

Pilots and cabin crew at Ryanair across Europe continue pay strikes; Overwhelming vote to join national strike by UK train drivers at two more rail operators; UK bus drivers' pay stoppage continues at Arriva North West as drivers at more depots ballot; Lebanese National News Agency declares indefinite strike over cost of living

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.

Pilots and cabin crew at Ryanair across Europe continue pay strikes

Workers at Ryanair continue strikes in several European countries this week, seeking to reverse pay cuts agreed by the unions at the start of the pandemic and to improve working conditions.

The unions representing most Spanish Ryanair cabin crew, USO and SITCPLA, announced this week they would extend their ongoing strike until January 2023. The new stoppages will begin on August 8, and occur weekly, but only on weekdays.

Ryanair and Spain's PSOE-Podemos government implemented many strike-breaking measures since workers first walked out at the start of July, including a "minimum service" requirement preventing many workers from legally stopping work. This week, *Crónica Global* reported that the USO union accused Ryanair of firing 10 cabin crew "for not having obeyed illegal orders from the airline during the days of the strike."

Despite calling the company's application of minimum services "illegal," the unions organised no mass defiance of them, leaving individual workers isolated.

On July 22, Ryanair pilots in Belgium also began a three-day strike, demanding the reversal of a 20 percent pay cut agreed by unions across the airline at the start of the pandemic. *RTÉ* reported that two unions representing Spanish and French pilots voted to accept a pay restoration deal lasting until March 2027.

Ground handling workers strike at Lufthansa in Germany over pay

Ground handling workers employed by German airline Lufthansa

walked out on a one-day national strike on Wednesday, affecting flights from many companies at airports across Europe.

The United Services Union (Verdi) called the warning strike of 20,000 workers while it negotiates with the company over pay. It is demanding a 9.5 percent pay increase. The Cockpit Union (VC), which represents around 5,000 pilots at Lufthansa, is also preparing to ballot its members for strikes, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported. VC is demanding a five percent increase this year and one adjusted for inflation in 2023. Pilots have been working without a collective agreement since June 30.

In an increasingly common refrain, the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) called for the strike to be banned. Its chief executive is quoted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* effectively calling for all strikes outside of token one-hour protests to be outlawed: "a 24-hour strike is not a warning strike. It proves once again: legal regulations for industrial action are overdue."

Bus drivers in Zaragoza, Spain continue long-running indefinite pay strike

Bus drivers in the Spanish city of Zaragoza remain on indefinite strike in a dispute with the company that has been running sporadically for nearly 18 months.

The company is offering a pay rise of 11.25 percent, or higher with performance bonuses, but spread over four years. At the current rate of inflation, prices would increase by 47.5 percent over the length of the contract.

The works council repeatedly watered down its demands. *el Periódico* reported on Thursday that the unions offered to reduce their demand for a pay rise at 95 percent of the level of inflation to 85 percent, a serious decline in real terms pay.

Large demonstration against legal threats to trade unionists in Piacenza, Italy

On Saturday, thousands of people demonstrated in the Italian city of Piacenza in defence of eight officials of “grassroots” trade unions USB and SI Cobas who were targeted by the state, six being placed under house arrest.

USB and SI Cobas regularly denounce the traditional corporatist, pro-business unions. The grassroots unions also called several protests and stoppages against deliveries of weapons to fuel NATO’s proxy war in Ukraine.

The victimised officials were accused of pursuing personal gain, but magistrates made particularly chilling comments denouncing their failure to sign employer-friendly deals. *il Fatto Quotidiano* wrote the magistrates accused the unionists of extortion, complaining “[i]ndividual multinationals or employers ... were ‘subjected to a condition of exasperation’ that ‘forced them to accept the economic demands that were made to them’.”

Unions call short stoppage after fatal accident in Italy

Italian unions representing construction workers called a 24-hour strike at a building site Friday July 22, after a worker was killed by a fall. Speaking to ANSA, the CGIL said that Antonino Tamburo died after falling four metres without a harness on a site in the city of Cefalù.

Fatal accidents continue at an horrific rate in Italy, and the token stoppages called by the unions to defuse workers’ anger have done nothing to slow them. The National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL), which compiles statistics on workplace safety in Italy, released its 2021 report on Monday, revealing a sharp rise in so-called “traditional” workplace deaths (i.e., those not related to COVID-19).

INAIL recorded 685 non-COVID fatal workplace accidents in 2021, almost two a day, a nearly 10 percent increase on 2020. Non-COVID-related accidents also increased by 20 percent.

Laid-off textile workers in Tuzla, Turkey strike over unpaid bonuses

Around 350 workers at the ETF Textile factory in the Tuzla district of Istanbul began a strike last week, demanding they are paid the bonuses owed before the planned closure of the factory at the end of July.

According to *Haberler*, one worker protested on the roof of the factory, and riot police were called after others joined. Workers told the paper that what the company offered them in severance was only 45 percent of what they were entitled to.

March by Turkish miners opposing pit privatisation is stopped by police

Miners at the Soma coal mine in Eynez, Turkey continue to oppose the pit’s privatisation. They set up a tent at the site to permanently protest, having stopped work and protested over the past two weeks.

Evrensel reported that around 100 miners planned to march to Ankara but were stopped by police in a town close to the mine.

Following a 2005 privatisation, Soma was the scene of the worst mining disaster in Turkish history, when a fire smouldering for several days in

2014 caused the deaths of 301 mine workers.

Bus drivers plan new strikes in Thessaloniki, Greece

Bus drivers at the Thessaloniki Urban Transport Organisation (OASTH), the state-owned bus company in Greece’s second-largest city, will begin a new series of strikes in August. This follows two days of walkouts last week, and a protest on Wednesday. Four one-day strikes are planned for next month, the first on August 2.

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. OASTH employs around 2,600 workers.

Archaeologists on Thessaloniki Metro construction site in Greece begin strikes over unpaid wages

On Monday, archaeologists working on the construction of the new Thessaloniki Metro began the first of a series of rolling strikes over unpaid wages, *alfavita* reported.

The Association of Emergency Archaeologists demanded the payment of arrears, which are eight months late, saying more strikes would be called.

Renault workers strike in Le Mans, France for pay rise

On July 21, around 150-200 Renault workers in Le Mans, France walked out for the second time this month over pay, demanding a pay rise and the return of paid break times.

Speaking to *Ouest France*, a representative of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) said the abolition of paid breaks for all new hires was an effective pay cut of 80 euros per month.

Ferry workers strike over pay in Lisbon, Portugal

Last week, workers operating the ferry across the river Tagus in the Portuguese capital walked out on a one-day strike over pay at the two subsidiaries Transtejo and Soflusa. The unions reported the strike involved 90 percent of the workers at Transtejo and 50 percent at Soflusa.

UK train drivers at two more rail operators vote overwhelmingly to join national strike

UK train drivers at two more rail operators voted to join workers at seven companies in 24-hour strike on August 19. The strike vote was 92.6 percent in a 90.5 percent turnout at Avanti, and 93.2 percent in a 90.5 percent turnout at Cross Country.

Thousands of drivers at seven companies will walk out on Saturday against the government's Great British Railways re-privatisation plan, which will decimate jobs and slash pay and conditions.

Train drivers' union Aslef are currently balloting drivers at other train companies. Ballots close August 25 at Chiltern Railways, Northern Trains and TransPennine Express, and September 19 at East Midlands.

Aslef is preventing unified action of all rail workers, like its counterparts the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) and clerical TSSA unions. More than 40,000 RMT members walked out on Wednesday against the government's scheme, but the RMT is limiting action in favour of negotiations.

UK bus drivers' pay stoppage continues at Arriva North West, more Arriva depots ballot but unions oppose unified fight

2,000 UK bus workers at Arriva North West are continuing indefinite strike action in the fight for a cost-of-living pay increase across 11 garages providing services across Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire—Birkenhead, Bolton, Bootle, Liverpool, Macclesfield, Manchester, Runcorn, Southport, Speke, St Helens, and Winsford.

The mainly Unite and GMB members at Arriva North West rejected offers of three percent, or six percent with strings including reductions in sick pay and ending enhanced payments for Saturday working. Workers rejected by 96 percent, in a turnout of 72 percent, a further offer of 8.5 percent. The RPI (retail price inflation) rate has now hit 11.8 percent and is expected to rise.

In Kent and Essex, 800 Arriva bus drivers are balloting over pay. The Unite ballot closes August 12. The drivers, who earn £12.12 an hour, were offered 7.8 percent.

Unite members at Arriva depots in Luton, Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Milton Keynes, Ware, Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead are also balloting until August 10. They were offered between four and six percent, including cuts to overtime rates and paid travel time for drivers.

Unite recently suspended a stoppage at Stagecoach Merseyside, pushing through a rise of 10.3 percent, rising to 11.9 percent from January 2023. After a four-week stoppage at Arriva Yorkshire, Unite negotiated a nine percent uplift which members accepted. General Secretary Sharon Graham described the below-inflation deal as a "superb result."

Arriva is part of German-government-owned Deutsche Bahn (DB). One of the largest transport companies in the world, DB made £5.9 billion the last decade and £560 million in the UK. £4.3 million went in dividends.

Outsourced ancillary staff at eight National Health Service sites in England walk out over pay and conditions parity

Outsourced staff employed as porters, cleaners and catering staff by OCS at eight National Health Service (NHS) sites in Lancashire, England held a stoppage on Tuesday and Wednesday. This follows three strike days last month.

The Unison members at The Harbour, Guild Lodge, Wesham rehabilitation unit, Blackpool and Royal Blackburn Hospital, Daisyfield Mill Clinic, Mount Clinic, Ormskirk District Hospital and Balladen House are demanding parity with directly employed NHS staff over pay and conditions.

Further stoppages are planned for July 31 and August 1, 4 and 5.

Ferry staff working for UK Red Funnel company walk out over pay

Ferry workers employed by Red Funnel on the service between the Isle of Wight and Southampton, England went on strike Wednesday over pay.

The 120 Unite union members work as customer service staff, ratings and shunters. They rejected a pay offer of between 4.5 and 6.5 percent for the lowest paid. Many of the workers such as cleaners are on the national minimum wage of £9.50 an hour, compared to cleaners at another local firm, Wightlink on £10.99. Some resort to foodbanks.

All staff are responsible for passenger safety and undergo sea training. Time away from home, sometimes days, is awarded no expenses.

Further stoppages are planned for August 1, 3, 5, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 23, 26 and 29. Cowes week (July 30-August 6) and the summer holidays will be affected.

Council workers in London's Hackney council walk out over pay

Council workers in Hackney in the UK capital walked out and held a protest on Monday demanding a 10 percent rise.

The Unite members in refuse and direct works planned further strikes on Wednesday and Friday. Unite is balloting other sectors employed by the Labour council.

Refuse workers in Surrey, England to strike over pay

UK refuse workers employed by contractor Amey in Camberley, Cobham, Esher, Frimley, Walton-on-Thames and Weybridge will strike for three weeks from August 1.

According to the GMB union, their members are £3 an hour underpaid, and do not have the same pension and sick pay benefits as local authority workers. The union complains the employer refuses to negotiate.

Meanwhile, Unite suspended a strike over pay and conditions by refuse collectors at London's Bexley council begun July 12. Negotiations between employer Countrystyle Recycling and the union will resume at government arbitration service Acas.

Subway workers in Glasgow, Scotland in overwhelming strike vote over duty schedules

Underground train workers in Glasgow, Scotland voted by 99 percent on an 83 percent turnout to strike over changes to duty schedules.

The 200 Unite members including train drivers and station staff at operator Strathclyde Partnership for transport are required to work shifts at short notice, to the detriment of family life.

The 24-hour strikes will be on August 6, affecting the first Rangers home game, and August 9, 13 and 27.

North Sea oil rig workers on Foinhaven field vote for indefinite strike over redundancy pay

Around 60 North Sea oil rig workers operating the Foinaven Floating Production, Storage and Offloading vessel voted by 96 percent in an 84 percent turnout to walk out indefinitely. Action will begin August 5.

The Unite members, including crane operators, electricians, deck crew and production workers, want parity with onshore workers regarding the redundancy package on offer.

AQA exam staff in UK to strike over pay

UK staff at exam board AQA plan to walk out July 29-31.

The 180 Unison members cannot make ends meet, and rejected this year's three percent pay offer, with RPI inflation at 11.8 percent. They received 0.6 percent last year. In response, the company is threatening to "fire and rehire" them.

The strike would impact the delivery of this year's GCSE and A-level exam results, expected August 25 and August 18. AQA sets and marks half these exams.

RMT union suspends long-running night London Underground strikes, announces strike date over jobs, pensions and conditions

The RMT suspended London Underground (LU) strikes on the Central, Victoria, Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines, begun January 7, on every Friday and Saturday.

LU workers, however, may walk out in a separate dispute against plans to axe 600 jobs, decimate pensions and slash terms and conditions.

The Night Tube service was suspended at the start of the pandemic. When it reopened, Transport for London (TfL) scrapped a 2016 agreement that established a dedicated grade of Night Tube drivers. All drivers were expected to work at least four weekend Night Tube shifts per year, disrupting family life.

The RMT's assistant general secretary John Leach said, "The RMT national executive Committee has taken the decision to accept an offer... to agree a minimum number on each line who wish to preference Night Tube duties... The dispute is not resolved, but we will remain vigilant and monitor the situation on the ground. In three months...we will review at ACAS [government arbitration body]."

The RMT is calling its members on the Underground out August 19, unless TfL responds to its demands. A union press release accuses TfL of not sharing the Conservative government's proposals on funding that they received "in secret and without any discussion with their recognised trade unions."

The government and Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan plan £400 million cuts across TfL this year.

The RMT's aim is not to fight for jobs, pensions and conditions, but to maintain corporatist relations with management.

Unite suspends fuellers' proposed pay strike at London's Heathrow airport

Unite suspended a strike by fuellers at UK capital's Heathrow airport planned for July 21-25.

The Unite members employed by Aviation Fuel Services at KLM,

Emirates, Virgin and Delta airlines rejected a 10 percent pay offer.

Unite pushed through a deal which they describe as "fantastic" though barely above inflation, which is rising—12.5 percent, an increase in overtime rates plus £2,500. The workers have had no rise for three years.

Union suspends planned pay strikes by OCS security officers at UK courts and tribunals

The PCS union called off planned strikes by security officers employed by OCS at UK's Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Services.

The PCS will ballot members on a new below-inflation offer of 8.3 percent, described by the union as a "significant win."

The workers rejected an initial pay offer bringing them to 27p an hour above the £9.50 national minimum wage. Workers also demand a £500 one-off payment, occupational sick pay from day one, paid time off for medical appointments and an extra day's leave.

Unite pushes through below-inflation pay deal for UK refuse workers at Sandwell council

Planned strikes by UK refuse workers at Sandwell council employed by outsource company Serco were called off "following a workplace meeting," according to Unite.

Workers accepted a revised below-inflation offer of nine percent plus five additional days annual leave, described by Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham as "an important pay victory."

The 60 Unite members including HGV (heavy goods vehicles) drivers, refuse collectors and street cleaners planned to walk out after Serco offered an eight percent pay uplift. Refuse collectors are paid £9.95 an hour.

Serco increased profits by 25 percent, making £192.2 million last year, increasing dividend payments by 15 percent.

Non-academic staff at UK universities balloting to strike against the cost-of-living crisis

More than 20,000 non-academic staff at 93 UK universities began voting for strike action after rejecting a three percent pay offer. The ballot closes August 19 in Scotland and August 23 in England and Wales.

The Unison members join University and College Union members and workers across the education sector, who reject the government's three-five percent pay offers.

The danger is that left in the hands of the unions action will be delayed, limited and uncoordinated, leading to sell-outs.

Demands to release arrested Iranian copper miners after strike

Calls are growing for the release of Iranian copper miners, imprisoned after a recent strike. Among the groups denouncing the arrests and calling for the immediate and unconditional release are several retired industrial

workers' organisations, unions and groups of Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers, who have also been on strike recently.

Miners spent three days in tents and cars at the Sungun mine complex in East Azerbaijan province, Iran's largest copper mine, demanding better conditions and wage increases and protesting the arrest of two colleagues. Riot police broke up the strike on July 7, arresting at least seven miners.

On July 8, Hossein Fathi, director general of the East Azerbaijan Labour Department, attempted to calm the workers. Workers refused to listen, as Fathi previously denied on public television any repression against the workers. The miners said they would not negotiate while any workers were arrested.

The strike ended July 9, after promises that workers' demands would be met and the arrested miners released. Further arrests and attacks followed. Around 20 protesting miners were arrested by security agencies and detained in Ahar prison. Access cards were blocked to around 30 workers at the Ahan Ajin contractor, all of them experienced workers with current contracts. During the strike, management brought in scab workers. Around 40 were kept on, apparently to prepare for sacking the strikers.

Lebanese National News Agency declares open strike over cost of living

On July 22, Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) announced an open strike over pay and conditions and stopped broadcasting news.

The strike follows a two-day warning strike, but its demands were not met. As its strike announcement stated, the NNA, which employs around 300 staff in 20 offices across the country, is "the main source of news certainty" in Lebanon. The strike became necessary, NNA declared, as "the living conditions' pain reached a point that no one can afford anymore." It expressed the hope that "silence, for the first time in its history, would be more eloquent than its voice."

Salaries were devastated by the economic crisis wracking the country since 2019. NNA salaries range from LL1,000,000 to LL2,700,000. Three years ago, these were equivalent to US\$600-1,800. Today the figure is less than US\$40-100.

Poverty levels are at 74 percent in Lebanon, with one third of the workforce unemployed. The UN says current minimum monthly salary is less than US\$25.

The NNA strike is only the latest in a spreading wave of indefinite public sector strikes in response to this crisis. Workers say salaries barely cover travel costs. All public administration is crippled, and the government says it has no means of increasing wages.

Instead, they offered to increase transport allowances and provide monthly financial assistance. Public sector workers refused this, accusing the government of treating their demands lightly.

Israeli teachers protest over pay and conditions

Israeli teachers barracked Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman in a television appearance on Channel 13, as part of an increasingly bitter protest over wages and conditions.

Lieberman was booed when he claimed "most teachers" support an offer already rejected by the Teachers Union. Teachers held placards reading "I can't end the month," and "Fair wages for teachers."

Pay negotiations have been underway for six months, while Israel is facing a critical shortage of teachers, who are leaving over poor

conditions. Strike action began in June.

The Teachers Union demanded salaries start at NIS 10,500. The government initially offered NIS 8,000, later increasing this to 8,600. On Monday, the Finance Ministry offered NIS 9,000, as part of the package defended by Liberman on Tuesday's broadcast.

The Union said the ministry jumped the gun with its announcements, as "The offer submitted today is even worse than the current situation."

Nigerian workers walk out in solidarity with striking university staff

On July 26-27, Nigerian workers in unions affiliated to the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress went on strike in a two-day national protest, in solidarity with university staff on strike since February 14.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members walked out over salaries, the delay in release of revitalisation funds for universities and the adoption of new payroll software. Similar issues led to walkouts by other workers in higher education, including those in polytechnics and colleges.

Protests took place across the country, including in Lagos, Enugu, Ogun, Jigawa, Benue, Kwara, Kaduna, Plateau, Edo, Akwa-Ibom. Workers were joined by students and parents, bringing many city centres to a standstill, as in Enugu and Ogun.

On July 26, thousands of protesters gathered at the Ikeja "underbridge" in Lagos while more were moving on foot from Labour House in the Yaba area of the city to join the protest.

As well as ASUU members, members of education unions Senior Staff Union of Nigeria and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities and Allied Institutions joined the protest.

National Union of Electricity Employees members are involved in the strike, potentially causing power cuts. Others including aviation workers, insurance and financial employees also joined the action.

The Nigerian government denounced the strike as illegal. A human rights lawyer defended workers' right to strike in solidarity.

Minister of Labour and Employment, Senator Chris Ngige, said he incorporated the NLC into tripartite conciliation talks going on in his Ministry, claiming this made the strike unnecessary. The NLC collaborate with the government while claiming to oppose them.

Civil servants strike for two days in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean public service workers, including teachers and nurses, took strike action on July 27-28 to demand payment of salaries in US dollars instead of the declining Zimbabwe dollar. This is seen as a degree of protection against raging inflation. A 100 percent pay increase was rejected as insufficient.

The Zimbabwe Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions called the strike as a "warning" to the government.

Other demands include stopping suspensions and victimisation of teachers and nurses, payment of medical allowances for all civil servants without discrimination, payment of tuition fees for teachers' children, and improvement of labour laws.

Annual inflation rose to 191 percent in June, as the Zimbabwe currency is increasingly rejected by manufacturers of basic goods.

South African public servants' union paves way for sell-out pay deal

Wage negotiations with the South African government's Department of Public Service and administration began after the workers' union offered a sell-out deal, cutting their initial demand from 10 percent to 6.5 percent.

The Public Servants Association (PSA) union rejected the government's initial offer of an average two percent, and could have rallied over 200,000 public servants, including teachers and nurses, to strike. Instead, the union returned to negotiations with a reduced wage demand which is a de facto pay cut, since inflation in South Africa reached 7.4 percent in June, its highest in 13 years.

The government says its proposal of a tax-free R1,000 "gratuity" equates to a 4.5 percent rise, which, on top of their initial two percent offer, would meet the PSA's required 6.5 percent, leaving the way open for a betrayal of workers by the union.

South African ANC workers picket party HQ demanding back pay

Administrative staff of South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) picketed the party's headquarters in Johannesburg and other provincial offices on July 25, after a failure to pay the last two months' salaries.

ANC staff previously walked out in protest over the party's continuing financial problems, which led to unpaid wages, employment insurance, hospital funds and salary increments. The last time was in February, when the ANC blamed recent new laws on political donations.

Municipal workers in South African town threaten strike over non-payment of wages

Workers in Dr. Beyers Naude municipality, Eastern Cape, threatened to strike if they do not receive their salaries this week.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members say they expect their wages whatever the financial problems of local government. The politically divided council was unable to come to agreement over the planned municipal budget.



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