

Airport and airline workers continue wave of pay strikes in Europe; UK postal workers to begin stoppages over pay and conditions; pensioners' protests at cost-of-living crisis continue across Iran; Lebanese public sector strike over collapse in living standards continues; electricity workers across Nigeria take indefinite national strike over pay and conditions

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 August 2022

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

### **Airport and airline workers throughout Europe continue wave of pay strikes**

Workers in airports and at airlines across Europe continue a wave of strikes aimed at reversing pay cuts agreed by the unions at the start of the pandemic. They are opposing the further deterioration of working conditions as passengers return to understaffed airports.

Pilots at EasyJet in Spain begin another three-day strike on Friday, following a similar stoppage last weekend. Members of the SEPLA pilots' union are demanding the reversal of cuts to their pay and conditions and a new collective agreement. SEPLA complained in a statement to *Europa Press* that after they agreed pay cuts during the pandemic, when the company claimed its "survival" was threatened, EasyJet took advantage of their "good will" and *increased* operations with its now-cheaper pilots.

The Spanish government imposed minimum service levels of around 60 percent on the EasyJet strike, banning most workers from joining the walkout. One more three-day strike is planned for next week.

Spanish cabin crew at Ryanair also continue their indefinite campaign of strikes, four days each week until January. The USO and SITCPLA unions say that so far around 300 flights have been cancelled since July due to the strikes. Minimum service levels of 80 percent and an agreement with the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union allowed Ryanair to run many services despite the strike.

Ryanair admits to having sacked several workers for defying the minimum service requirements. In an interview with *ABC*, Ryanair's HR director dishonestly claimed that "absolutely no one has been fired for following the strikes," but added, "If workers decide not to show up on a flight included in minimum services, the company can take action, as has

happened." The unions say that at least 11 workers have been fired for refusing to comply with "illegal" minimum service schedules. While accusing Ryanair of abusing the law, the unions organised no mass defiance, leaving individual workers vulnerable and appealing to a court process which will take years.

A strike is also planned at Iberia Express, the Spanish subsidiary of the International Airlines Group, on August 28.

At Lyon Saint-Exupéry airport in France, 160 security guards held a three-day strike on Saturday, August 13, according to *Lyon Mag*. The French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) said that the guards' pay had not increased since 2017. The previous Wednesday, ground handling staff at Munich airport also walked out on a five-hour warning strike over pay.

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."

Portway is owned by the Vinci Group, a France-based multinational which also owns ANA, the company managing most of Portugal's major airports. SINTAC and other unions representing ANA employees called off a strike planned for Friday, after reaching an agreement to negotiate a new collective agreement.

### **Logistics workers at Amazon and Rewe in Germany strike over collective bargaining**

On August 12, warehouse workers at two of Germany's largest logistics operators, Amazon and the supermarket chain Rewe, walked out on one-day strikes. Both strikes were called by the United Services Union (Verdi), which is demanding Amazon and Rewe negotiate new collective

agreements. Amazon workers walked out in the city of Bad Hersfeld, and Rewe warehouse workers in Eitting.

For years Verdi has called for Amazon to join the national collective agreement for the retail and mail-order sector, and called many short, isolated walkouts under this slogan. Amazon insisted on its right to determine wages unilaterally, according to *DW*, planning to increase pay to 12.50 euros per hour this autumn, only 50 cents above the minimum wage.

The Rewe Group owns the second-largest supermarket chain in Germany as well as tourism businesses, with total sales of 76.5 billion euros in 2021 and profits of 756 million euros, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The company is demanding an insulting pay rise of only 1.7 percent in the collective bargaining for wholesale trade in the state of Bavaria, while Verdi is demanding a pay increase of 4.5 percent backdated to May 2021 and an additional 45 euros per month. Inflation in Germany is 7.5 percent.

### **Thousands of workers in Norwegian electrochemical industry strike over pay**

On Monday, 1,422 workers in the Norwegian electrochemical industry began a stoppage called by the Industri Energi union after the failure of pay negotiations with the Norsk Industri employers' association, *Reuters* reported.

In a statement, Industri Energi emphasised how generous it had been to the industry at the expense of its members, having "settle[d] for zero wage increases in order to support the companies' competitiveness." Feigning confusion at the fact that Norwegian businesses did not show the same "good will," the union's president wrote, "The industry is operating with historically high profits. I am simply disappointed not to get an offer that reflects the economic situation in the industry."

According to *Reuters*, another 1,115 workers will join the strike from next Monday, still a small fraction of the 7,600 electrochemical workers represented by Industri Energi.

### **Indefinite strike of "home help" healthcare workers in Asturias, Spain**

Workers who provide in-home care walked out on an indefinite strike from Tuesday in the Spanish autonomous community of Asturias, with a large protest in the capital Oviedo.

The "home help" workers are demanding improved pay, rest time, and an increase of mileage payment in line with inflation. *La Nueva España* reported that many protestors said increased fuel costs meant it was "costing us money to go to work," particularly for those working in rural areas.

"Home help" workers throughout Spain joined strikes and protests recently against low pay and exhausting working conditions. In La Rioja, workers began an indefinite strike last week, and two weeks ago, workers in the Basque Country held a two-day stoppage.

### **Strike at Eurospin supermarkets in Italy over working conditions**

On Tuesday, workers at Eurospin supermarkets in the Italian region of Umbria walked out on a one-day strike over their working conditions. The CGIL, CISL and UIL unions reported "very high participation" among the 500 Eurospin workers in Umbria.

In a statement reported by ANSA, the three unions reported 14-hour days and other "intolerable" conditions: "Excessive workloads, exhausting shifts, the obligation for employees to also take charge of the cleaning of bathrooms and parking lots ... and forced transfers to distant locations."

### **Workers at Amazon subcontractor in France demand salaries as company announces closure**

Workers at Fast Despatch Logistics (FDL), a British logistics company which delivers parcels for Amazon in France, protested outside Amazon sites this week to demand payment of their salaries for July.

FDL announced last week it was ceasing all activity in France, with the loss of 1,700 jobs. According to *France Bleu*, the workers began their protest last weekend, and were told by an Amazon manager their salaries would be paid by the end of Sunday. Protests resumed on Tuesday after they were still not paid.

In June, FDL workers also walked out to protest their working conditions, denouncing the company for failing to maintain vehicles and forcing workers to pay for their own equipment. One told *France Bleu*, "Frankly, it looks like modern slavery." As their contracts are not terminated, they are left in limbo, unable to get a new job or redundancy pay. A protesting worker told *France Bleu*, "We feel that they want to push us to resign. They tell us to leave on our own so as not to have to pay us compensation. But we will not give up!"

### **Manufacturing workers at Kyte Powertech in Ireland strike over pay**

Around 400 workers at the Kyte Powertech transformer manufacturing plant in Cavan Town, Ireland, begin a campaign of strikes with a 24-hour stoppage on Friday. According to the *Anglo Celt*, members of the SIPTU union voted by almost 90 percent to strike, rejecting an offer from the Labour Court agreed by both Kyte and SIPTU for a three percent pay rise each year for three years.

Despite the massive strike vote, SIPTU announced only one stoppage so far, repeatedly emphasising its reluctance to fight the company. Demanding only a six percent pay rise while inflation in Ireland is more than nine percent, a SIPTU official told the *Irish Independent*, "We are certainly not chasing inflation." The company, backed by private equity fund MML Ireland, claimed it would be unable to afford a pay rise above the Labour Court's recommendation.

### **UK postal workers vote for additional action over working conditions with strike dates already set in pay dispute**

Around 115,000 UK postal workers are to hold four days of stoppages, August 26, 31 and September 8-9.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) members voted by a near 98 percent majority for the action after rejecting a pay offer of 5.5 percent. In a separate dispute over working conditions, postal workers voted by a

near 99 percent majority to hold walkouts. The subsequent ballot result was announced Wednesday, with the CWU expected to give dates for further action in the next few days. The *Daily Mirror* quoted a union source saying, “I think by the end of September you are going to be looking at eight days.”

### **UK dockers in Liverpool vote to strike over pay**

Over 500 UK dockers employed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC), Liverpool voted to walk out after rejecting a seven percent pay offer. The RPI (retail price index) inflation rate is 12.3 percent and expected to rise.

The Unite union members voted by a 99 percent margin for the action. MDHC is part of Peel Ports, the UK’s second largest port group.

Liverpool dockers conducted a 28-month long strike at the end of the 1990s over the sacking of more than 300 dockers after they honoured a picket line set up by dockers at Torside, a labour contracting company. Unite wrapped up the dispute in January 1998, with the dockers all made redundant and receiving a mere £28,000 settlement figure.

On Sunday, 2,000 dockers at Felixstowe port will walk out for eight days over pay.

### **Unions suspend strike of UK bus workers at Arriva North West after company makes new pay offer**

On Wednesday, the Unite and GMB unions suspended the month-long strike by around 1,800 UK bus workers at Arriva North West begun July 20. Drivers were due to return to work at 3am Thursday.

The suspension was announced following talks between Arriva North West and the unions at which a 11.1 percent pay deal was agreed. The latest RPI inflation figure released Wednesday is 12.1 percent and expected to rise.

Earlier this week the workers rejected a 9.6 percent pay rise by a 79 percent majority.

An article in the *Liverpool Echo* quoted Unite regional officer Dave Roberts saying, “Following our members’ very strong rejection of the company’s offer yesterday evening (Tuesday), Arriva have seen sense and met the demands of our members by tabling an 11.1 per cent pay deal. Unite’s negotiating team is recommending the offer be accepted and it is being put to members in a vote.

“The strike is suspended pending the outcome of the ballot and drivers are to return to work tomorrow to serve the needs of the community and public.”

The new offer is for a one-year deal of 11.1 percent backdated to April. A Unite press release announcing the deal gave no further details. The ballot result is expected Friday.

### **Stoppage by workers at DBS office in Liverpool, England over pay and conditions**

UK workers employed by Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS) in Liverpool began a six-day strike Monday.

HGS is an Indian-based IT services management company, which

provides contact centre and back-office facilities for the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). DBS provides police check information on people wanting to work with children or vulnerable adults.

The Public and Commercial Services union members rejected a 3.25 percent pay offer. The owner of HGS is on the *Sunday Times* Rich List and has a personal wealth of £24.5 billion. HGS directors and top management got a 13 percent pay rise last year.

The strikers are demanding at least the Living Wage Foundation figure of £9.90 an hour, paid sick leave, 27 days’ annual leave allowance, paid breaks and job security.

### **Strike of mobile home manufacturing workers in Wigan, England over pay and conditions**

Around 100 workers at Pemberton Park and Leisure Homes in Wigan, England walked out on August 10.

Despite the firm doubling its profits since 2020 and paying out £3.4 million in dividends, it only offered a three percent pay rise. Some workers are on just £12 an hour. The firm makes caravans and leisure homes.

The GMB union members are seeking a 10 percent pay rise and an end to fixed holiday periods. Apart from two days, workers must take annual leave in the summer or October school holiday periods. Additionally, they are seeking sick pay provision.

### **UK journalists to walk out over derisory pay offer**

Around 1,000 journalists working for major UK national and regional newspapers, belonging to the Reach PLC group are to walk out after rejecting a three percent pay offer.

They work for national publications including the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Sunday People*, *Daily Record* and *Daily Star* and regional papers including the *Manchester Evening News*, *Liverpool Echo*, *Birmingham Mail* and *Bristol Post*. Reach PLC is the largest UK national and regional newspaper publisher.

The National Union of Journalist members will strike on August 26, 31 and September 14-15. They will impose a “work to rule” from September 1-13.

### **Further walkouts by care workers in Bristol, UK over “fire and rehire” threats and pay cuts**

Over 100 UK workers at Bristol-based care company St Monica Trust will take further strike action after five days of stoppages in June and July. Staff working at the Russets and Sherwood care home in Sandford, North Somerset began a 48-hour stoppage on Tuesday, with workers at the Cote Lane retirement village in Bristol due to begin a two-day stoppage Friday.

The Unison union members, who work as care workers, registered nurses and residential home staff, oppose plans by the Trust which would see senior care workers’ weekend pay rates cut by 21 percent. Other staff will see a 10 percent cut, with workers losing around £400 a month. Other planned attacks on their working conditions include a 50 percent cut in sick pay and the imposition of unpaid breaks during shifts.

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

### **Staff at luxury UK department store receive threatening letters from company during pay ballot**

Around 150 staff at Harrods luxury store in Knightsbridge, London are currently balloting after rejecting a five percent pay offer. The ballot closes on September 1.

The Unite union members work in store services, engineering, maintenance and security. The ballot began August 11. Harrods sent letters on August 8, informing the workforce that due to recent changes in employment law, Harrods would employ temporary staff to cover for strikers. A Unite press release quoted from the Harrods letter. It noted, "We are therefore no longer restricted from engaging temporary workers should any industrial action take place now or in the future."

### **Unite union suspends planned strike of glass workers at St Helens, UK as company makes new pay offer**

The Unite union suspended the week-long strike of around 170 glass workers at the UK Pilkington factory in St Helens, due to begin Wednesday.

The stoppage of engineers' production operators, technicians and warehouse staff was suspended after the company came back with an improved offer. The workers rejected the original five percent offer. Should the workforce reject the new offer, further strike dates will be announced.

### **Protests in Shahrekord, Iran after nine days without piped water, as temperatures soar in the south**

Protesters demonstrated outside the governor's office in the Iranian city of Shahrekord, after going without piped water for nine days.

The Shahrekord area, with three major rivers, is the largest source of fresh drinking water in Iran. On August 7, there were reports of low or no water pressure in the city. It is thought that a pipeline from the Koohrang spring to the city was cut off because of water cloudiness following torrential rains.

More than 500 workers on oil and gas projects across southern Iran were hospitalised over the past few days because of the heat. At least two oil workers died this week in Abadan, in Khuzestan province, southwest of Shahrekord. At the southern port of Asaluyeh, at least 100 workers are reported hospitalised with heatstroke daily because of the working conditions.

Another worker died at work in the Khuzestan provincial capital Ahvaz a fortnight ago. While government offices were closed because of temperatures of more than 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit), government contractors refuse to suspend work.

The Shahrekord protesters chanted slogans against both local and national governments, shouting, "Only the street will give us our dues."

### **Iranian pensioners launch new round of protests at cost-of-living crisis**

On August 10, Social Security Organisation retirees and pensioners across Iran launched a new wave of rallies and protests against high prices, poverty, low wages and government corruption. Protests were reported in Ahvaz, Babol, Arak, Kermanshah, Shush and other cities.

Their protests, escalating since they began in June, are the focus for wider anger at a devastating economic and social crisis exacerbated by US sanctions.

According to the government's Labour Council, retirees are entitled to a 38 percent increase in their pensions because of factors including rising inflation, currency devaluation and rocketing prices of domestic goods and basic foodstuffs. The government approved a 10 percent increase, which does not cover basic needs.

The government is accused of looting the retirement fund intended for pensions. Protesters in Ahvaz, in the southwest, and Babol, in the north, chanted slogans accusing the government of stealing money from them. In Arak the chants specifically targeted Vice President Mohammad Mokhber.

At least 10 suicides related to economic hardship and "livelihood problems" were reported in the last three months.

### **Lebanese public sector strike continues as workers become more desperate**

About 15,000 public sector workers in Lebanon continue their indefinite strike, begun June 13, over the collapse of social and economic conditions.

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

Almost 80 percent of Lebanon's civil servants are on salaries of 1.5-2 million Lebanese pounds a month, something like \$1-2 per day.

As civil servants have no right to strike, the action began as widespread absenteeism but now they declare they are in open strike.

The Finance Ministry has insisted it has no money to meet their demand that wages be calculated on the basis of US dollar exchange rates, which would mean a fivefold increase in salaries. Instead, they offered minimal increases in travel allowances and a "motivation" bonus.

Nawal Nasr, head of the Public Administration Employees Association, called these "tricks whose worth rises according to wages, so that the highest wages get the largest benefits," and expressed scepticism that they would be paid at all.

It was reported this week that some officials in the vehicle registration service accepted this offer. As Nasr stated, this is "out of desperation. They feel total hopelessness and can no longer afford even the luxury of saying no."

### **Protests in southern Libya following tanker explosion**

Protests escalated across the oilfields of southern Libya since a tanker explosion in Bint Baya on August 1 that killed 22 and injured dozens. The explosion, the cause of which remains unknown, became the focus for

anger at conditions in the oil-rich Fezzan region. The absence of hospitals contributed to the death toll.

The protests were called by the Fezzan Anger Movement, formed in 2018 to protest the crisis in the region's infrastructure and development. The Anger Movement called for the oilfields to be shut down. After initially blocking the road to the El Sharara oilfield, they escalated their protests

Anger Movement coordinator Bashir al-Sheikh claimed success in closing down the southern oilfields, warning that the movement could spread across Libya "because everyone is suffering from crises."

### **Israel teachers' strike expected to hit start of school year**

A strike announcement is expected from Israel's Teachers Organisation union next Tuesday that will see high schools closed at the start of the school year on September 1.

The union negotiated with the Finance and Education Ministries for a month over pay and conditions. Among their demands are changes to matriculation reform, a second day off each week as part of a move to a five-day school week, five hours of "paperwork time" at home instead of at school, and negotiations on salaries, although the Organisation indicated its willingness to delay this.

In the early 2000s, salaries were raised on the basis of a productivity agreement. Additional "paperwork hours" and "private lessons" were done in school, lengthening the working day and reducing hourly pay. With an anticipated move to a five-day school week, these additional hours will still need to be done in school, extending hours even further.

Israel is suffering from a chronic shortage of teachers. Last month the Education Ministry reported a shortfall of around 6,000 teachers and preschool teachers ahead of the new school year.

### **Electricity workers across Nigeria take indefinite national strike over pay and conditions**

Nigerian electricity workers held a protest on August 16 and walked out indefinitely August 17 after the government failed to address grievances on staff welfare and pay.

The National Union of Electricity Employees issued a 14-day ultimatum to the CEO of the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) on May 18 this year, threatening to strike if complaints about discriminatory promotion practices were not resolved.

Another grievance is the authorities' failure to pay entitlements to former staff of the now-defunct Power Holding Company of Nigeria in December 2019.

Pickets ensured that the Mando TCN Station in the Kaduna state capital was brought to a halt on the first strike day. Power supply was disrupted in many areas. The strikers vowed to stay out until their demands are met by the Federal Government. The strike will worsen an ongoing electricity supply crisis.

### **Strikes over pay and conditions by medics spread across Sudan**

Strikes by groups of medical workers are spreading in Sudan against bad

management, unpaid salary increases and poor conditions. Strikes on these issues are common and widespread in recent months.

New salaries for 2022 were supposed to offer some respite at a time of rising inflation. Many workers, however, are still paid the pre-2022 salary, even though they are more than halfway to 2023.

Doctors in Northern State are on strike to demand the removal of the director general of the state's Ministry of Health. They announced the strike in all localities from August 10. The medics accused the director-general of creating new problems from the time of his appointment, stopping the supply of oxygen to the Dongola Specialised Hospital in his first 72 hours and then disclaiming the Ministry's responsibility for oxygen supply.

In North Darfur, the strike is in response to the state government's failure to pay civil servants' arrears of the new salary increases, and bonuses for March, April and May. The strike in West Darfur was suspended after the first outbreak of the monkeypox virus in Sudan.

### **Reception teachers in Western Cape, South Africa protest demanding permanent employment**

Reception teachers from schools throughout Western Cape, South Africa marched last Tuesday to demand the Western Cape Department of Education (WCED) grants them permanent employment and recognition of their qualifications. This is the third protest this year, due to no response from the WCED, which says this is a national, not a regional issue.

The Grade R (reception) teachers have to sign a contract every year and are employed by school governing bodies not the WCED. They are recognised as teachers by the South African Council for Education but not WCED, which means they have no pension funds or medical aid.

Ruwayda Jones, a teacher for nearly two decades told the *Cape Times*, "Imagine working for a company or a department for more than 10 years but you are still under a contract, no permanent post. One day you might just wake up with no job. Food and fuel prices are rising but salaries are not. Enough is enough."

### **Unions suspend strike at South African Revenue Service to enter talks**

The National Education, Health, and Allied Workers Union and the Public Servants Associations (PSA) called off ongoing pay strikes at the South African Revenue Service to enter negotiations.

Earlier this month, strikes continued against a sell-out deal by PSA which cut the initial demand from 10 percent to 6.5 percent, a de facto pay cut as inflation was 7.4 percent in June, the highest in 13 years.

### **South African Water Workers pay strike in district in Eastern Cape ends with below-inflation pay deal**

The week-long strike by South African water workers in the Amathole District, Eastern Cape province was suspended after unions accepted a below-inflation 6.2 percent pay offer.

Workers will also get a one-off COVID risk allowance payment of R20,000.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members have had no pay increase for three years. According to Mongezi Mabhece of the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union, a signed collective bargaining agreement valid for three years was ignored.

Management blamed water outages across a number of towns, affecting thousands of households, on the strike and worker sabotage. This was challenged by shop steward Lorna Lubedu, who said the real cause was management's failure to service pumps and maintain the water infrastructure. In some areas these were not working since September 2020, because the electricity cables were stolen and not replaced.

Whilst some residents were planning a protest over water shortages, others said taps had been dry for years and were not even aware there was a strike.



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