Teachers’ strikes continue across Europe over pay and conditions; national strike by UK criminal barristers over legal aid and pay; strikes and protests across Iran after death of young woman arrested for not wearing hijab; Nigerian university lecturers’ stoppage continues in face of government attacks and union sabotage; strikes across Sudan by doctors and civil servants continue over lack of pay

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 September 2022

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

Teachers’ strikes over pay and conditions continue across Europe as school year starts

Underpaid teachers working in understaffed schools across Europe, are continuing a wave of strikes begun as schools opened in September. In Norway, 1,800 more teachers walked out over pay this week, bringing the total number of striking teachers since June to 8,200, *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

The Norwegian media made increasingly hysterical calls for the government to intervene and impose a pay settlement. Online newspaper *Nettavisen* alleged striking teachers were causing “a danger to life and health.” Any forced settlement would likely be in line with the 3.71 percent pay rise the unions accepted for teachers in Oslo, who did not join the walkouts. One of the three unions involved in the strike, the Education Association, said it would accept the same deal for other teachers nationwide, despite inflation being 6.5 percent.

Teachers and other public sector workers in Kosovo continue an indefinite strike begun August 25. The Union of Education, Culture and Science of Kosovo (SBAShK) and other unions are calling for a 100 euro monthly pay rise across the board, rejecting an offer of 50 euros from the government.

As in Norway, there has been a relentless campaign by the Kosovan government and media to turn parents and students against teachers, claiming the right to education was being violated. But a rally opposing the strike in the city of Peja drew only ten participants, according to *RTK Live*.

In Latvia, the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) called off a strike of 23,000 teachers at the last minute, agreeing real terms pay cuts, and delaying changes to workloads until September 2023. According to *The Baltic Times*, the lowest paid teachers will see their monthly salary increase from 900 euros to 1,080 euros. This is a 20 percent pay rise, but spread across two years, and so effectively less than half the current annual inflation rate of 21.5 percent.

Nursery teachers in the city of Banja Luka in Bosnia and Herzegovina also walked out in a one-hour warning strike on Wednesday. According to *Al Jazeera*, they have not had a pay rise in 17 years, and a pay rise agreed for August was not respected by the city government.

Thousands of Belgian workers join national strike against pay restraint and energy prices

On Wednesday, around 10,000 workers joined a major rally in Brussels, many travelling from other parts of Belgium. The Belgian trade unions called a rally and one-day walkout, asking for measures to reduce energy bills, and urging the government to review the pay restraint law. Public transport workers and others in the capital stopped work en masse.

According to the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, there are many households in Belgium who do not qualify for means-tested subsidised energy prices, and pay the market price, which is 5,000 euros higher per year. The unions also criticised the 1996 “wage norms” law, which legally prevents pay rises from being higher than in neighbouring countries.

A “pay index” is supposed to compensate workers with automatic pay increases in line with inflation. However, major companies recently intensified a campaign against the index, demanding the government allow them to pay one-off bonuses instead of increasing wages, meaning workers’ pay will fall behind rising prices.

Health workers join national strike in France against understaffing

© World Socialist Web Site

Healthcare workers throughout France joined a national strike on Thursday, calling for an increase in hiring and job security, with hundreds joining rallies in multiple cities. The General Confederation of Labour called the short walkout and another for September 29, warning that workers are angry about social inequality in the face of President Macron's statement that French people should be prepared for "sacrifices" to support the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Community and voluntary sector workers in Ireland strike over pay inequality

Workers in community and voluntary care organisations in Ireland began a three-day strike on Wednesday, denouncing the fact that they are paid less than equivalent workers employed directly by the public sector, despite often doing the same work.

The three unions who called the strikes appealed to the government to intervene and guarantee better pay and conditions in the sector, citing high turnover rates of up to 33 percent annually, *RTÉ* reported. The government, however, insisted that as the care organisations are private companies, it could not make decisions on pay, despite funding them.

Dutch public transport workers continue stoppages, while unions shut down national rail strike for below-inflation pay deal

Workers in local public transport in the Netherlands continue a series of rolling strikes, with several stoppages in bus services and regional railways this week called by the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV).

The *Algemeen Dagblad* reported that hundreds of transport workers also joined a demonstration organised by the FNV in The Hague last Friday, calling for increases to pay and staffing levels.

The FNV also announced it will call nationwide stoppages of the 4,000 coach drivers who drive rail-replacement services as well as private trips. The FNV is calling for a pay increase of five percent plus 100 euros per month, which would still fall below current inflation of 12 percent, and is calling to limit the maximum working day to 12 hours.

The unions also ended rolling strikes at the state rail company NS last week, accepting a below inflation deal which would increase workers' wages by only 9.25 percent over 18 months. NS workers will vote on the agreement in the next few weeks but have already faced a campaign in the media declaring the real terms pay cut a "bumper pay deal" which will set off a "wage wave."

Home care workers' strike ended in Asturias, Spain after narrow vote to accept pay deal

The five-week strike of 3,500 in-home care workers in Asturias, Spain ended this week, with a 60 percent vote to accept a proposal from the Asturian Service for Extrajudicial Conflict Resolution. Only 786 workers managed to vote on the proposal, just as in the previous voting assembly which narrowly rejected an offer from the employers' association. The Workers' Commissions and General Workers' Union did everything possible to restrict participation and give workers no time to study the proposals.

The terms of the deal depend on when the concession is renewed for the in-home care service, *La Neuva España* reported. In any case, there is no backdated pay rise for 2021, and until the contract is renewed a maximum 5.1 percent pay rise is spread over five years. If the contract is renewed, the pay rises between 2021 and 2025 are a total of 18.1 percent, which at the current inflation rate of 10.5 percent will wipe out any gains 20 months into the contract, leaving workers far worse off at the end.

Public transport workers strike against tiers and privatisation in Athens, Greece

Public transport workers in the Greek capital, Athens, walked out for a 24-hour strike on Wednesday called by the Labour Centre of Athens (EKA) against a new law on public sector workers passed that day.

The Press Project reported that the EKA bill introduces a two-tier system of employment, opens the door for the widespread use of temporary contracts, allows the minister of finance to sell state assets, and paves the way for the complete privatisation of state-owned companies.

The government sought a court order to declare the strike illegal, which was granted retrospectively on Thursday as statutory minimum service levels were not observed, *ef.syn* reported. Not satisfied with this ruling, the official government spokesman suggested the court should have acted more quickly and the law should be changed to fast-track injunctions against strikes.

Ukrainian refugees in Poland strike against discrimination

Ukrainian refugees at a factory which manufactures Christmas decorations in the Polish city of Gliwice held a two-day strike against their discriminatory treatment, *Strana.ua* reported this week.

One worker from the factory told the news site that Ukrainian workers had eight z?oty (1.67 euros) deducted from their wages covering the lunch break, a policy which was not applied to the Polish workers. He said that as the factory was entering a busy period, the management relented after two days, and agreed to give all workers paid lunch breaks.

Strana.ua also detailed the conditions under which many Ukrainians in Poland work. The worker continued, "There are shifts of 12 and even 15 hours, many night shifts. Everything is paid at the same rate: 15–16 z?otys per hour. … Many, in order to earn more, are ready to work for 15 hours, and on weekends they fill their hours."

All-out strike of UK barristers continues as newly appointed government Justice Secretary agrees a meeting

All-out continuous strikes by the UK's 2,273 barristers over legal aid levels and pay began on September 5.

The newly appointed UK government Justice Secretary Brandon Lewis met Criminal Bar Association (CBA) representatives on Tuesday. Lewis described the meeting as constructive, with further discussions to follow, but urged the barristers to end their walkout. The previous Justice Secretary, Dominic Raab, refused to meet them since the dispute began in April this year.

© World Socialist Web Site

The CBA called off planned demonstrations due to take place during the period of official mourning for the queen's death.

The CBA members escalated their dispute after holding previous stoppages on alternate weeks. 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 are demanding 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 a quarter of criminal barristers resigning, and severe overwork for those remaining.

A 15 percent rise in fees is due to come into effect at the end of September, translating into a £7,000 a year pay increase. However, the rise will only apply to new cases and not the thousands of cases caught in a backlog that is denying clients their rights to due process.

Northern Irish council proposes new pay offer to end six-week refuse collectors' strike

The strike by refuse collectors at Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon council in Northern Ireland is now in its sixth week. Rubbish is piling up in the streets as a result of the stoppage over pay and conditions. At a meeting of the council on Tuesday night, it proposed a new deal to end the dispute.

The Nipsa, Unite and GMB union members will now consider the new deal. Strike action by council workers at Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council is continuing after workers rejected the latest pay offer.

UK, London bus drivers at Arriva to walk out over pay

Around 2,000 bus drivers employed by Arriva in London are due to begin a continuous strike October 4, to push for a pay rise "in line with the real inflation rate (RPI) of 12.3 percent."

The Unite union members are based at eight depots across north and east London: Ash Grove, Barking, Clapton, Edmonton, Enfield, Palmers Green, Tottenham and Wood Green. Arriva, responsible for nearly 20 percent of services across the London area, is owned by German state rail company, Deutsche Bahn.

In a separate dispute, around 600 drivers working for Arriva at garages in Gillingham, Maidstone, Gravesend and Tunbridge Wells in Kent will walk out on September 30. This follows a one-day strike on September 5. Planned stoppages on September 16 and 20 were called off following the queen's death.

The Unite union members' pay is as low as £12.12 an hour. They rejected previous offers of 7.8 and 10 percent. The Unite press release announcing the new strike dates says the drivers are seeking a pay rise in line with the current inflation rate.

Unite agreed a below-inflation deal at Arriva Northwest of 11.1 percent in August, refusing to organise unified action with bus workers in the same company or between companies.

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 began a two-week stoppage Tuesday to demand a pay rise. This follows a week-long strike begun August 27.

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

A Unite press release on 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."

UK non-academic staff strike over pay

Staff working as administrators, cleaners, library, security and catering staff across 16 universities in England and Scotland began a series of strikes, with different universities striking on different dates.

The Unison union members rejected a three percent pay offer made by the employer, the University and College Employers Association, and instead are seeking an inflation plus two percent rise.

The list of universities taking part with dates is:

Birkbeck (University of London) 4 October; Edinburgh Napier University 20-21 September and 3-4 October; Glasgow Caledonian University 3-4 October; Kings College London 27-29 September; Leeds Beckett University 3-4, 6 October; Liverpool Hope University 4, 11, 13 October; Liverpool John Moores University 26 September and 4, 11 October; London South Bank University 4-5 October; Manchester Metropolitan University 4-5 October; Robert Gordon University 20-21 September and 3-4 October; School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) 26-27 September and 4 October; University of Glasgow 20-21 September and 3-4 October; University of Bristol 26-28 September; University of Leeds 28-30 September and 3-4, 8 October; University of the West of England 20 September; University of Winchester 20-21 September.

UK college lecturers to walk out over pay

UK lecturers at 26 further education (FE) colleges will begin 10 days of stoppages over four weeks from Monday next week. This will be 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 University and College Union (UCU) members voted by a near 90 percent majority for stoppages over pay.

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

The colleges taking part are Abingdon and Witney College, Bath College, Blackburn College, Bournville College of FE, Bridgwater and Taunton College, Carlisle College, Chichester College Group, City College Plymouth, City of Bristol College, Croydon College, Derby College, Halesowen College, Hereward College of FE, Lambeth College, Lewisham College--Deptford, Lewisham College--Lewisham Way, New College Swindon, Southwark College, South and City College Birmingham, Strode College, Truro and Penwith College, West Lancashire, Weston College, Wiltshire College and Yeovil College.

© World Socialist Web Site

Health ancillary staff at UK hospital trust to begin 12 days of stoppages over pay and conditions

Around 50 health ancillary staff working as caterers, cleansers and porters for facilities management company OCS at the Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Trust are to hold a twelve-day strike beginning September 27.

The Unison union members, who have held several stoppages since June, are demanding to be paid sick pay and for increased pay for working unsocial hours. The Trust includes several hospitals in northwest England including Burnley General Hospital, Chorley District and General Hospital, The Harbour Hospital in Blackpool and the Royal Blackburn Hospital.

Security staff at London wholesale market announce walkout over pay

Security staff employed by the OCS Group UK Ltd at New Covent Market, a world-famous wholesale fruit and vegetable market in the UK capital, will begin a three-day strike on Sunday.

The Unite union members are paid £9.69 an hour and demand at least the current London Living Wage of £11.06 an hour. In its last reported profit results, OCS announced it made around £44 million.

Security staff at UK London bank to strike after rejecting derisory pay offer

Security staff working at global banking giant HSBC at its site in Canary Wharf, London will begin a three-day stoppage on September 28.

The Unite union members are employed by outsourcing company Bidvest Noonan, who are imposing a two percent rise and refusing to negotiate. Some of the security workers earn only £12.35 an hour.

UK meat alternative production workers to strike over pay

Around 60 workers at a Quorn meat-free paste production factory in Billingham on Teesside, including fermenters, chiller technicians, maintenance and laboratory staff as well as waste treatment workers, are to strike after rejecting a four percent pay offer and £1,000 bonus. Stoppages were announced for September 30-October 2 and October 4-8. Further dates will be announced if no progress is made.

The Unite union members began their pay claim in April, when they were seeking a nine percent rise. Quorn's latest profits were £236 million, and its CEO is paid £1.7 million.

UK dairy workers in Gloucestershire to strike over changes to work rotas

Around 70 shunters and drivers working at the Stonehouse Muller dairy distribution centre in Gloucestershire, England announced walkouts on September 22-24 and September 29-October 1. This follows nine days of stoppages since August 25.

The Unite union members are fighting an imposed change to a working rota of five days on, followed by two days off. The plant supplies milk and dairy products to retail chains Marks and Spencer and Waitrose.

Strikes back on agenda in UK after queen's funeral as tens of thousands of workers plan to walk out across different sectors

After several UK unions utilised the queen's death and funeral to call off planned strikes, stoppages in several disputes are now back on the agenda.

Already on strike are 500 dockers at the port of Liverpool, who walked out on the evening of September 19 for two weeks after rejecting an 8.3 percent pay rise offer plus a one-off £750. They will be joined by 1,900 dock workers at Felixstowe on September 27, who will strike for eight days in a second round of stoppages after rejecting a seven percent offer.

Train drivers belonging to Aslef at 12 rail operating companies are to walk out on October 1 and 5, coinciding with the Tory party conference in Birmingham. Around 40,000 rail workers belonging to the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union working for Network Rail and 14 Train Operating Companies will hold a one-day stoppage on October 1. The actions by rail workers are in pursuit of increased pay and against plans to reorganise the railways which would lead to mass job losses, the rewriting of employment contracts and attacks on pensions.

Around 115,000 postal workers, members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), are to begin a 48-hour stoppage on September 30. They are seeking improved pay and opposing plans to reorganise the postal service, which would entail job losses and increased exploitation.

CWU members working for telecom giant BT are set to walk out in October over a pay offer well below inflation. Around 30,000 Openreach BT infrastructure workers and 10,000 call centre staff plan stoppages on October 6, 10, 20 and 24. They held previous strikes in July and August.

Sections of UK teachers are being balloted for possible stoppages. Teachers working for Future Academies are taking part in a strike ballot which closes September 28. Any strike action will begin after October 13. Future Academies runs 10 academies including three primary schools in London and Hertfordshire as well as a teacher training college. The academy chain was founded by former Tory education minister and venture capitalist Lord Nash and his wife.

The National Education Union members accuse the academy chain of running a narrow curriculum which blights the lives of pupils, and they are protesting intolerable workloads.

Teachers in Scotland formally rejected a five percent pay offer from the employer's body, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The members of Scotland's biggest teaching union the Educational Institute of Scotland will now ballot for possible strike action. The ballot opens October 12 and closes November 8.

Strikes and protests across Iran after death of young woman following arrest

A general strike affecting cities in Iran's Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan provinces took place this week in protest at the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. She was arrested for refusing to wear the mandatory hijab,

© World Socialist Web Site

and relatives say she was beaten in police custody.

Amini was transferred to hospital but collapsed into a coma and died three days later. Protests against her death also took place in Tehran and Mashhad. Eight further deaths were confirmed among people protesting her death, which has sparked wider protests against the economic hardships exacerbated by US sanctions.

Taxi strike and protests in Lebanon amid protests over worsening financial crisis

Mass protests including a strike of taxi drivers took place in Lebanon this week, as the financial crisis intensifies. Roads were blocked and sit-ins took place across northern Lebanon, including the port city of Tripoli.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation arrived Monday to push for the implementation of austerity measures in return for IMF loans.

Banks closed Monday for three days, in response to recent bank hold-ups across the country by bank customers using fake or real guns to access their savings.

Over the last three years the Lebanese pound lost 95 percent of its value, and according to the United Nations 80 percent of the population lives in poverty.

One-day strike of Palestinian schools in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem

Most of the nearly 300 Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem took part in a general strike on Monday. They were protesting the Jerusalem municipality's censoring and editing of Palestinian books, and the introduction of an Israeli curriculum to be taught in schools. Teachers were already refusing to teach the Israeli-imposed textbooks.

Nigerian university lecturers' stoppage continues in face of government attacks and union sabotage

Striking university lecturers face attacks by the capitalist law courts and their union. The strikers walked out on February 14, demanding better salaries and funding, and an end to problems with payroll software that caused years of late payment of salaries.

The National Industrial Court issued a ruling on September 21 demanding an end to the strike, after a federal government application for a court order against the strike. The president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) said the union was considering a "purely legal" response with its lawyers.

A group within the ASUU, the Congress of University Academics (CONUA) opposes the stoppage. CONUA is seeking to make a separate deal with the Nigerian government at the expense of the majority. It is made up of senior lecturers, lecturers and professors, who are less affected by the problems the majority are determined to fight.

Strikes in Sudan by doctors and civil servants continue over lack of pay

Junior doctors have been striking throughout Sudan since September 11. They extended their strike on September 14 by another 72 hours, after the federal Ministry of Health failed to respond to their demands for payment of eight months' unpaid salaries.

Doctors reported that the third day of their strike achieved wide participation in the 32 hospitals of six states. For 28 of the hospitals, the participation rate was 100 percent.

Government employees in the state of North Darfur have been on strike for two months. They are demanding implementation of the new 2022 salary structure and payment of outstanding amounts, as well as their allowances and bonuses. Other state employees in South Kordofan have been on strike for three weeks over the same issues.

Over 500 water and sanitation workers protest in Durban, South Africa over pay

Water and sanitation workers protested outside the eThekwini Water and Sanitation offices in Durban, South Africa last week to demand overtime and standby pay.

According to *ECR News*, some workers say that from this month they will not receive their overtime and standby pay.

They previously took wildcat strike action and go-slows against cuts to overtime pay. Overtime was cut by 50 percent from August 1. Workers who blocked roads in protest are facing dismissal. Raymond Rampersad, the head of Durban Waste, said they are implementing the "no work no pay" policy.

South Africa's government ANC staff strike over ongoing non-payment of wages

ANC staff took strike action on Monday during protests outside the party's national and regional offices in South Africa for wages owed for August and September.

The workers involved in the dispute for the last two years were told their wages depend on donations and may be paid soon. The workers may have to wait until the party conference in December.

ANC staff representative Mandla Qwane said, "We are withdrawing our labour not because we do not want to work, but because we cannot go to work. For you to go to work, you need to have the means. If you do not have the means, do not allow yourself to be exploited. We are trying to save our members from unnecessary stress."

Gauteng community health care workers in South Africa protest for permanent contracts

Hundreds of community health care workers in South Africa's Gauteng province**,** who are paid less than the minimum wage and want to be permanently employed, protested last Friday outside the Gauteng Health Department offices. Following protests in March, contracts were extended by a year.

© World Socialist Web Site

They are members of the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW).

Ntuki Sejosing, a cleaner from Protea in Soweto, who supports her two children and unemployed sister on R3,200 a month, told Ground Up, “We are taken for granted. The work we do has doubled. And we carry most of the workload, especially at a community level, without complaining, We want the department to recognise us and pay us what we deserve. I’m truly suffocating. Transport fares and food are going up every day.”

The workers, who have been working on a contract basis for over 11 years, are still waiting for a decision from the Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council who are due to meet NUPSAW reps in October.

South African fuel station workers to strike action

Forecourt attendants, cleaners and cashiers, members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), are to strike for a 12 percent pay increase. They work unsociable hours working late at night and early in the morning with no reliable public transport.

The Fuel Retailers Association (FRA) and the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI) are offering 4 percent over three years.

Following three rounds of talks with the Motor Industries Bargaining Council (MICO). Phakamile Hlubi-Majola, a NUMSA spokesperson, told Newzroom Afrika “that they have now dropped their demand to nine per cent across the board and are trying to make a compromise.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site