Strikes continue in airline industry across Europe over pay and conditions; further UK rail strikes against attacks on jobs, pay and pensions; protests in Iraq against power outages; public sector workers in Lebanon continue stoppage over poverty and unemployment

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.*

Europe

Strikes continue in airline industry across Europe over pay and conditions

Workers at airlines and airports across Europe continue to fight to recover pay which the unions agreed to sacrifice at the start of the pandemic to "save the industry." They also oppose the deterioration of working conditions as passenger numbers return to pre-pandemic levels.

Around 600 workers in Germany's Munich Airport at Swissport Losch, which provides 35-40 percent of the ground handling services, joined a five-hour warning strike on Wednesday, the *Berliner Morgenpost* reported. The United Services Union (Verdi) called the stoppage to "secure real wages in view of an inflation rate of eight percent."

In Spain, pilots at EasyJet begin a three-day strike on Friday to demand the restoration of pre-pandemic working conditions, while the company is demanding further cuts. The SEPLA union called further three-day walkouts each weekend in August.

Cabin crew at Ryanair in Spain also walked out for the first of a renewed wave of strikes on Monday. As part of a campaign called by the USO union, Spanish Ryanair workers will stop work for four days every week until January. However, Ryanair has predicted the impact of the strike on its flights will be low, as the government granted it a minimum service decree under which it can force striking workers to return to the job to provide more than 80 percent of normal service.

There were also strikes in the past weeks by workers at Ryanair in France, Belgium, Italy and Portugal, but the unions' division of the struggle against the company along national lines allowed Ryanair to get away with strike-breaking measures. The company told Asturian newspaper *La Nueva España* it expected to run all flights in Asturias when it resumes operations there in three months, since "all the routes that we will begin to operate in Asturias have their bases abroad."

On August 26, airport workers throughout Portugal will join a three-day strike called by Portugal's Civil Aviation Workers' Union (SINTAC) against the ground-handling company Portway. SINTAC accuses Portway of creating a "climate of psychological terror, where threats proliferate and disciplinary proceedings are instituted, creating social instability unparalleled in the company's history." According to *Lusa*, Portway is owned by the Vinci Group, a France-based multinational which also owns the company managing most of Portugal's major airports.

"Home help" healthcare workers in Spain strike over insecure contracts and low pay

Workers who provide in-home care in Spain are fighting against the widespread use of precarious contracts and to increase pay for the vital service. In the Basque Country, workers held a two-day stoppage last week, and plan three more in September, *Europa Press* reported.

The Basque Workers' Solidarity (ELA) union accused the private concessionaire Lagunduz of "indifference," saying the company and local government's proposed agreement would "perpetuate precariousness for the coming years."

On Monday, the Workers Commissions (CCOO) union announced that "home help" workers in La Rioja would begin an indefinite strike, following a previous campaign of stoppages. The CCOO said workers on temporary contracts who had taken part in previous strikes were threatened with non-renewal of their contract. In Asturias, members of the CCOO and General Workers' Union (UGT) in the home help service will also walk out on indefinite strike from August 16, demanding employment security and pay increases.

Auto parts workers strike for pay and safe working conditions in Manisa and Düzce, Turkey

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Workers at two Standard Profil auto parts factories in the Turkish cities of Manisa and Düzce began walkouts last week, demanding pay rises and compliance with health and safety measures.

According to *Evrensel*, around 1,300 members of the Petrol-?? union stopped work in Manisa, and many of the 1,000 workers at the Düzce plant also walked out. Petrol-?? declared "victory" on Wednesday, announcing it agreed a 28 percent pay rise and a 1,500-lira bonus. According to Petrol-??, before the strike Standard Profil workers made only the minimum wage.

Police attack picket of dismissed textile workers in Turkey

On Tuesday, a picket line of workers at the liquidated ETF Textile factory in Istanbul, Turkey was attacked by police to allow the company to remove goods from the building, *Evrensel* reported.

Around 350 workers from the factory began a walkout when the closure was announced, demanding they were paid the full bonuses they were entitled to. Workers picketed the plant. Last week, they successfully turned back lorries attempting to remove goods.

Workers strike against sackings at Greek wine manufacturer in face of police attacks

Workers at the wine manufacturer Malamatina, based in the Greek city of Thessaloniki, continue a series of strikes begun six weeks ago after 12 colleagues were fired.

On August 4, riot police attacked strikers for picketing the factory and arrested two union leaders, following the finding of a Thessaloniki court that the strike was "illegal." A five-day strike began on Monday in response, demanding the dropping of charges and rehiring of the 12 dismissed workers.

Waste collection workers continue indefinite strike in Auxerre, France

Waste collection workers in the French city of Auxerre continue an indefinite strike begun July 7, demanding a pay increase of 300 euros per month, more secure contracts and improvements to working hours.

After a meeting with the city's mayor, a representative of the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions told *France Bleu* that nothing had been agreed, and "we would all like to go back to work tomorrow," but "[a]s long as there is nothing concrete, we will remain on the picket line."

Online fundraising for the strike fund brought in more than 5,900 euros.

Bus drivers in Le Mans, France continue strikes against violence and poor working conditions

Bus drivers in the French city of Le Mans held another strike on August 6, the latest of the intermittent walkouts called by the Force Ouvrière (FO) union since the end of June.

Ouest France reported that the stoppages began after a bus driver was assaulted by somebody who forced open the door to his cabin. FO demanded "strong measures" to prevent violence against drivers, and denounced the director of Setram, the Le Mans transport network, for "minimising the facts" of the assault.

Agricultural workers strike over low pay in Georgia

Last week, the *Caucasian Knot* reported that around 400 agricultural labourers near the city of Zugdidi in Georgia began a strike to demand higher pay.

The workers are paid around 0.50 lari (0.18 euros) per kilogram by Agro Georgia to collect hazelnuts, and are demanding a pay rise of at least 0.20 lari. Workers told media the 0.50-lari rate leaves them much worse off this year because of rising prices and the poor hazelnut harvest.

Avanti West Coast slashes services due to unofficial action ahead of Saturday's strike at eight train operating companies

UK train drivers at Avanti West Coast have taken unofficial action ahead of Saturday's strike. The drivers at Avanti are due to strike Saturday, along with drivers at eight other train operating companies, over attacks on pay and conditions.

The drivers refused to voluntarily work rest days, leading the operator to reduce services. On Saturday, they will join the drivers' strike of Aslef members at CrossCountry, Greater Anglia, Great Western, Hull Trains, LNER, London Overground, Southeastern and West Midlands Trains.

Avanti reduced its services to four an hour from its normal seven on its West Coast Main Line service. The company normally expects to run around 400 trains a week based on drivers volunteering to work rest days at enhanced pay. With the boycott of rest day working, Avanti was forced to reduce this to 50 a week.

Avanti West Coast managing director, Phil Whittingham, wrote to the rail industry that the "current industrial relations climate" resulted in "severe staff shortages in some grades through increased sickness levels, as well as unofficial strike action by Aslef members."

Aslef general secretary, Mick Whelan, denied there was unofficial action, saying, "Avanti does not employ enough drivers to run the services they have promised."

Around 40,000 Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members walked out for three days in June to oppose the government's Great British Railways plan, which will decimate jobs and slash pay and conditions. The RMT, Aslef and admin union TSSA oppose mobilising their members in unified action.

UK postal workers set dates for stoppages over pay offer

Around 115,000 UK postal workers employed by Royal Mail are set to walk out on August 26, 31 and September 8-9. They rejected a 5.5 percent pay offer.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) members voted by a near 98 percent majority for the action. The pay offer was for a two percent uplift backdated to April 1, plus an additional 3.5 percent subject to

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changes in working practices.

Should it go ahead, it would be the biggest UK strike this year.

Dates announced for strike by dockers at UK's largest port, Felixstowe, over pay

Around 1,900 port workers employed by the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company in East Anglia, England voted by a 92 percent majority to strike after rejecting a five percent pay offer. Felixstowe is the UK's largest port. The Unite union members are set to begin an eight-day strike on August 21.

The Felixstowe port workers are in a strong position, with nearly half the UK's container traffic passing through the port.

Talks brokered by the government's conciliation service Acas to try and avert the stoppage broke down.

The company made £61 million in profits in 2020, and paid £99 million in dividends.

Logistics workers in Northern Ireland to hold one-week strike after rejecting pay offer

Logistics workers employed by DHL on a contract to Spirit Aerosystems in Northern Ireland are to hold a week-long strike beginning August 15. Spirit Aerosystems make aircraft parts. The DHL workers are responsible for transporting the parts between production lines as well as delivering processed fuselage parts to Spirit production sites all over the world.

The Unite union members rejected a four percent pay offer and voted by an 84 percent majority to walk out.

Further stoppages by AQA exam staff in UK over pay

Following a walkout by UK staff at exam board AQA from July 29-31, a four-day walkout is set to begin Friday. A stoppage is also planned August 17-21, which will cover the August 18 A-level results day when AQA staff would normally handle phone calls from A-level students.

The 180 Unison members cannot make ends meet, and rejected this year's three percent pay offer, with RPI inflation at 11.8 percent and expected to rise to 17 percent by the end of the year. They received 0.6 percent last year. In response, the company is threatening to "fire and rehire" them.

The stoppages could also impact the delivery of this year's GCSE results, due on August 25. AQA is responsible for setting and marking half the country's GCSE and A-level exams.

Refuse collectors in Edinburgh, Scotland to strike over pay

Around 300 waste collection, recycling and street cleaning workers in Edinburgh, Scotland are to strike August 18-30, a period covering the world famous Edinburgh Festival.

The GMB and Unite union members are opposing the two percent pay offer put forward by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Around 1,500 refuse workers in Unite at 15 councils across Scotland are also scheduled to walk out August 24-31 over the same issue.

University ancillary staff at Dundee University, Scotland, to begin all-out strike over pension attacks

Ancillary staff at Dundee University are to begin an all-out strike on August 25 against the university's plans to close their Defined Benefit Pension Scheme, replacing it with a Defined Contributions Scheme. This would mean lower paid workers losing up to half the value of their pensions.

The Unite union members voted by an 83 percent majority to walk out. They held 11 days of stoppages over the same issue in October 2021.

Coffin manufacturer workers in Glasgow, Scotland to hold one-week stoppage over pay

Coffin makers employed by Cooperative Funeral Care at their factory in Glasgow, Scotland are to begin a one-week strike on August 22.

The site supplies coffins to the Co-op funeral business throughout the UK. The Unite union members voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out after rejecting a well below inflation three percent pay offer.

Outsourced ancillary staff at eight National Health Service sites in England to hold further stoppages over pay and conditions parity

Around 50 outsourced staff employed as porters, cleaners and catering staff by OCS at eight National Health Service (NHS) sites in Lancashire, England are to hold further stoppages after taking holding strikes in June, July and early August. The new dates are Thursday and Friday this week, followed by a 48-hour strike beginning Sunday and a three-day strike from August 18.

The Unison union members at The Harbour, Guild Lodge, Wesham rehabilitation unit, 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.

Nurses in England and Wales ballot over pay

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members are to ballot for strike action over pay.

The RCN, with over 400,000 members UK-wide, is the largest nursing union. The ballot begins September 15 and lasts for four weeks. The RCN is calling for a pay rise five percent above the RPI rate of inflation. A recent government pay offer was for around four to five percent total, representing a cut in real terms.

Should strike action take place, it would be the first in the RCN's

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history in England and Wales. RCN members in Northern Ireland walked out for the first time in 2019.

Around 100,000 Unite union members working in the NHS in England and Wales are currently taking part in a consultative ballot over the pay offer. The ballot for Unite members in England closes September 11, and for those in Wales on September 15.

Unite union suspends planned walkout of construction supply workers in Chester-Le-Street, UK as employer makes new pay offer

The UK stoppage of around 120 Unite union members at construction suppliers Birtley Group and Bowater Doors, based in Chester-Le-Street, due to begin Wednesday, was suspended by the union. An overtime ban was also lifted.

Parent company Hill & Smith Holdings PLC came back with an improved pay offer which was put to the membership. Should the new offer be rejected, 16 days of stoppages planned to begin September 4 will go ahead, along with the restoration of the overtime ban.

Middle East

Iraqi protesters block roads over electricity outages as temperatures soar

After days of power shortages caused by the collapse of the electricity power grid, protesters in southern Iraq blocked roads with burning tyres. Protesters began a sit-in at 3am Monday, unable to sleep in the summer heat.

In the oil province of Basra, Iraq's second largest city, protesters blocked the streets for three consecutive days over the power outages. There were similar protests in Dhi Qar governorate.

Despite a state of alert from the Ministry of Electricity last week, the grid collapsed in six southern governorates under the weight of demand during peak summer heat. Iraq, a major oil exporter, is reliant on neighbouring Iran for nearly a third of its energy needs during the peak summer period.

Basra's governor blamed the latest power outages on a power station fire. A weapons depot in Najaf exploded in the heat, as temperatures reached 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit). Southern governorates suspended working hours because of the heat.

Basra protester Ali Hussein told press, "It's not the first time we protest and it won't be the last. We are continuing our protests for electricity and water, which are very basic demands."

Hussein expressed support for an ongoing sit-in by supporters of nationalist Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr at the parliament buildings in Baghdad. They are calling for an end to corruption and the political system put in place after the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

There are mounting protests at the terrible social and economic conditions in Washington's puppet state, where unemployment and poverty rates are skyrocketing. On Sunday, protesters attacked a gas facility at the PetroChina-operated Halfaya oilfield in Missan province, southern Iraq.

Journalists arrested during protests in Kurdistan region of Iraq against the ruling parties

Widespread arrests and harassment of journalists restricted coverage of protests across Iraq's Kurdistan region on Saturday.

Demonstrators were protesting against collapsing social conditions and alleged mismanagement by the two ruling parties, the Patriotic Union Party (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

In Sulaimaniyah, controlled by the PUK, police used tear gas on hundreds of demonstrators. Security forces prevented demonstrators from assembling in Dohuk and Erbil, where the KDP is in control.

The Metro Center for Journalists Rights and Advocacy reported 21 arrests, four raids, five injuries connected with tear gas and 23 confiscations of journalists' equipment. Rast News in Dohuk was closed. Detained journalists were freed the day after the protests.

Media outlets associated with the ruling parties largely ignored the demonstrations. PUK outlets reported only a statement from the security services denying that any journalist or opposition politician had been arrested. Some KDP-affiliated outlets ignored the protests entirely.

Frustration is rising at the failure to pay public sector salaries on time, rising prices, the unreliability of electricity and water services, and endemic youth unemployment. The demonstrations follow protests by nationalist Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Baghdad.

The opposition New Generation Movement sought to contain the popular resentment, issuing demands around public sector pay and unemployment.

Lebanese public sector strike continues over poverty and unemployment

The indefinite strike by Lebanese public sector workers, begun June 13, is continuing to spread. Air traffic controllers will this month stop working nights.

Workers are striking over a collapse of economic and social conditions. They demand wage adjustments in the face of a devastating economic crisis. The currency devalued around 90 percent in the last three years, with poverty and unemployment rampant. Strikers are also seeking social improvements in family support, medical subsidies and education.

Every aspect of public administration is affected, including documentation for travel and birth registration. Food imports remain unprocessed at Beirut Port, exacerbating an already critical situation. According to the World Bank, Lebanon experienced the world's worst food inflation in the first half of 2022, with a 332 percent increase in food prices.

The war in Ukraine has had a huge impact and Lebanese food security was also hit by collapsing domestic infrastructure. The 2020 Beirut Port fire destroyed the country's wheat silos, leaving the government unable to store and distribute wheat nationally.

Caretaker Minister of Labour Mustafa Bayram estimated the strike is causing daily losses of $400,000. None of the interim proposals made by the caretaker government, like temporary cash bonuses, satisfied the strike committees, and many strikers insist they will not call off the action before their demands are met. Tarek Younes, of the Association of Public Administration Employees, told the press, "What will [the bonuses] do? Will it help you get to work, pay your electricity bill or your phone bill? You can do one of these, but then you can't feed your children, take them to school or get them healthcare."

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Port grain silos collapse during demonstration marking anniversary of Beirut port explosion in Lebanon

Protestoes marched through the Lebanese capital Beirut on August 4, marking the second anniversary of the 2020 port explosion that killed more than 200.

Grain silos at the port have been collapsing since then, with videos showing the remaining silos crumbling last month. On August 4, smoke was seen rising from the port area, and the silos were filmed crumbling.

West Bank shopkeepers in commercial strike after Israeli army killings

Shopkeepers in the occupied West Bank staged a protest Monday, after Israeli army forces killed three Palestinians and wounded 40 others in a pre-dawn raid on the city of Nablus.

Shopkeepers in Nablus, Hebron, Jenin, Qalqilya, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Salfit and Tubas closed their shops in protest. Protesters marched in Ramallah, before clashing with soldiers at a checkpoint. Clashes with the military were also reported at Tulkarm, Nablus and Hebron, with many injured.

Africa

National pay strike of South African metalworkers looms

Around 90,000 workers at components manufacturing companies, fuel stations, car dealerships, car cleaning and auto-spare assembly and panel-beating workshops are threatening strike action.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) said there is “seemingly going to be a national strike,” following the Fuel Retailers Association (FRA) offer of four percent for forecourt attendants, three percent for cleaners and cashiers over three years. The offer is based on NUMSA dropping demands for a night shift and transport allowance and medical aid for garage workers.

NUMSA is demanding a 12 percent wage increase. While NUMSA spokesperson Phakamile Hlubi-Majola said workers were willing to take to the picket lines, she hoped the dispute could be resolved through the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

South African ANC admin staff continue protests over non-payment of salaries

Administrative staff of South Africa’s ruling African National Congress (ANC) plan to spread their protests against the non-payment of salaries.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members have yet to be paid their July wages. This affects workers throughout South Africa, not just those who work at the party headquarters.

NEHAWU also claims wage deductions for provident funds were not paid into the relevant fund for the last three years. As a result, the families of ANC workers who died in the last three years have difficulty gaining access to the necessary support. Other employees lost their houses and cars because they could not keep up with bond and instalment repayments.

Local government workers and teachers continue pay strike in Enugu State, Nigeria

Local government workers and teachers in Enugu State, Nigeria are entering the third week of the strike begun July 28 to demand payment of the minimum wage.

The state began implementing the minimum wage for civil servants in 2020, but excluded primary school teachers and council workers.

At an August 9 press conference, the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) and the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) disclosed that they were being asked to call off the strike before negotiations. Chairman of the state NUT, Theophilus Odo, pleaded with the state government to pay the minimum wage “for industrial harmony to continue in the state.”

Sudanese miners in River Nile state continue strike against harmful practices

Sudanese miners in River Nile state are in the second week of a sit-down strike that has halted all mining operations in the area.

The strike, prepared by those living around El Ibeidiya in the Berber locality north of the Nile River, began at the start of August.

In addition to demanding improvement in mining processes to stop the use of toxic chemicals, locals are angry that none of the mining revenue is invested locally. The strikers are demanding improved services and employment opportunities, and the replacement of the manager of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, Mubarak Ardol.

Among the mines brought to a standstill by the strike is a Russian-owned gold mining company.

Namibian union calls off civil servants’ planned strike, accepts government’s below-inflation deal

A planned strike by 42,000 Namibian civil servants over the government's refusal to give them a pay rise was called off by the Namibian Public Workers Union (Napwu). Workers have suffered a pay freeze for seven years.

The government used the courts to declare the strike illegal. Media reports stated the IMF previously granted a loan on the condition of a pay freeze for civil servants.

The government then imposed a three percent increase in basic salary, with an 11 percent increase in housing benefit and a 14 percent increase in transport benefit. Napwu agreed to the below-inflation deal without balloting its members. Echoing government statements, Napwu general secretary Petrus Nevonga said, “This is the best we can do with limited resources.”

Inflation in Namibia climbed to six percent in June from 5.4 percent in May, and is likely to rise further.

Employees of TransNamib in the Namibia Transport and Allied

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Workers Union (Natau) will also ballot on strike action, after the union accepted an out-of-court settlement on July 27 that stipulates a vote on August 12.

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