

Teachers continue strikes over pay and workload across Europe as court bans nurses' strike in Finland; UK unions including RMT, CWU, Unite, RCN, PCS cancel strikes because of queen's death as attacks on living conditions continue; unions intervene with sellout deal to end Putco bus drivers' wildcat strike in South Africa; Nigerian aviation workers ground flights to protest strike ban

## 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.*

### **Finnish court bans nurses' strike, government continues to push anti-strike law**

This week the Helsinki District Court imposed a strike ban on intensive care nurses due to walk out over pay on Friday. The Tehy and SuPer nurses' unions initially called a strike for September 6, but this was postponed by the government and eventually banned under the threat of a six million euro fine.

The ruling Social Democratic Party (SDP) brought forward a "Patient Safety Act," claiming this was necessary to prevent deaths of patients during the strike. Despite the court's ban, the SDP pushed ahead with the bill. Prime Minister Sanna Marin told the media the anti-strike powers were necessary, as "We cannot know in advance what decisions the court will make" over future strikes.

According to *YLE*, a Tehy official described the anti-strike law as "slavery." The law would not only prevent strikes but could even be used to compel nurses who have resigned to work during strike action under the threat of fines. *YLE* reported that almost 500 nurses and other care workers requested to be struck off the professional register, which Tehy said was to protect themselves against being forced into work.

The ex-Stalinist Left Alliance, in coalition with the SPD government, showed its right-wing colours insisting there was no need for a new law as the courts had already banned the nurses' strike. However, Marin said "The government is united here and everyone votes for this law."

### **Latvian teachers begin indefinite strike over pay and workloads**

Over 23,000 teachers and education workers in Latvia will begin an indefinite strike on Monday, after the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) rejected a "compromise" offer from the government, *Baltic News Network* reported.

The government's proposal reportedly increases pay by between 8.4 and 11.2 percent, for most teachers less than half the current 21.5 percent inflation rate. LIZDA also criticised the proposal to balance workloads, as it would not be fully implemented until 2028.

### **Thousands more teachers join indefinite pay strike in Norway**

On Tuesday, another 3,000 teachers in Norway joined a pay strike begun in June, bringing the total number of striking teachers to around 6,500, *NewsInEnglish.no* 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.

One of the three unions, the Education Association, has over 190,000 members, but only called a tiny fraction to walk out. Teachers in the capital have also not joined 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 said it would accept the same deal from KS, well below the latest inflation figure of 6.5 percent.

### **Hungarian teachers continue rolling strikes in defiance of minimum service requirements**

Teachers in Hungary are continuing a wave of strikes begun at the start of September over pay, despite government threats that the stoppages are

“illegal.” The Democratic Trade Union of Teachers (PDSZ) and the Teachers’ Union (PSZ) accuse the government of unilaterally imposing “minimum service” requirements, usually decided by a court.

The PSZ published a list of “loopholes” on its website which teachers could use to organise rolling strikes beginning from Monday. Both the PSZ and PDSZ have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights over the violation of teachers’ right to strike.

### **Public sector pay strike continues in Kosovo**

Workers in public administration and teachers in Kosovo continue an indefinite strike over pay this week, demanding a 100 euro monthly pay rise. The government refused to budge from its offer of a mere 50 euros, rejected by the unions last week.

Teachers faced multiple threats from the government and media attacks, with accusations of “violation of children’s fundamental right to education,” and the prime minister complaining, “This method of blackmail is not fair.”

RTK Live reported on comments by the Minister for Education. The Minister called for the Union of Education, Culture and Science of Kosovo to follow the example of betrayals by teachers’ unions in North Macedonia and Bulgaria, who called off strikes before their members’ demands were met, or in Norway where the unions only involved a small fraction of the members in walkouts.

### **Home care workers in Asturias, Spain continue indefinite strike over conditions and against privatisation**

In-home care workers in Asturias, Spain, continue their indefinite strike begun on August 16. The workers in the “Home Help” service (SAD) are demanding improvements in pay and working conditions, as well as more secure contracts. Eighty percent of SAD workers are on part-time contracts.

The strike was called by the Platform for SAD Workers and the SAD Workers Collective of Asturias, which denounced the larger national Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers’ Union (UGT) for negotiating a real-terms pay cut and attempting to force it on workers by undemocratic means.

*La Nueva España* reported on Thursday that a motion of support by the pseudo-left Podemos party “removed from the debate the main request of those affected: that the city remunicipalise the service.” The paper quoted a member of the Platform for SAD Workers saying, “They are trying to get us to surrender.”

### **GPs strike against funding cuts in Berlin, Germany**

Around 2,000 GPs’ practices closed their doors in Berlin on September 7, to protest the revoking of a 2019 reform. The Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians called an all-day “training event” to get around a ban on strikes, the *Berliner Morgenpost* reported.

A doctor commenting on the website of broadcaster *rbb* explained that without the reform, a GP is paid 35 euros per patient for the first 1,200 patients treated in each quarter of the year but receives only 3.50 euros per

patient after that number. The reform ensured that GPs always received 35 euros for treatment of a new patient from the statutory health insurance funds, but with its cancellation GP practices will receive 400 million euros less funding, according to *t-online*.

### **French air traffic controllers strike over pay and staffing levels**

Air traffic controllers in France will hold a one-day national strike on Friday, called by the National Union of Air Traffic Controllers (SNCTA), which represents most of the workforce. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation told airlines to cancel half of all flights for the day, and the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation has told other flights within Europe to avoid French airspace.

The SNCTA is asking for a pay rise in line with inflation, currently at 5.9 percent, and measures to guarantee recruitment of staff. It also called for a three-day strike from September 28 if the government provides no “concrete element or guarantee” towards its demands.

### **National public transport strike in Italy against lack of safety at work**

Workers on all forms of public transport throughout Italy will walk out for an eight-hour strike on Friday against lack of safety at work, including threats of violence.

Five unions called the strike to demand increased staffing levels and protection. The national body which regulates strikes issued a “strong appeal” for the stoppage to be restricted to four hours, but the unions said, “the invitation to reduce the duration of the strike to a ‘merely symbolic’ dimension cannot be accepted.”

Only two days after a similar one-day stoppage September 9, a female train driver in Lazio was attacked by a passenger and hospitalised. ANSA quoted a disgraceful statement from her employer, Cotral, attacking any workers who pointed to their responsibility: “The company condemns any form of violence, even if only verbal, against its staff ... and all protests outside the rules that contribute to raising the levels of tension, preventing the smooth running of the service.”

### **Italian airport workers strike over pay and insecure contracts**

On Monday, workers at airports throughout Italy joined a 24-hour strike called by the “grassroots” unions, USB and CUB. The national secretary of CUB told ANSA, “Prices are increasing at 10 percent while pay has been at a standstill since 2017,” and denounced increases in workload.

*Contropiano* reported that following the last four-hour strike in July, further stoppages throughout August were banned by Italy’s anti-strike laws.

### **Workers at Scottish bus manufacturer walk out over pay**

Around 400 workers at the bus manufacturing company Alexander Dennis Ltd (ADL) in Falkirk, Scotland began a stoppage Tuesday. It is

scheduled to last till midnight Friday.

The Unite union members, who work as paint sprayers and coach builders at the company's Camelon and Larbert sites, rejected a four percent pay offer, and a subsequent offer of an initial four percent from April to October, to be increased to 6.6 percent from October.

A further two-week strike set to begin October 3 is also scheduled. ADL is owned by Canadian-based New Flyer Industries. It has a full order book, including one to supply the Scottish government with 172 green buses.

### **UK college lecturers to walk out over pay**

UK lecturers at 26 further education (FE) colleges voted by a near 90 percent majority for stoppages over pay.

The University and College Union (UCU) members will strike for 10 days over a four-week period. They will hold a three-day strike beginning September 26, followed by a two-day strike beginning October 6, a two-day strike beginning October 10 and finally a three-day stoppage beginning October 18.

The Association of Colleges, the employers' representative, offered a 2.5 percent pay rise, when inflation is over 12 percent. FE lecturers' pay fell by 35 percent since 2009. They are paid around £9,000 less than school teachers.

Lecturers at three colleges in northwest England held a two-day stoppage last week over pay. Pickets were in place at Burnley College, Manchester College and Oldham College.

### **Further planned strikes of UK dockers in Felixstowe and Liverpool**

Around 1,900 workers at Felixstowe port in Suffolk, on England's east coast will walk out on September 27 for eight days in a second round of stoppages. They work as crane operatives, tug boat operators and stevedores at the port.

The Unite union members held an eight-day stoppage, begun August 21. They rejected a seven percent pay offer from port owner CK Hutchison Holding Ltd, which paid out £198 million in dividends since 2017.

Felixstowe is the UK's largest container port, responsible for about 48 percent of container traffic. It handles 4 million containers a year from 2,000 ships.

Around 500 dockers working for Peel Ports Ltd at the Port of Liverpool are also due to begin a two-week strike on September 20 over pay. They rejected a revised offer from the company on Monday. The strike was to begin September 19, but was postponed a day to avoid clashing with the queen's funeral.

### **UK Amazon workers in Coventry begin strike ballot over pay**

Hundreds of Amazon workers in Coventry began balloting for strike action over pay on Thursday.

The 300 GMB members reject a derisory pay offer of 35p an hour, voting 97 percent in a consultative ballot saying they are prepared to strike. Pay would rise from £11.10 to £11.45 an hour for Tier 1 workers, and £11.35 to £11.70 for workers with more than three years at the

company. Working conditions at the fulfilment centres are likened to slavery.

The workers staged a wildcat strike over two days in August, including a sit-in at the canteen, with more workers demonstrating at sites in Tilbury and Swindon. Similar walkouts took place at the BHX4 warehouse in the West Midlands, the BHX1 depot in Rugeley and the BRS1 warehouse outside Bristol.

### **Further strike of refuse workers in Newham, London over pay**

Around 130 loaders and drivers working as refuse collectors for the London Borough of Newham will hold a two-week stoppage beginning September 20. This follows a week-long strike begun August 27.

The Unite union members are seeking a pay rise. They receive around £2,000 a year less than refuse collectors working in neighbouring Hackney and Greenwich.

A Unite press release of September 14 announcing further action dismissed claims by Newham's Labour Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz that workers were offered a pay rise of between 13.8 and 17.9 percent. The press release notes, "The council's offer is worth a 'measly' £950—only if workers work every bank holiday week. In reality, bosses in Newham have offered zero per cent on workers' basic pay."

### **Following death of UK monarch, rail union suspends planned strikes**

Following the death of UK monarch Queen Elizabeth II on September 8, the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union postponed strikes planned for September 15 and 17. The strikes comprising 40,000 rail workers at Network Rail and 14 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are part of an ongoing series of 24-hour strikes begun June.

An RMT press release announcing the suspension read, "RMT joins the whole nation in paying its respects to Queen Elizabeth. The planned railway strike action on 15 and 17 September is suspended. We express our deepest condolences to her family, friends and the country."

The stoppages are in opposition to massive restructuring involving cuts in jobs, attacks on pensions and for improved pay.

A strike on September 15 by train drivers belonging to drivers' union ASLEF affecting 12 TOCs was also postponed. Strikes by rail workers belonging to the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) were called off. A stoppage by TSSA members at Avanti West Coast planned for September 15-17 was called off, as were 24-hour strikes at Network Rail and nine TOCs, due to begin September 26.

To date the RMT has not announced further walkouts.

### **UK postal workers' union calls off second day of two-day strike following UK monarch's death**

A two-day strike by 115,000 UK postal workers began September 8, but the Communication Workers Union (CWU) cancelled the second day following the queen's death.

Workers are opposing the imposition of a well below-inflation pay rise and attacks on jobs and conditions. Previous strikes took place at the end of August.

A further 48-hour strike is scheduled to begin September 30.

### **PCS union postpones strike of UK magistrates' courts workers after Queen's death, but barristers' stoppage continues**

A planned nine-day stoppage of workers at the UK magistrates' courts due to begin September 10 was postponed by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union due to the queen's death.

The workers employed by HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), part of the Ministry of Justice, oppose the introduction of the Common Platform digital case management system. They say it has led to increased workloads and worsening conditions.

All-out continuous strikes by 2,273 barristers, members of the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), over legal aid levels and pay began on September 5 and are continuing. The CBA has, however, called off planned demonstrations due to take place during the period of official mourning.

The CBA members escalated their dispute after holding previous stoppages on alternate weeks. The government refused talks with the CBA since the action began two months ago. At least 6,000 hearings were disrupted, 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 severe overwork for those remaining.

### **Unite union postpones stoppages of bus workers in Kent, UK because of queen's death**

Following the strike of more than 600 bus drivers at Arriva at garages in Gillingham, Maidstone, Gravesend and Tunbridge Wells in Kent on September 5, the Unite union called off stoppages planned for September 16 and 20, citing the mourning period for the queen.

The drivers, whose pay is as low as £12.12 an hour, rejected a 10 percent offer from the company, whose original offer was 7.8 percent. The next scheduled strike is due September 30.

### **UK teachers to ballot over inadequate pay offer**

The UK's largest teachers' union, the National Education Union (NEU) is to ballot its 450,000 members over a five percent pay offer—a real-terms pay cut.

The consultative ballot begins on September 24 and closes October 14. Depending on the result a formal ballot for industrial action will take place in November.

### **Unite union suspends strike of educational qualification authority workers in Scotland as employer makes new offer**

The Unite union suspended planned strikes by several hundred workers

at the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) which accredits educational awards, due Thursday and Friday. They held a one-day strike last week. Unite suspended the strike following a pay offer from the SQA.

A BBC news website article explained the "SQA said the offer would mean an overall average consolidated increase of 5.9%, excluding pay progression."

The Unite members previously rejected an offer of between 5.5 and 7.7 percent. The same BBC item stated, "Unite the Union welcomed the revised offer and announced its members would take part in a consultative ballot."

Currently further strikes are scheduled for September 22-23, 26, 29-30 and October 3.

### **Iranian government arrests water shortage protesters**

Last week, the Iranian government announced 25 arrests following protests last month in the western city of Hamadan over water shortages. Cuts to water supplies lasting more than a week led to protests calling for the resignation of the governor and "incompetent officials."

### **Protests against executions in Iran**

Daily protests outside Iranian judiciary offices in the capital, Tehran, which began last week, continued into this week. The protests were mounted by relatives of those on death row, slated for execution. The protesters were harassed by Iranian security forces, who arrested 20 of the demonstrators on Sunday. According to Iranian government statistics, 57 judicial executions took place between August 23 and September 11.

### **Unions intervene with sellout deal to end Putco bus drivers' wildcat strike**

South African bus drivers at the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco) ended nearly three weeks of wildcat strike action on Tuesday, after the unions including Numsa pushed through a sellout deal.

Thousands of workers had blocked bus depot entrances in Johannesburg, and picketed depots in Soweto, Pretoria West and Mpumalanga in Gauteng province for a six percent pay increase, back pay and bonuses promised in 2020.

Losses incurred by Putco during the pandemic in 2020 were cited by the company as the reason for non-payment of the increase and bonus. This is currently being looked at by the courts, as two rulings have been made.

The company agreed to the six percent pay increase but this will not be backdated, and over one hundred workers who were dismissed for misconduct and intimidation will not be reinstated. These workers were part of a group of more than 1,000 workers issued letters of intent to dismiss them on Monday. Sixty-seven are driver-conductors, and 38 are technical staff.

The stoppage, which affected over 150,000 commuters, ended after three days of talks between four trade unions and Putco. A union spokesperson, Sizwe Pamla, said, "Employers should understand that if they fail to soberly handle this growing resentment, it will only harden attitudes and fuel the rising militancy and struggles for better wages and

better working conditions.”

It was reported that the unions agreed to sign a written undertaking that no member will participate in any unprotected strike action, and that the prescribed dispute settlement procedures provided for in law and collective agreements will be followed to resolve any dispute.

### **South African refuse workers in eThekweni Municipality on wildcat strike threatened with dismissal**

Workers at Durban Solid Waste in eThekweni Municipality, South Africa, have taken wildcat strike action and go-slows against cuts to their overtime pay. Overtime was cut by 50 percent from August 1.

Workers who used municipality trucks to block roads are being charged and threatened with dismissal.

### **Nigerian aviation workers ground flights to oppose strike ban**

Nigerian aviation workers, including pilots and air traffic controllers, grounded flights from Nigeria on September 12, to protest an attempt to change the law banning them from striking. New bills covering the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria and four other aviation agencies include a clause designating them as essential services, banning any “strikes, lock-outs, pickets, blockades, service disruptions, etc of any kind.”

The union bodies involved are the Air Transport Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers, National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE), Association of Nigerian Aviation Professionals and Amalgamated Unions of Public Corporations, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees.

The aviation unions portrayed the changes as the work of a rogue individual without official government consent. NUATE Secretary General, Ocheme Aba criticised the way the new laws “usurp the powers of the minister of labour.” The unions are calling on the Nigerian President to reject the new laws, which are currently awaiting his assent.

### **Sudanese electricity sector workers in two-day strike**

Workers in Sudan’s electricity sector began a two-day pay strike on September 6.

The action began when employees at the Ministry of Energy and Oil in Khartoum began a sit-down protest in the ministry on September 5, to demand implementation of the 2022 new salary structure including a pay rise. Security forces were called in to bring the sit-in to a halt. The demand was taken up more widely and became a strike across the electricity sector the following day.

Safety is also a major concern for employees. One worker died in Port Sudan, capital of Red Sea state, on September 4, from an electric shock when repairing a fault on an electricity mains system. Power cuts in Sudan are an everyday occurrence, and some rural areas are without any power at all.

### **Gambian commercial drivers continue sit-down strike in Brikama**

Gambian commercial drivers are continuing a sit-down strike in Brikama, begun September 12.

Gambia Transport Union President Omar Ceesay said, “For us, all our demands are important. We want the government to reduce the fuel price; reduce the number of police checkpoints on the main highways; reduce the fees at the Senegambia Bridge and also the issue of driver’s licence.”

Ceesay reported that 90 percent of the drivers joined the strike. Police confirmed that two striking drivers were arrested by the police for obstructing drivers wanting to work. Those arrested were later released.



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