eligible staff, and refusal to agree to a collective bargaining agreement.

Other issues behind the strike are repeated power cuts and gaps in medical cover due to the state government’s failure to pay premiums and remit monthly deductions taken from the workers’ wages.

The Nairobi County government is alleged to have diverted more than NGN490.5 million in staff funds for unauthorised expenditures. The union threatened a strike in February over the same issue, but then came to an agreement that kept the workforce from putting the strike into effect.



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