Teachers strikes continue across Europe over pay, conditions and funding; UK dock strikes at two ports over pay and conditions; continuing protests in Iran after death of young woman at hands of clerical regime's morality police; air traffic controllers in 18 African countries go on unofficial strike over working conditions

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.*

Teachers' strike wave over pay, conditions and funding continues across Europe

Teachers throughout Europe continue a wave of strikes begun at the start of the new school year. Returning to under-funded schools in the middle of a worldwide cost of living crisis, teachers demand improvements in pay, staffing levels and educational resources.

In **Kosovo** teachers have been on indefinite strike since August 25 alongside other public-sector workers. The Union of Education, Culture and Science of Kosovo (SBAShK) and other unions are calling for a 100 euro monthly pay rise, as an interim measure until the new pay law supposedly to increase wage by around 150 euros is passed.

The Kosovan media and government relentlessly attacked the strike, accusing teachers of violating the "right to education." This week *RTK Live* reported that the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo issued a statement demanding "compromise" and effectively warning the government not to grant a pay rise in response to high inflation: "the current situation related to the rapid and continuous escalation of the cost of living requires adequate conventional measures and not improvisational decisions, with short-term effects or counter-effects."

Norway's Labour Party government moved this week to ban a strike which, since it began in June, involved 8,500 teachers. Three teachers' unions called the strike to demand a pay rise in line with other public-sector workers, which would still have been far below 6.5 percent inflation.

The dispute will now be decided by a board consisting of two representatives each from the unions and employers' association KS, and five "neutral" members, according to *FriFagbevegelse*. The board will almost certainly impose a deal in line with the 3.71 percent the unions accepted for teachers in Oslo in a separate dispute. The International Labor Organisation criticised successive Norwegian governments for using compulsory wage boards to deny the right to strike.

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions endorsed the government's strike-breaking, telling *FriFagbevegelse*, "We assume that the government will not implement a compulsory wage board unless there is a danger to life and health, or that other weighty social considerations are affected. We therefore assume that the government has made the necessary balances in what is a very difficult situation."

Teachers in **Greece** joined a one-day walkout on Monday and a further partial stoppage on Thursday, as well as continuing a mass boycott of the new school assessment system, *alfavita* reported. The teachers defied a court order declaring the strike "illegal."

The branch of the Union of Secondary School Staff (ELME) in the city of Piraeus denounced the assessment procedure as it would "lead to the categorisation of schools", comparing it to the Ofsted inspection system in the UK, whose inspections impose a major additional burden on teachers.

In **Germany,** around 3,500 teachers in Berlin joined a rally during the all-day strike on Wednesday, calling for smaller class sizes. The *Berliner Morgenpost* reported that the Education and Science Workers' Union is calling for class sizes in primary schools to be reduced from 26 to 19, and for reductions in secondary school class sizes as well.

Teachers in **Hungary** will walk out on another national strike next week, the Democratic Trade Union of Teachers (PDSZ) announced. While the PDSZ called a strike for October 5, the other major teachers' union, the Teachers' Union, said it would not organise any walkouts until November.

The Hungarian government imposed draconian minimum service levels, requiring teachers to continue to provide child care for 50 percent of the lessons, and 100 percent of the lessons for final-year students, effectively banning the majority of teachers from joining strikes, *Napi.hu* reported. According to *Népszava*, one district threatened to deduct one and a half hours' wages for every hour teachers spend on strike.

In Novi Sad, the second-largest city in **Serbia,** workers in the kitchen, laundry and bus fleet at the "Radosno detinjstvo" (happy childhood) pre-school began a wildcat strike last week, *Luftika* reported. The workers wrote to the director on September 8 asking for a pay rise and walked out on September 20 after their requests were ignored.

According to *Luftika*, many of the workers earn below the minimum

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wage, do not receive holiday pay or a penalty rate for night shifts. They also reported that the trade unions had not supported them.

French refinery workers strike over wages

Refinery workers at the multinational energy company TotalEnergies in France walked out on a three-day strike from Tuesday, called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) to demand a 10 percent pay rise. The CGT also called for the "unfreezing of hiring" and a "massive investment plan," *Ouest France* reported.

The CGT reported that around 70 percent of the 35,000 TotalEnergies employees in France joined the walkouts, along with another pay strike at Exxon Mobil, shutting down a number of refineries, and according to *Reuters* taking offline 60 percent of France's oil refining capacity.

TotalEnergies paid its shareholders a 2.6-billion-euro dividend this week, having made 5.7 billion US dollars in profit in the second quarter of 2022 due to high energy prices. It increased the pay of its workers by only 3.5 percent in 2022, well behind current 5.9 percent inflation.

Latvian healthcare workers join two-day warning strike

Healthcare workers in Latvia held a two-day warning strike on Tuesday and Wednesday, and around 500 people joined a protest outside the cabinet building. The Latvian Health and Social Care Workers' Trade Union (LVSADA) is calling for a pay rise and said the main cause of the staff shortages in the Latvian healthcare system is low pay, *Baltic News Network* reported.

Workers at Philip Morris factory in Turkey continue strike against dismissals

Workers at a Philip Morris tobacco factory in the Turkish city of ?zmir continue their strike, which began on September 20 after the sacking of a dozen colleagues. According to *Evrensel*, the G?da-?? union members were fired by the subcontractor Euroserve for opposing their transfer to another site.

Since the strike began, more than 100 workers were fired, and strikers are demanding the reversal of all sackings and recognition of G?da-??.

Phone operators begin indefinite strike in Madrid, Spain against job cuts

The operators of the 010 official help line in Madrid, Spain, began an indefinite strike on Tuesday, as the change in private companies operating the privatised service threatens major job cuts and changes to their conditions. *Europa Press* published comments from the secretary of the works council, who said the new company wants to cut the workforce of 460 by 100.

Rather than calling for the service to be taken into public ownership, the works council demanded the Madrid city council act as a mediator and show "more political will." During a previous walkout in July, the Workers' Commissions union accused the outgoing company of a "covert ERE [restructuring]."

Doctors at Greek children's hospital demand increased staffing levels

On Wednesday, doctors at the Agia Sophia children's hospital in Athens held a one-day strike, and at least 100 joined a rally in the Greek capital. Outside the Ministry of Health, doctors denounced the staff shortages and underfunding at Greece's largest children's hospital, where there are 34 vacant positions and 40 further doctors may soon lose their jobs, according to *ef.syn*.

Baggage handling workers in Cyprus airport hold "lightning" strike over job losses

On Saturday night, around 70 baggage handling workers at Paphos airport and 40 at Larnaca airport in Cyprus held a two-hour "lightning" strike after their employer, LGS, announced it had lost its contract with easyJet and may cut 40 jobs, the *Cyprus Mail* reported.

The media reported the walkout as a "lightning" or "impromptu" strike, and travellers wrote on Tripadvisor that they were told it was an unexpected wildcat strike.

Factory workers strike over unpaid wages in Novorossiysk, Russia

Workers at a shoe factory in Novorossiysk, a Russian port city on the Black Sea, began an indefinite strike on Tuesday over unpaid wages. According to the *Caucasian Knot*, workers at the VetAnna factory have not been paid since June, and many have not even been paid their wages from January, with total arrears of 10 million rubles between the 100 employees.

Ambulance workers in Georgia protest over pay

Ambulance workers protested this week outside the Georgian ministry of health as part of a campaign to improve their wages. According to *First Channel*, the unions representing ambulance workers are not legally allowed to strike but have begun a lawsuit to force the management to begin negotiations over pay.

UK sees resumption of widespread mass strikes

The end of the week sees the resumption of strikes in several UK sectors after trade unions used the period of the queen's mourning to suppress action.

Several rail unions will be taking part in a 24-hour strike on Saturday,

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with train drivers belonging to Aslef, along with rail workers at Network Rail and the train operating companies (TOCs), to walk out. They will be joined by administration workers at Network Rail and 11 TOCs, members of the TSSA union. Network Rail power supply workers belonging to the Unite union will also join the action. More than 40,000 rail workers will be involved in the stoppage, which coincides with the start of the Tory party conference. They are pushing for increased pay and fundamental restructuring of jobs and conditions.

Friday and Saturday will see strikes by 115,000 workers employed by the Royal Mail, which delivers letters and packages to homes and businesses. The CWU members are seeking improved pay and opposing attacks on jobs, conditions and pensions. The weekend action will be followed by four across-the-board stoppages on October 13, 20 and 25 and again on November 28. In addition, 15 sectional strikes will be held throughout November and December which will impact on the service in the run-up to Christmas.

Sections of UK teachers are being balloted for possible stoppages. A ballot of teachers working for Future Academies closed on Tuesday. 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 National Education Union members accuse the academy chain of running a narrow curriculum which blights the lives of pupils, and staff 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.

UK barristers' strike in danger of sellout as union puts new pay offer to ballot

The Criminal Bar Association (CBA) is balloting the UK's barristers on a new, inadequate pay offer from the government to end their strike.

The 2,273 barristers walked out indefinitely on September 5 over legal aid levels and pay. The strike continued following the death of the queen, though demonstrations were suspended.

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, with a backlog of 59,000 crown court cases.

Chair of the CBA, Kirsty Brimelow, said, "The offer from government has resulted from constructive talks between the Ministry of Justice and the leadership of the CBA. This offer represents substantial positive movement from government. As a result, the offer will be put to a ballot."

The government however has not improved its offer of a 15 percent increase in legal aid, which was due to come into effect at the end of September and increase pay by £7,000. According to the BBC, the government is offering a £54 million package, to bring forward legal aid payments to barristers, and only £19 million of this will improve fees on criminal cases for case preparation work, for example. Barristers are self-employed and paid retrospectively according to time spent in court, sometimes up to several years after a case ends.

Barristers escalated their dispute after holding previous stoppages on alternate weeks, disrupting at least 6,000 hearings.

Dockers at two major UK ports on strike this week over pay and conditions

Over 560 port operatives and maintenance engineers in Liverpool, England are in the second week of a two-week strike begun September 19. They walked out after rejecting an offer of between 7 and 8.3 percent from the Peel Group, which operates Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC). RPI inflation is currently at 12.3 percent.

On Tuesday, they marched through Liverpool city centre, where the annual Labour Party Conference was being held, receiving support from bystanders. At the conference venue they called on Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer to come out in support of their strike, but he failed to offer support.

The Peel Group is demanding a de facto pay cut. The company is an infrastructure and property investment business which boasts of having "collective investments owned and under management of more than £5 billion." It reported profits of more than £30 million in 2021 from its operations at MDHC.

The Liverpool dockers mounted well-attended picket lines. They were joined on Tuesday by more than 1,900 dock workers at the largest UK container port, Felixstowe on the east coast of England, in their second round of eight-day strike action until October 5. They are opposing a derisory pay award of 7 percent.

The previous strike in the last week of August demonstrated the enormous social power of dock workers, closing a port accounting for 48 percent of UK container freight. Felixstowe Dock and Railway company is owned by Hong Kong based CK Hutchison Holdings Ltd, which holds interests in 52 ports in 26 countries. The company paid out £99 million to its shareholders from the profits of its Felixstowe operations last year.

The combined action by dock workers at both ports has the capacity to shut down 60 percent of all UK container traffic.

Although the strike actions at Liverpool and Felixstowe coincide for six days this week, Unite is proceeding as if the struggles are separate. The union is preventing their necessary unification, protecting not only the companies involved but Truss's Conservative government, which is committed to outlawing strikes in essential services to spearhead it class-war agenda.

Vinyl floor manufacturing workers in Greater Manchester, England walk out over pay

Around 200 UK workers employed by vinyl flooring manufacturer Polyflor at their site in Whitefield, Greater Manchester began a three-week stoppage on Monday.

The GMB union members were previously due to begin a series of two-hour strikes against low pay on September 7. However, prior to the stoppages the workforce was informed by email not to turn up for their shift on Monday and they were locked out for a week. While unions cancelled strikes after the queen's death, the lockout was not lifted.

The GMB union members had 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."

On September 20 the company ended the lockout and the workers returned to work. They then held a two-hour strike on September 21 and protested outside the factory before beginning the current action.

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Strikes by UK offshore wind maintenance staff over pay

Around 100 technicians and maintenance workers employed by Orsted Energy in Barrow in Furness and Birkenhead in northwest England began a 48-hour strike on September 23. A further 48-hour stoppage will begin Friday. The workers maintain and repair nearby offshore wind turbines.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union members rejected a 3.5 percent offer from the Danish company. The workers are also protesting the victimisation of a worker at the Barrow in Furness site. The company, which refuses to enter negotiations, announced profits of £664 million in April.

UK further education college lecturers walk out over pay

Around 4,000 further education (FE) staff, including lecturers, admin, IT and librarian workers at 31 FE colleges across England began 10 days of stoppages over four weeks from Monday, with a three-day stoppage. 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 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 included 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.

UK non-academic staff strikes over pay

Staff working as administrators, cleaners, library, security and catering staff across 16 universities in England and Scotland are continuing their series of strikes in late September and early October, 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 are seeking an inflation plus two percent rise.

The list of universities taking part with dates is:

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

UK post office staff hold further 24-hour strike

Around 3,500 UK Post Office workers at 114 Crown Post Offices, and cash and valuables in transit (CViT) workers responsible for the collection and delivery of cash, valuables and supplies to 11,500 sub-post offices began a 24-hour strike on Wednesday.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) members are protesting a 5 percent pay offer and a £500 lump sum payment. They held a series of stoppages in their fight for higher pay, with the first walkout on May 3.

The profits of the government-operated postal service more than halved from its pre-pandemic levels but was still £35 million in 2020/21. Those on the front line who kept the service operating throughout the emergency health crisis are not prepared to accept poverty pay in return.

Workers voted by 97 percent in March for strike action against an original offer of 2 percent with a £250 lump sum.

UK Royal Mail workers plan further walkouts

Around 115,000 UK postal workers are due to begin a 48-hour stoppage on Friday. It is the latest stoppage by Royal Mail staff who are responsible for sorting and delivering letter and parcels to homes and businesses.

They are seeking improved pay and opposing plans to reorganise the postal service, which would entail job losses and increased exploitation.

The CWU announced further stoppages for October 13, 20 and 25, to be followed by sectional strikes in the run-up to Christmas.

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

Around 50 UK health ancillary staff working as caterers, cleansers and porters for facilities management company OCS at the Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Trust began a twelve-day strike on Tuesday.

The Unison union members, who 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.

Rail workers in Scotland to strike over pay

Rail workers in Scotland are to walk out on October 10 after rejecting a 5 percent pay offer.

The stoppage called by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union will take place after a strike by RMT members in England and Wales on October 1, which will hit Network Rail and 15 train operating companies,

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nationwide.

Unite union suspends scheduled strike of 2,000 London bus drivers to ballot new offer

The Unite union suspended an indefinite stoppage of 2,000 Arriva North London bus drivers due to begin October 4 after the company made an improved pay offer. Unite said as “an act of goodwill” it would suspend action while the drivers vote on the offer.

Arriva North London operates routes across north London from eight depots. A previous offer from the company described by the union as “high value” was voted down by a near 90 percent of the drivers in a ballot on September 16. The company described the rise as 11.2 percent, but drivers calculated it was worth 8.2 percent.

UK meat alternative production workers in Billingham, Teesside to strike over pay

Around 60 workers at a Quorn meat-free paste production factory in Billingham on Teesside, England including fermenters, chiller technicians, maintenance and laboratory staff as well as waste treatment workers, will walk out on Friday for three days after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer and £1,000 bonus. This will be followed by five days of stoppages from 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.

Light rail workers at UK’s West Midlands Metro to strike over low pay

A strike of 176 UK workers employed on the West Midlands Metro, which runs a light-rail service between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, was announced for October 15.

The Unite union members voted by an 86 percent majority on an 84 percent turnout for the action. It will be followed by a further 52 stoppages over the period up to January 5. The tram workers seek a minimum £27,000 for drivers and customer representatives and an additional £5,000 a year for all other grades.

UK: Protest by healthcare support staff at Greater Manchester hospitals trust over pay grade

Around 150 UK healthcare support staff lobbied a meeting of the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) NHS Foundation Trust on Monday. The NCA comprises Salford Royal, Fairfield General and Royal Oldham hospitals as well as Rochdale Infirmary.

The support workers are paid at the band 2 level for tasks including changing beds and personal care for patients but are also taking blood, fitting cannulas and providing emergency care for which they should be paid at a higher salary band. The protesters are demanding pay at the higher rate.

Call for Iranian teachers and students to walk out in protest at death of Mahsa Amini

The Coordinating Council of Teachers’ Cultural Associations in Iran called on teachers and students to abandon classrooms Monday and Wednesday in support of the ongoing daily protests following the death of Mahsa Amini.

The 22-year-old woman was arrested by the notorious morality police over the fitting of the hijab she was wearing. The police are accused of attacking her, resulting in her admission to hospital where she fell into a coma and died three days later.

Iranian contract oil workers warned the government to end its crackdown on the protests against Amini’s death or they will walk out.

Open ended strike of Lebanese teachers leads to closing of schools

Public school teachers in Lebanon are on indefinite strike and schools did not reopen for the new academic year. With the ongoing financial crisis, teachers in Lebanon saw their salaries decimated. Also, school administrators fear they will not be able to afford to light and heat schools in the approaching winter.

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.

Walk out by Moroccan teachers as colleagues face trial

Moroccan contract teachers walked out on Monday protesting the resumption of a trial of 45 of their colleagues. The teachers are accused of violating the health emergency brought in as a result of the pandemic, because they took part in a protest last year. The trial was postponed until December 5.

Air traffic controllers in 18 African countries on unofficial strike over working conditions

Air traffic controllers defied a ban and held a wildcat strike from September 23 to 25 across 18 African countries to demand better working conditions.

Flights were grounded across a large part of west and central Africa, covering the 18 countries belonging to the Agency for the Safety of Air Navigation in Africa and Madagascar, including Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.

The authorities initially requisitioned unqualified workers to operate the control tower at Douala airport in Cameroon, who told pilots to take off, putting all those on board in danger. This was opposed by the Canadian-

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based International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers, which released a statement on September 23 calling the move a “breach of trust” that “undermines the credibility of the safety of this airspace.”

Recognizing the failure of their first tactic, leading politicians such as Ivorian Prime Minister Patrick Achi promised the demands of the strikers would be heard. This intervention brought an end to the strike, but the 700 strikers said they would come out again if their demands were not addressed.

The Union of Air Traffic Controllers' Unions members demand: reclassification of all air traffic controllers; indexation and revaluation of overtime; reform of their career plan; revaluation of night hours; the license premium to be paid to controllers in training; and reduction of understaffing.

Ugandan trainee doctors strike to demand safety over Ebola

Trainee doctors, pharmacists and nurses at Mubende's regional hospital in Uganda walked out over the lack of safety provisions over Ebola. They are not provided with the right safety kit, risk allowances or health insurance.

One worker reported anonymously, “Most times you come into contact with a patient and you use your bare hands.”

Ugandan health ministry spokesman Emmanuel Ainebyoona claimed there was “no strike at the hospital” but an announcement by all 34 of the interns who joined the strike disproved this.

Six interns at the hospital were exposed to the virus and are waiting for test results in isolation. Since the outbreak began earlier in the month, government data shows 36 people are reported to have caught Ebola, and 23 died.

South Africa Broadcasting Company workers to strike over pay

Workers at the South Africa Broadcasting Company based in Johannesburg are planning pickets as part of an upcoming strike for a wage increase.

The Broadcasting, Electronic Media and Allied Workers Union and the Communications Workers Union members are demanding a R20,000 one-off payment for the 2021/22 financial year, an 8 per cent pay increase across the board, and a R500 housing allowance increase for 2022/23.

Wildcat strike of South African municipality workers in Mogalakwena, Limpopo

Municipal workers in the Mogalakwena local municipality in Limpopo, South Africa blocked entrances to the workplace with TLB excavators and graders as part of wildcat protest and strike. They were protesting the appointment of the municipal manager Morris Maluleke, leading to the shutdown of services.

Workers are demanding Maluleke’s sacking following a court hearing which found his appointment unlawful. According to the *Soweto Times*, the workers said they will not take orders from him. The municipality is seeking an injunction to stop the strike.

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