School strikes across Europe over pay and conditions as new term begins; UK court workers to walk out over conditions, joining criminal barristers on indefinite strike; South African bus drivers in Johannesburg and Pretoria in wildcat strike over pay; Nigerian lecturers continue strike over pay and education funding

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.*

Widespread strikes in French schools over pay and conditions

At the start of the new school year, teachers and other school workers throughout France walked out to demand improvements to working conditions and adequate classroom resources.

On Wednesday, workers in crèches in Paris walked out on a three-day strike called by five unions, according to *actu Paris*. The childcare workers called for an increase in pay and staffing levels, and the unions have asked for them to receive the same bonus given to some healthcare professionals last year. The strike follows a one-day walkout last week of 500 workers.

In Grenoble, a "large majority" of teachers at the Jules Vallès de Fontaine college walked out on Monday and Tuesday to oppose an increase in class sizes, *France Bleu* reported. One teacher told the broadcaster that classes capped at 24 students a few years ago were increased to 26, and this year to 27.

France Bleu also reported that teachers in seven schools in Île-de-France, the region containing Paris, walked out on Monday against conditions including closure of some classes. This has resulted in classes with more than 30 students due to budget cuts. One parent, who helped start an online petition, said, "Every time schools reopen, we have to fight against class closures." Walkouts and protests by teachers and parents against class closures, increasing class sizes and job cuts were also reported by local media in Perpignan and Lyon.

Teachers and parents protested in a 30-minute walkout on September 2 at the Quatre Vents college in the town of Lanmeur, to demand the hiring of additional workers to accompany disabled students (AESH). According to *Le Télégramme*, there are 18 students who require individual support to attend the school, but only two AESH workers, down from five last year. Around eight are needed. One teacher told the newspaper, "We don't want to end up having to make choices between the students who need help and the others. It's a matter of equality."

Nine months' strike by migrant workers at French post office subsidiary

More than 100 undocumented migrant workers in the French department of Val-de-Marne just outside Paris have been on strike for nine months at Chronopost and DPD, subsidiaries of the state-owned La Poste, *BFM* reported.

The workers have demanded permanent residence and denounced low pay since December.

The leader of the Socialist Party (PS), Olivier Faure, attended a rally in support of the strikers on Wednesday, and cynically declared, "I came to demand justice with them." During the presidency of the PS's François Hollande, *Statista* records that around 70,000 migrants were forcibly removed from France.

National school strike in Turkey for permanent contracts

On Monday, teachers and other workers in schools throughout Turkey walked out on a one-day strike called by the All Education Employees Union (TEÇ-SEN).

A TEÇ-SEN press release denounced the use of many different contract types throughout the sector, saying "We are on strike today to recruit all contracted personnel." It also called for school workers to receive a holiday bonus, which they are currently excluded from.

More teachers join indefinite pay strike in Norway

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Next Monday, hundreds more teachers will walk out throughout Norway, bringing the total number of striking teachers to 3,600 since an indefinite strike began in June, *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

The dispute between three teachers' unions and the municipal employers' association KS began after the unions accused KS of giving teachers a far smaller pay rise than other workers in its recent pay deal.

Teachers in Oslo did not join the strike, as the unions agreed to a 3.71 percent pay increase for teachers in Oslo schools, which are not part of KS. The Education Association, one of the three unions, said it would accept the same deal from KS, well below current 6.8 percent inflation.

Unions call off teachers' strikes in Catalonia, Spain

Last week, unions representing teachers in Catalonia, Spain called off a strike planned for September 7 after reaching an agreement with the government which fails to fully reverse cuts made in June.

Teachers walked out repeatedly during the last school year, demanding the restoration of a non-teaching hour in the middle of each day for preparations and the reversal of years of cuts.

The Catalonian Ministry of Education agreed to restore the hour for preparation, but only from January 1, starting the new term under the same conditions as last year. It also agreed to hire 3,500 new teachers, but unions representing teachers on insecure contracts pointed out this does not even make up for the 4,000 jobs lost in June, *Crónica Global* reported. The paper reported comments from teachers on social media denouncing the unions as "traitors" and saying, "they have sold us."

Italian national strike against violence towards rail workers to be held Friday

Train drivers and conductors throughout Italy will walk out on an eight-hour strike on Friday, opposing continued violence against rail workers. Six unions called the strike following "yet another aggression against staff on duty on trains," and called for employers to increase resources for staffing levels, *ANSA* reported.

Belgian bus drivers hold four-day wildcat strike

On September 1, bus drivers at three bus depots in the Belgian province of Hainaut began a wildcat strike which lasted all weekend. Drivers at TEC, the state-owned company which operates public transport in the French-speaking provinces, walked out in three depots after management refused to grant requests for leave.

While involved in negotiations to end the strike, the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium repeated management's excuses to the media, telling *Sud Presse*, "It is not possible to allocate leave. Most holidays are refused, because of the lack of staff, absenteeism, difficulties in recruiting new drivers."

Public sector pay strike continues in Kosovo

Public sector workers in Kosovo continue an indefinite strike over pay this week, after unions rejected the government's offer of a mere 50 euros per month pay rise. The strike began on August 25 for the demand of a 100 euro pay rise.

Many teachers joined the strike, prompting furious attacks by the government, who accused them of committing a "violation of children's fundamental right to education."

Strike in regional public transport and national rail in the Netherlands

Regional public transport workers in the Netherlands began rolling strikes this week, walking out in different regions between Tuesday and Friday.

Members of the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) will join the strikes in services operated by many private groups, including Kéolis and Arriva. According to the *Algemeen Dagblad*, members of the Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV), the second-largest Dutch union federation after the FNV, will not join the strike, as the CNV has signed a collective agreement for regional transport.

A national one-day strike in local public transport is also planned for September 16. The FNV and CNV also both called a one-day strike of workers at the state rail company NS this Friday, limited to the north-western and western regions. Further regional strikes are planned for September 13 and 15.

Warning pay strikes of train and bus drivers in Germany

Workers in local public transport in Germany held several warning strikes over the past week.

In the state of Schleswig-Holstein, the United Services Union (Verdi) called a 48-hour strike from September 2. Verdi is negotiating a new collective agreement with private bus operators in the state, covering around 2,000 bus drivers, the *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported, and is calling for hourly wages to increase by 1.95 euros.

On Thursday, train drivers also stopped work in the south-western states during collective bargaining between the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) and the local rail company SWEG, owned by the state of Baden-Württemberg. The GDL accused SWEG of "trying to cement a two-class society in the company" as it refused to negotiate a single collective agreement covering all workers and would only discuss an agreement for the subsidiary SBS.

Delivery workers continue strike for pay rise in Baku, Azerbaijan

Around 1,200 delivery workers at Wolt in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku continue an indefinite strike begun September 1, *Haqqin* reported.

The workers are demanding pay be increased from 3 gapiks per 100 metres to 6 gapiks (0.04 euros), that separate orders are not counted as only one delivery when they are close, and that Wolt replace its GPS navigation system with a better one.

Wolt is a Finnish multinational company which runs an app-based delivery service. It was acquired by US company DoorDash in an 8.1

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billion dollar deal in June.

Growing support for striking wine workers in Thessaloniki, Greece

Hundreds of people joined a rally in the Greek city of Thessaloniki on Tuesday in support of striking workers at the Malamatina wine factory, and another protest was held in front of the Minister of Labour in Athens.

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

Strike of UK court workers announced as criminal barristers' walkout continues

Workers in UK magistrates courts will begin a nine-day stoppage on Saturday. They are employed by HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), part of the Ministry of Justice.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are opposed to the introduction by HMCTS of the Common Platform digital case management system. They say its introduction led to an increased workload and worsening conditions.

The nine-day walkout by magistrates court workers comes alongside an all-out continuous strike by criminal barristers over legal aid and pay begun Monday.

The 2,273 Criminal Bar Association (CBA) members escalated their dispute after holding previous stoppages on alternate weeks. The government has refused talks with the CBA since action began two months ago. At least 6,000 hearings were disrupted since action began, on top of 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 led to quarter of criminal barristers resigning, and overwork for those remaining.

Second 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 second 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 strike follows a six-day strike begun August 15, after PCS members rejected a 3.25 percent pay offer, subsequently raised to 3.5 percent. The owner of HGS is on the *Sunday Times* Rich List, with 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.

Flooring production workers in Greater Manchester, UK locked out prior to planned strike

Around 200 workers employed by Polyflor Ltd, which makes vinyl floor tiles, were to begin series of two-hour strikes Wednesday against low pay. However, prior to the stoppages the workforce at the site in Whitefield, Greater Manchester was informed by email not to turn up for their shift on Monday and that they were laid off for at least a week.

The GMB union members rejected the company's final pay offer of eight percent with strings. GMB regional organiser Stephen Boden said, "Members are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, all they are looking for is a fair settlement of 10 percent, which is still below inflation. Meanwhile the company dishes out £24m to shareholders."

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

The response of the GMB to the lockout was to call on the company to resume talks and take part in "meaningful negotiations."

Workers at the site held several stoppages a year ago in a fight to demand a substantial pay rise.

Walkout of luxury car interior manufacturer workers in Tipton, UK over pay offer continues

Around 100 workers employed by CabAuto near Birmingham, England are continuing their pay strike begun August 23. It is scheduled to last until September 16. They walked out after rejecting a three percent pay offer.

The Unite union members, who make car interiors for luxury cars such as Aston Martin and Bentley, are on £9.90 an hour. Some of the strikers use food banks because of the low pay. They held a one-week stoppage in June, followed by a two-week stoppage in July, over the same issue.

The company, part of Adler Pelzer Group, made profits of £118 million in 2020.

Stoppage of educational qualification authority workers in Scotland over pay offer

Several hundred workers at the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA), which accredits educational awards, walked out Thursday. Further stoppages are planned for September 15,16, 22-23, 26, 29-30 and October 3. An overtime ban, lasting until November 30, also began Thursday.

The Unite union members are calling for improved pay, rejecting an offer made by the SQA of between 5.5 and 7.7 percent.

The strike could affect around 55,000 exam appeals.

Pay strike of aerospace workers in Scottish capital

Around 20 aerospace workers employed by Honeywell at their production and assembly plant in Edinburgh, Scotland are to strike Thursday, then each subsequent Thursday for 12 weeks.

The Unite union members voted by a near 80 percent majority for the stoppage, in opposition to the company's 2.75 percent pay offer followed

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by no rise in 2024.

Strike of council workers at Northern Ireland local authority scheduled to begin Thursday over pay

An all-out strike by workers at the Causeway Coast and Glens council in Northern Ireland is due Thursday. The Causeway Coast and Glens council is a local government district covering most of the northern part of Northern Ireland.

The Unite union announced the stoppage would go ahead after a council meeting Tuesday rejected by a single vote proposals to settle the dispute with a two pay-point increment and lump sum.

Workers at Grosvenor Casinos in London to hold 72-hour strike over pay

Around 150 workers employed as dealers and croupiers, as well as restaurant staff, working for Grosvenor Casinos in the UK capital, are to begin a 72-hour walkout on Friday.

The Unite union members voted by a 91 percent majority for the action. They rejected retention bonuses of between £600 and £800, and are seeking a higher wage in face of the enormous cost-of-living crisis hitting all workers. The Rank Group, which owns Grosvenor Casinos, made £74 million in profits so far this year.

Further UK sectors in strike ballots over cost-of-living crisis

Around 300 workers at the Amazon fulfilment centre in Coventry, England voted in a consultative ballot by a 97 percent majority in favour of balloting for strike action.

The GMB members are angry at a 35p an hour pay offer with workers facing an enormous erosion of pay due to the cost-of-living crisis. There have been spontaneous walkouts by Amazon workers at various UK sites. The GMB is keen to offer its services to Amazon to circumvent the spontaneous actions of Amazon workers. The GMB said it will meet with members at the Amazon Coventry site to plan the next moves, which could include a formal strike ballot.

Around 32,500 UK firefighters are to ballot in October over a two percent pay offer made in June.

The firefighters held their first nationwide strike in 1977. The nine-week strike over a pay claim saw the then Labour government bring in the army to break the strike. The next nationwide strike of firefighters was not until 2002.

Bus drivers at Stagecoach in Sunderland are to ballot over a pay offer of four percent this year and two percent next year. The GMB members will ballot September 12-26.

Protesting Iranian oil workers arrested in Tehran

Around 70 Iranian oil workers were arrested at a protest held outside the Oil Ministry building in Tehran last week. Most of those arrested work in the South Pars gas field.

Organised by the Free Union of Iranian Workers, they called for improved wages and conditions and lower taxes as well as improved health care.

The workers were subsequently released but they are calling for records of the arrests to be deleted and their names not passed to oil security personnel. A nationwide rally of oil workers is planned for September 19.

Lebanese judges among public sector workers striking over pay

Since mid-August around 400 Lebanese court judges have taken strike action alongside other public sector workers such as teachers and civil servants.

Representing around two thirds of the Lebanese judiciary, they are protesting the collapse in living standards. The collapse in the Lebanese currency has led to the pauperisation of large sections of the Lebanese population. A mid-level judge’s salary used to be worth the equivalent of $4,000. Today that figure is $200, with junior judges on around $100.

Strike of Lebanese telecom workers over pay

Telecom workers at the Lebanese state-owned Ogero walked out on August 30 and are expected to remain out until at least Thursday, to demand a wage increase.

The stoppage led to internet outages across Lebanon. The company recently raised the fees charged to businesses, but the wages of the workers were not increased. The collapsing Lebanese economy and currency is eroding the spending power of all Lebanese workers. The Lebanese currency lost 90 percent of its value against the US dollar.

Many Lebanese businesses are dependent on Ogero for a high-speed internet connection and the outages are impacting them.

South African bus drivers in Johannesburg and Pretoria in wildcat strike over pay threatened with dismissal

Around 1,000 drivers at the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco) in Johannesburg continue their wildcat pay strike begun September 1, despite company threats of sacking. Workers demand a six percent pay increase and bonuses for 2020.

Putco was granted exemption by the bargaining council from the rise and bonuses on the grounds of pandemic losses. The company was also granted an interdict from the Labour Court making the strike illegal. Around 22,000 commuters across Johannesburg and Pretoria are affected.

A Putco spokesman announced workers would be dismissed if they did not apply in writing to return to work by 5 p.m, on Wednesday. He said strikers were turning up at “Putco depots to blockade, to burn tires and stop some of the workers who are not on-site from entering some of our facilities.”

Drivers complain of lack of uniforms and dirty, poorly maintained buses. Inflation in South Africa hit a 13-year high of 7.8 percent in July.

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Public sector workers' pay strike looms in South Africa

Workers in South Africa's public sector, including nurses, teachers, social workers and other public servants are threatening strike action over pay. They have not had a wage or pension increase since 2020, and their demand for an eight percent pay award was rejected by the government in talks on September 2 with the South African Federation of Trade Unions.

The government's three percent offer is part of a three-year plan, so is effectively only a one percent increase.

Over half the population of South Africa, or 30.3 million people, are classified as living in poverty, according to databank.worldbank.org.

Forensic health workers in Eastern Cape, South Africa on go-slow over owed monies

Health workers in forensic pathology in the Eastern Cape, South Africa have been on a go-slow over non-payment of overtime for over two weeks.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members employed by the Department of Health are owed three months of overtime. They are refusing to work overtime and or be on standby.

The Health Department, who blame the Department of Public Health and Administration, are threatening to use private forensics to cover the backlog.

NEHAWU claim that if this is possible then the overtime payments could be made.

South African security guards threaten pay strike

Around 500,000 security guards in South Africa plan to walk out on September 26 over pay. They demand a 16 percent wage rise or R900, against the employers' five percent offer.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union and Democratised Transport Logistics and Allied Workers Union, with 28 other unions, are in negotiations with employers and said they will consult their members on a new, undisclosed offer.

Strike by Nigerian lecturers over pay and funding continues

Nigerian university lecturers have been on strike for over six months. Lecturers walked out on February 14, demanding increased salaries and education funding, and an end to problems with payroll software that caused years of late payment of salaries.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) reached an agreement with the government on these issues in 2009, which the government reneged on.

The government says lecturers will not be paid for the time they have been on strike, even though the stoppage is legal.

The ASUU said lecturers do not need the support of their students to remain on strike. At the same time, Emmanuel Osodeke, ASUU president, tried to blame students and their parents for the union's predicament, saying if they had supported the strike then the lecturers possibly "wouldn't have been where we currently are."

Union suspends strike of Nigerian electricity workers over redundancy pay

After Nigerian electricity workers walked out on August 17, the National Association of Electricity Employees (NUEE) quickly suspended their strike.

Two weeks later, the union admitted the government has yet to meet their demands, despite promises over redundancy payments.

National vice president of the NUEE (East) Joe Oforka said, "We are ready to down tools should the federal government fail to implement the 2019 agreement with the union on the non-payment of exit entitlements."

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