Airline and airport workers across Europe continue fight to reverse cuts to pay and conditions; educators' pay strikes across Europe as new school term begins; refuse workers in Newham, London walk out against low pay as bin strikes set to continue in Scotland; protests in Soweto, South Africa against electricity cut-offs

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.*

Airline and airport workers throughout Europe continue fight to reverse cuts to pay and conditions

Workers at airlines and airports across Europe continue a widespread wave of strikes triggered by worsening conditions as passengers return to understaffed airports. As well as improved working conditions, workers are fighting to reverse pay cuts agreed by the unions at the start of the pandemic.

Baggage handling workers on the Danish Island Bornholm walked out on wildcat strike over pay from August 26, and began a picket the next day, successfully preventing managers from scabbing. The 3F trade union opposed the walkout, issuing a press statement that "The strike is against the agreement [between 3F and management], and we encourage the employees to resume work." The strike forced the prime minister to move a planned energy summit from the popular tourist island to her own residence in Copenhagen.

On Monday, following a ruling from the Labour Court, workers ended their strike under threat of fines.

Workers at Portuguese ground-handling company Portway concluded three days of strikes on Monday, which cancelled more than 200 flights nationwide. The Civil Aviation Workers' Union called the strikes after accusing Portway of creating a "climate of psychological terror, where threats proliferate and disciplinary proceedings are instituted."

Strikes continue among cabin crew at Ryanair and Iberia Express in Spain. The USO and SITCPLA unions accuse Ryanair of violating Spanish labour law, and workers at Iberia Express demand a pay rise to make up for a seven-year pay freeze. Pilots at EasyJet also walked out to demand the restoration of pre-pandemic working conditions.

Around 50 Belgian pilots at Ryanair are taking the company to court to demand the reversal of a 20 percent pay cut, pushed through during the pandemic. This cut took place across Europe, but the pilots' unions in Spain and France agreed "pay restoration" deals which do not fully reverse the pay cut until 2027.

In Germany, pilots at Lufthansa and its subsidiary Eurowings voted almost unanimously in favour of strikes, with the first one-day stoppage by Lufthansa pilots on Friday called by the Cockpit Union (VC). Keeping the disputes separate, VC has not yet announced any dates for strikes by Eurowings pilots.

Dutch regional transport workers begin strikes, while unions suspend national rail strikes

Local transport workers in the Netherlands will begin a series of rolling regional strikes from September 6, lasting four days.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) is calling for a new collective agreement with pay rises, and improved workloads as staffing levels are low. If the regional transport companies do not negotiate a new agreement, the FNV threaten a national strike on September 16.

Rolling strikes by workers at national state-owned Dutch Railways (NS) were suspended by the unions, citing the importance of the trains to the Formula 1 Grand Prix this weekend. The FNV fraudulently claimed it is going to "organise a powerful wage wave" of strikes, but in previous comments to the media the director of the FNV said it would not demand pay keep up with inflation: "We are in favour of decent wage increases, but we cannot pass everything on to the employers."

Italian dock workers strike against maintenance job losses

Workers in the Italian port of Trieste held a strike on August 27, to block the transfer of parts by Wärtsilä, a Finnish multinational which recently announced it would cut 450 jobs at its Trieste factory.

Il Piccolo reported that members of the CGIL, CISL, UILTRASPORTI and UGL unions intend to block the transfer of parts until a meeting

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between the unions, company and government, scheduled for September 7. There have been several stoppages to protest the job losses since they were announced in July.

24-hour strike in Thessaloniki, Greece after police attack striking wine workers

Hundreds of workers joined a protest and 24-hour strike called in support of striking workers at the Malamatina wine factory in Thessaloniki, Greece on Thursday.

The day before, riot police attacked striking Malamatina workers and others at their rally, including two MPs, injuring many. The Malamatina Workers' Union announced additional strikes for the next two weeks, denouncing the police and company "terrorism."

Malamatina workers have been on strike for over two months, demanding reinstatement of 15 sacked colleagues. Their strike has been criminalised, with union leaders arrested and they have suffered several attacks by police.

Hungarian teachers in pay strike defy minimum service requirements

On Thursday, teachers throughout Hungary begin pay strikes despite previous government threats that the stoppages are "illegal." Last February, 20,000 teachers took part in warning strikes.

Teachers are required to provide some level of childcare during the strike, and the Democratic Union of Teachers (PDSZ) said it would provide strike pay for any teacher whose pay was docked for refusing to comply with this anti-strike measure, although it would not organise mass defiance.

The PDSZ called the strikes as part of a long-running pay dispute. According to *Napi.hu*, in a PDSZ survey more than 99 percent of teachers said the government's offered pay rise of 14 percent was inadequate. With inflation at 13.7 percent and rising, the government offer will be a pay cut.

Nursery school assistants in France strike for improved working conditions

Specialised assistants in nursery schools (ATSEM) held a one-day national strike in France on Thursday, the first day of the school year, called by the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions and Force Ouvrière.

ATSEM workers demanded improved working conditions, including more stable career progression, professional training, and guaranteed staffing levels. Another one-day ATSEM strike was called by the General Confederation of Labour for Monday.

ATSEM workers are responsible for assisting with the guidance and hygiene of young children and their environment.

France Bleu published a letter written by one ATSEM worker to the president, in which she wrote, "For the professionals that we are, we are paid at minimum wage, so it's really not enough. There have been salary increases during the Covid crisis, but the ATSEM were never brought to light." There are more than 50,000 ATSEM workers in France.

Serbian teachers begin school year with partial strikes

Teachers in Serbia will hold partial strikes on Thursday, the first day of the new school year, shortening the length of classes to only 30 minutes.

The Union of Education Workers of Serbia (USPRS) called the partial stoppages and 15 rallies in cities throughout the country. They demand a 20 percent pay increase, payment of the 50,000 dinars unpaid salaries owed by the government, and limiting class sizes to 24, *Vreme* reported.

Teachers were offered a 12.5 percent pay rise. Inflation is currently 12.8 percent and rising, and teachers' monthly salaries are already 10,000 dinars below the national average. Official data cited by the USPRS show that there are over 42,000 teaching vacancies.

Polish teachers protest pay restraint, while unions refuse to call strike

Teachers in Poland began the school year on Thursday with protests, hanging union flags and posters about their pay dispute, but the unions so far refuse to call strikes.

With inflation at 16 percent, the Polish Teachers' Union (ZNP) is calling for a 20 percent pay rise. The government offered a nine percent increase. Moreover, *Dziennik Wschodni* reported a statement from the ZNP saying the government's offer was limited to certain groups of teachers, and 80 percent of teachers would suffer a pay freeze.

The ZNP called for the prime minister to meet them and other unions before September 10, to "prevent an escalation" of the teachers' protests.

Refuse workers in Newham, London walk out as further bin strikes planned across Scotland against low pay

Refuse workers including loaders and HGV drivers in Newham in the UK capital walked out on Saturday for seven days.

The 130 Unite workers are demanding a £2,300 annual pay rise, as opposed to £850 for bank holiday working offered by the employer. They demand pay parity with other workers in London doing the same job. They are paid £22,850 a year, compared to £24,763 at Greenwich.

The Labour council at Newham has emulated Coventry Labour council's recent strike-breaking against a bin strike, employing agency workers to scab.

Waste and recycling workers at councils across Scotland will walk out in a further strike on September 6, unless employers come back with an improved pay offer. The latest offer from Scottish local authorities' organisation Cosla is worth just five percent with a one-off lump sum.

RPI inflation is 12.3 percent, and expected to rise to 17 percent by the year's end and 23 percent in the first quarter of 2023.

On Monday, Unite and the GMB union rejected another offer to other council workers, which Unison will put to its members with a recommendation to reject. The offer included an increase of £1,925, part of which was not consolidated, unlike that given to council workers in England.

Inverclyde council is closing schools and early years settings September 6-8, when Unite and GMB members including cleaners, janitors, pupil support staff, technical and catering staff walk out.

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A cleanup has begun of streets in Scotland strewn with overflowing bins and uncollected rubbish attracting rats, though it will not be complete before the next stoppages.

Criminal barristers in England and Wales begin indefinite strike over pay and cuts to legal aid

Criminal barristers in England and Wales walked out indefinitely on Tuesday, over pay and cuts to legal aid.

The 2,273 Criminal Bar Association (CBA) members voted by 80 percent to escalate their dispute, after holding previous stoppages on alternate weeks. The government refused talks with the CBA since action began two months ago. At least 6,000 hearings were disrupted since action began. There was already a backlog of 59,000 crown court cases.

Some junior barristers earn less than the minimum wage or £12,000. They demand the government increases legal aid by 25 percent. The government funds legal aid, which enables legal defence for those who cannot afford it, but cuts have led to quarter of criminal barristers resigning, and overwork for those remaining.

A report by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice Sir Christopher Bellamy warned that unless government cuts since 2010, aggravated by inflation, were reversed, "the system as a whole would grind to a halt," and "the adversarial system of the criminal justice system cannot function without the defence."

UK journalists pay strike back on at major publisher

Journalists at the British national *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Star* newspapers walked out on Wednesday over pay, to be followed by stoppages September 14-15.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members voted against a three percent pay offer. The NUJ suspended a strike planned for August 26 to enter talks with the employer, which broke down.

The newspapers are owned by publishing giant Reach, whose chief executive Jim Mullen earned £4 million last year. Starting salaries for Reach reporters are just £22,000. Reporters on Reach's local papers can earn even less than £20,000.

The British Association of Journalists members voted to accept the deal.

Workers in Scotland at oil and gas giant strike against "fire and rehire" slashing wages by a third

Workers at US oil and gas giant Baker Hughes in Montrose, Scotland are striking against the company's "fire and rehire" tactics, which slashed annual wages by £10,500—29 percent.

In June, the company issued redundancy notices at the two sites in Montrose, telling workers unless they signed inferior contracts by August, they would lose their jobs.

The 110 Unite members walked out on August 29, after a strike vote of 87.3 percent in an 87.5 percent turnout. The strike will last until September 14, and then 48-hour stoppages are planned until November 16.

The company specialises in the latest manufacturing and engineering processes for the oil and gas industry.

UK brewery workers in Preston, England walk out over pay

UK workers at Budweiser Brewing Group's Samlesbury Brewery in Preston began a week-long stoppage on August 29 over pay, and plan further strikes in September.

The 275 GMB members voted by 93 percent to reject a real terms pay cut. Strikes began in June.

Civil servants strike ballot in pay dispute at UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Civil servants at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) rejected a three percent pay offer, which would leave some reliant on food banks.

The FDA and Public and Commercial Service (PCS) union members may strike, or work to rule, doing no more voluntary, unpaid overtime. A strike ballot is expected to begin September 6.

Two years ago, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) merged with the Department of International Development (DFID) to form the FCDO. Promised pay parity has now been rejected, as "circumstances have changed." Staff formerly at the DFID were offered a £2,000 "London Allowance." Former FCO staff have had pay rises capped at £2,000.

Different sectors to hold strike ballots as UK strike wave continues

More sectors are planning strike ballots, as the UK was hit this week by national stoppages by Royal Mail and BT workers against below-inflation pay offers.

More than 1,000 cleaners, security and maintenance staff, airport ambassadors and firefighters at London's Stansted airport began balloting August 26, until September 19. They will decide whether to strike to restore a 10 percent pay cut imposed during the pandemic.

The GMB union is to ballot 50,000 school support staff, offered a £1,925 annual pay increase by local government, as well as 100,000 local government workers over pay.

The GMB began balloting National Health Service (NHS) workers from August 30 to September 27, after being offered a percent pay uplift of one-seven percent. A pay ballot of NHS workers in England by Unite closes September 11.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which has never called a strike in England, Wales and Scotland, confirmed it will hold a consultative ballot of its several hundred thousand members on whether to strike. The ballot runs September 15 until October 13. The RCN is calling for an award of five percent above inflation. Frontline nurses are £10,000 worse off than they were in 2008.

PCS union members begin a national strike ballot over pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy terms on September 26.

Royal Mail workers are set to hold further stoppages September 8-9.

Train drivers at 12 operating companies plan a further 24-hour strike on September 15, following two strikes in July and August. After a three year

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pay freeze, the Aslef union members demand a pay increase. The strike will affect services between London and the Midlands, in the north of England, Scotland and Wales, as well as commuter services in the south east, Midlands, north and London overground.

Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) members at nine train operators plan a 24-hour strike September 26, in the national rail dispute over pay, jobs and conditions.

Israel teachers' unions call off wages and conditions strike with pledge to industrial peace

At the last minute, two Israeli teachers' unions have called off strikes that would have delayed the start of the new school year today.

The Teachers' Union, which represents teachers in elementary schools, junior highs and kindergartens, announced yesterday that it had reached an agreement with the Finance Ministry. The Teachers' Organisation, representing high school teachers, announced its own settlement yesterday evening.

In return for wage increases, the Teachers' Union has agreed to an extended workload, undermined legal status for teachers and a commitment to prevent industrial action.

Negotiations over pay and conditions had been protracted and bitter. On Tuesday, the government attempted to issue a restraining order to prevent the strike proceeding.

Yesterday, the Teachers' Union announced an agreement with the Finance Ministry, which Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman called "not ideal, but … the best we can achieve." Union general secretary Yaffa Ben-David called it "real good news," saying it would "protect their working conditions and improve their salaries."

Lieberman has agreed to a higher wage settlement than expected, with a total cost of 4.5 billion shekels rather than the 4 billion previously mentioned by the Finance Ministry. Starting teachers' salaries are to rise by 30 percent, from 6,920 shekels ($2,100) to 9,000 shekels ($2,700) per month, with a one-off 10,000 shekel bonus after three years.

Long-serving teachers will receive a monthly rise of 1,100 shekels, rather than the 300-400 originally proposed. The deal, however, was won by further concessions on conditions, to be policed by the union. Tenure will now only be granted after three years' service rather than two, as at present, and the union has agreed to shortening the process for dismissing tenured teachers.

A previous salary increase in the early 2000s was won on the basis of a productivity agreement. The present agreement also includes an expansion of summer classes. These will now run through July 31 and be extended to the fourth grade.

The vacation schedule is also being adjusted, with schools to open on Lag B'Omer and the Fast of Esther, as well as on the Issru Chag days following Sukkot and Passover. Schools will now close between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, with teachers' also receiving two additional vacation days.

Workers at Lebanon's mobile network operators strike over wages

Workers at Lebanon's two state-owned mobile network operators began an indefinite strike for improved wages last week. The two operators, Touch and Alfa recently increased the fees they collect, and workers are demanding a pay rise to offset this.

Since August 25, branches and selling points of both companies closed. The sale of lines and recharge cards was stopped, as were customer services and maintenance work.

The strike was called after negotiations with the companies broke down. The workers' syndicate for the two companies said it welcomed "any efforts that contribute to finding a solution that would preserve employees' full rights."

Lebanese judges continue strike over wages and conditions

The General Assembly of Lebanese Judges last week decided to extend their strike over "the difficult financial, social and health conditions" they face. They issued a statement after a meeting of around 400 of the country's 550 judges.

More than half Lebanon's judges stopped work in protest at the Central Bank reneging on a decision to pay their salaries at a US dollar exchange rate of 8,000 LL. The official exchange rate is only 1,507.5 LL and the Lebanese pound has lost 95 percent of its value in the last three years, so public sector salaries collapsed.

Judges of all levels, from the president of the Supreme Judicial Council down, took part in the strike.

Former general prosecutor Judge Hatem Madi told *Arab News*, "My salary is now worth $300, and I occupy a high judicial rank." He said junior judges' salaries now "amount to less than $75."

This is the first time the Lebanese judiciary has been disrupted this way, said Madi. "What is happening reflects the collapse of the country."

Residents in Soweto, South Africa protest power cut-offs

Residents in Soweto, South Africa blocked roads with rocks and burning tyres when City Power authorities disconnected illegal power connections on August 24.

A spokesperson for City Power, Isaac Mangena, said, "The problem… starts with people coming to the City of Johannesburg wanting to find a job without any place to stay, and when they find an open space, they erect shacks and connect themselves to services."

Over half the population of South Africa, some 30.3 million people, are living in poverty, according to the World Bank.

Food manufacturing workers at RCL Foods, South Africa strike over pay rise

South African workers at RCL Foods' Piemans brand, headquartered in Westville, KwaZulu-Natal began a strike on August 25 over pay.

The South African Industrial Commercial and Allied Workers Union members want an hourly pay rise of R30 an hour. The leading food manufacturer in South Africa offered R2 an hour. The workers bake 500,000 pies daily.

Strike certificate issued at South African state-owned rail freight company over pay

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A strike certificate has been issued at South Africa's state-owned freight and logistics company Transnet, after pay talks broke down on August 25.

The SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and United National Transport Union (UNTU) put in for a 13 percent wage rise, revised down to a below-inflation 12 percent over three years. The company first offered 0 percent, then 1.5 percent with no back pay. The unions had three rounds of talks with the employer since May.

If, after 30 days of issuing the certificate the employer, does not table a further offer the unions think they can foist on their members, SATAWU general secretary Jack Mazibuko said, "We will be left with no other choice but to serve them with a 48-hour strike notice and embark on industrial action."

According to *BL Premium*, UNTU general secretary Cobus van Vuuren said the union would call industrial action as a last resort. "However, it is a right that we will exercise unless Transnet provides an offer that is aligned with the increased cost of living, cost of housing, medical costs and, of course, CPI that has increased to 7.8% in August," he said.

Nigerian lecturers reject government intimidation, continue strike

Nigerian lecturers rejected government efforts to intimidate them into returning to work and are set to continue their strike indefinitely. They walked out on February 14, demanding better salaries and funding, and an end to problems with payroll software that have caused years of late payment of salaries.

The Nigerian government recently refused to pay lecturers for their time on strike, even though the action was legal.

A National Executive Council meeting of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on August 29 decided to extend the strike, after area votes showed a majority of members wanted to continue the strike.

While other education unions are telling their members to return to work, new strikes are breaking out. Lecturers at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze in Anambra State began a three-week strike on August 23 against management's refusal to pay entitlements for duties such as teaching supervision.

As rail strike continues in Namibia, railway bosses call in union to secure a sellout

As the rail strike in Namibia continues, the bosses of employer TransNamib asked the rail workers' union leaders to begin talks to secure a return to work.

The workers have been on strike for over two weeks, following the failure of the Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (Natau) and TransNamib to agree a pay deal.

Without any evidence, TransNamib management blamed workers for damaging a train it is estimated will cost N$330,000 to repair: "Bullying, intimidation and harassing of any non-striking worker or damaging company equipment is an absolute violation of the strike rules, and as such, we will now use the legal recourse to remedy the matter."

When management rejected the union's original pay demand, Natau reduced their demands.

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