

Oil refinery and nuclear workers continue pay strikes in France; one-day national rail strike in Belgium for improved staffing and conditions; UK dock strikes at two main ports over pay; protests continue in Iran over police killing of Mahsa Amini; port and railroad workers on indefinite strike across South Africa over pay; months-long strike by Nigerian lecturers faces legal action by government

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.

Oil refinery and nuclear workers continue pay strikes in France

Oil refinery workers at multinational TotalEnergies continue a national strike in France this week, and workers at nuclear power plants run by state-owned EDF also stopped work on Thursday.

The General Confederation of Labour (CGT), in negotiations with TotalEnergies, is calling for a 10 percent pay rise for 2022, increased hiring and investment in production in France. EDF imposed a 1.3 percent pay rise for 2022, *France Bleu* reported, while the CGT is calling for wages to be linked with inflation, currently 5.6 percent.

The strike at TotalEnergies reduced refining capacity by more than 60 percent, and Reuters reported this week the government began to use its strategic fuel reserves as petrol stations' supplies run out.

Childcare workers in France strike over working conditions and staffing levels

Childcare workers in France held a one-day national strike on Thursday, opposing a new government decree which would allow the hiring of unqualified staff in nurseries and schools. Rallies of hundreds of workers were organised in cities across France.

The group "No babies in lockers" and most unions called the national stoppage, with a spokesperson from the group telling AFP that the decree "says our jobs are worth nothing, that there is no need for skills." To deal

with major staff shortages, childcare workers are calling for pay increases and more people to be accepted onto training courses.

One-day national rail strike in Belgium for improved staffing and conditions

Belgian rail workers held a one-day national strike on Wednesday, calling for the government to increase investment in the network to provide higher staffing levels.

An official from the General Union of Public Services (CGSP) told RTL that over the past five years, 5,000 jobs were cut, so "the workload is becoming less and less bearable for the staff. Working conditions have degraded. Now, we need recruitment and for that, the budgets have to follow."

RTL also reported a statement from rail users' association Navetteurs.be in support of the strike: "We come across rolling staff on a daily basis exhausted by the productivity efforts required in recent years... We are deeply concerned about the impact that their fatigue can have on the safety of our journeys."

The media reported an attack on a picket line at a depot of the state rail company SNCB in Schaerbeek in Brussels. A member of the CGSP suffered a broken arm when he was hit by a construction vehicle which rammed the picket line, according to RTL.

Strike at Charleroi airport in Belgium over outsourcing

On Sunday, security staff at Charleroi airport in Belgium walked out for

between one and two hours in response to the decision to divide their jobs between two companies instead of one when the service was retendered. According to RTL, workers were concerned that the two would not offer equal levels of training and pay.

National teachers' strike in Hungary

Teachers in Hungary walked out on a national strike on Wednesday, International Teachers' Day, as part of a long-running dispute over pay. According to the Democratic Trade Union of Teachers (PDSZ), 13,000 teachers stopped work, and were joined by students and parents at protests.

Teachers have faced many attacks from the government, including public threats against "illegal" stoppages and draconian "minimum service" requirements. Five teachers at a high school in Budapest were fired for joining the strikes, prompting a protest of 100 teachers, students and parents, Telexreported.

Kosovo teachers' strike suspended in narrow vote

Classes resumed in school in Kosovo on Monday, after the suspension of the teachers' strike begun August 25.

The Union of Education, Culture and Science of Kosovo (SBASHK) announced that members voted by 54.9 percent to suspend the action, but it may call another in January next term. With workers' pay eroded by 13 percent inflation, the SBASHK called the strike along with other public-sector unions to demand a 100 euro monthly pay rise as an interim measure until a new law on public-sector pay is passed.

Teachers came under relentless attack from the government and media aimed at isolating them from other workers as well as children and parents. Government ministers constantly issued statements accusing teachers of violating the "right to education," and the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo effectively warned the government not to make concessions over pay.

Doctors strike at Charité hospital in Berlin, Germany

On Wednesday, doctors at the Charité hospital in Berlin joined a one-day warning strike called by the Marburger Bund union over pay and time on call. In comments to rbb24, a representative of the Marburger Bund said doctors at Charité could currently be on call 10 to 15 times each month, and called for a maximum of four times per month.

The union is also calling for a 6.9 percent pay rise and improved rosters, while the hospital only offered 1.9 percent this year and 1.6 percent next year, *taz* reported. During the strike, 1,000 doctors also joined a rally in Berlin, while emergency care continued to be provided in the hospital.

GPs in Hamburg were also on strike on Wednesday, against planned cuts by the Social Democrat's current health minister, following a similar stoppage by 2,000 Berlin GPs last month. The Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (KV) called an all-day "training event" to get around a ban on strikes.

The changes would see GPs receiving less funding per patient after an initial quota, which the KV said would also affect patients who would find

it hard to register with a GP.

Pilots at German airline Eurowings strike over workload

Pilots at Eurowings, a subsidiary of the German airline Lufthansa, joined a one-day strike on Thursday during collective bargaining between Eurowings and the Cockpit Union (VC). According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the VC said Eurowings makes pilots fly the maximum permitted hours with short rest times.

Eurowings management tried to set other workers against the pilots, despite a wave of strikes throughout the airline industry in recent months. They said in the media, "In times when millions of people are afraid of a cold winter and the next heating bill, [VC's demands] are more than excessive."

Three-day strike by care home workers in Bizkaia, Spain

Care home workers in the Spanish province of Bizkaia began a three-day strike on Tuesday, after working for two years without a new collective agreement. The Basque Workers' Solidarity (ELA) union said employers in the sector had not negotiated over the agreement since October 2021, and the Bizkaia local government was "look[ing] the other way," *Europa Press* reported.

The ELA said that to ensure good working conditions and care, pay rises above inflation are needed in the privatised care homes to bring pay in line with the publicly owned homes, and more staff are necessary.

Cleaning workers at Stellantis in Vigo, Spain strike against cuts to pay, conditions and job security

On Monday, cleaning workers in the Urbano Bernabé group, in the Spanish city of Vigo, began an indefinite strike against an attempt to force them onto a worse contract. The workers are contracted to clean the factory of multinational auto giant Stellantis.

The Galician Union Confederation reported that almost all the company's 60 workers joined the strike.

Urbano Bernabé formerly adhered to the province-wide sectoral agreement for cleaning workers, but according to *Europa Press*, it tried to reclassify its employees as "road freight transport" workers, whose collective agreement would allow the company to pay lower wages and did not guarantee job security if Stellantis moved to a different contractor.

Gig economy delivery workers in Florence, Italy strike following death of colleague

Delivery workers in Florence, Italy joined a 24-hour strike called by the Italian General Confederation of Labour on Wednesday, following the death of a colleague this weekend.

Sebastian Galassi, 26, was hit by a car on his bike on Saturday night while making a delivery for Glovo, an app-based courier service, and died

in hospital the next day. His family told the media that after his death, the company sent an automated email to his address firing him for “non-compliance with terms and conditions,” according to *il Fatto Quotidiano*.

ANSA reported on a large demonstration in Florence of workers from Glovo and other delivery companies, with slogans such as “My life is worth more than a sandwich.” The unions and many at the demonstration denounced the “piecework” model on which delivery workers are paid, effectively forcing them to ride dangerously in order to make a decent income.

The National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work, which compiles statistics on workplace safety in Italy, reports that 677 workers were killed in workplace accidents in the first eight months of 2022 (almost three every day). Despite the horrific scale of deaths across Italy, the unions have always responded by calling brief 24-hour stoppages, or even shorter, to defuse workers’ anger.

Dockers at UK port of Felixstowe complete second tranche of strikes over pay

On September 27, more than 1,900 dock workers at the largest UK container port, Felixstowe on the east coast of England, ended their second round of eight-day strike action on Wednesday. They oppose a derisory pay award of seven 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.

Unite has not announced dates of further strikes but Unite regional officer Miles Hubbard told the BBC on Monday the workers will, “if necessary, take further action” and that the workers are “here for the long haul.”

Dockers at the UK’s second largest port, Liverpool, announced further strike dates October 11-17 against a pay offer of between seven and 8.3 percent.

Further stoppages by UK telecom workers over pay and attacks on conditions

Around 40,000 UK call centre staff and engineers working for BT and its subsidiary Openreach members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) went on strike Thursday. Further stoppages are planned for October 10, 20 and 24. This follows a two-day strike from July 31, and again on August 30.

The strikes in BT this summer were the first company-wide action for 35 years.

The UK telecoms giant unilaterally imposed a below-inflation pay deal in April of between 3.8 and eight percent. Chief executive Philip Jansen described this as “generous” after awarding himself a 32 percent raise, bringing his annual remuneration to £3.5 million.

The company bypassed the CWU, even after the union agreed a pay freeze last year while telling members that a pay increase for 2022 was provisionally approved. This year’s de facto pay cut helped fund a £760 million payout to shareholders, compared to just £90 million set aside for a deal covering 58,000 telecom workers—over half the workforce.

Train drivers at 13 UK companies walk out over pay and attacks on jobs and conditions

Train drivers at 13 UK train operating companies (TOCs) walked out on Wednesday over pay and attacks on jobs and conditions. The strike coincided with the last day of the Tory party conference held in Birmingham. Picket lines were set up at rail locations across England and Scotland.

The Aslef union members have been taking strike action since July, with the number of TOCs affected growing. Rail staff belonging to the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) union working for Cross Country were due to strike Wednesday, while those working for Great Western Railway were set to walk out Thursday and Friday, and those working for Avanti and 2C2 on Saturday.

Strike of ancillary rail workers at UK train operating company Abellio

Around 140 workers at train operating company Abellio East Midlands began a 48-hour strike on Thursday, with a further 48-hour strike planned for October 17.

The Unite union members work as cleaners, engineers, inspectors, shunters and other roles at the TOC’s depots in Derby, Leicester and Nottingham. They voted by an 84 percent majority to walk out after the company refused to make a pay offer this year, despite recording profits of £401 million last year.

Union continues to fragment strike action at UK further education colleges over pay

Further education (FE) staff, including lecturers, admin, IT and library workers at around 18 FE colleges across England plan to walk out for two days from Thursday, followed by a two-day strike from October 10 and a three-day stoppage beginning October 18. Last week, staff at 30 colleges were called out.

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 against an RPI inflation rate of 12.3 percent. FE lecturers’ pay fell by 35 percent since 2009. They are paid around £9,000 less than schoolteachers.

The UCU is not calling all members out together and is allowing union branches to negotiate separate deals with colleges. Abingdon and Whitney College, Oxfordshire recently agreed a below-inflation deal with the UCU. The lowest paid will see an eight percent increase, with five percent for middle earners, including lecturers, and three percent for the highest earners within management.

Staff at Barnet & Southgate, Burnley, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham and Sparsholt colleges will also strike this month, on different dates.

A UCU report published in the summer showed over 80 percent of college lecturers skip meals and ration use of hot water to save money, and that 70 percent planned to leave the profession unless pay and working conditions improved.

Strikes by non-academic staff at 16 universities in England and Scotland over pay continue

Staff working as administrators, cleaners, library, security and catering workers at 16 universities in England and Scotland are continuing their series of strikes begun late September, 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 where workers took 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.

Workers at Northern Ireland council continue strike while considering new pay offer

Workers at Lisburn and Castlereagh Council in Northern Ireland have been on strike since the beginning of September as they push for improved pay.

The Unite union members provide refuse collection, environmental health and leisure services at the council. The council submitted a new pay offer on September 30, which the workers are balloting on. However, they are continuing the strike, which led to a backlog of uncollected waste, until the ballot closes on October 28. The council called for the suspension of the strike during the ballot to no avail.

Walkout by office staff at USDAW union over pay and conditions

Around a quarter of office staff employed by UK shopworkers' union USDAW were on strike September 29-30.

The 100 GMB union members oppose a 3.5 percent pay deal and want to move to a blended work model to allow home working. Picket lines were held including at USDAW's head office in Salford, Greater Manchester.

Strike of cleaners and porters at London's Royal Opera House

September 30 saw a strike by around 25 cleaners and porters working at London's Royal Opera House (ROH). They are employed by outsourcing company DOC to provide cleaning and portering services.

The Cleaners & Allied Workers Union (CAIWU) members' demands include 12 weeks sick pay, for the employer to provide a 12 percent contribution to their pension and seven days additional holiday leave.

Directly employed workers at the ROH enjoy benefits such as healthcare, subsidised café, flexible working and child care vouchers, which are not available to contracted workers. The ROH cleaners held a picket on the day of the strike, including a rally at the end of the afternoon.

All-out strike set to begin by bus workers in Hull, England over pay

Workers employed as drivers, cleaners, engineers and commercial assistants by bus company Hull Stagecoach in Hull, England will begin an all-out strike on Friday until December 29.

The Unite union members voted by a 96 percent majority on an 87 percent turnout for the stoppage. They rejected a below-inflation offer, which comes on top of their pay having increased by only one percent since 2019. The drivers seek pay parity with Stagecoach drivers in other parts of the country. Hull drivers currently earn £11.14 an hour, while Stagecoach Merseyside drivers are on £14 an hour.

The beginning of the strike will coincide with the staging of the Hull fair, due to run October 7-15.

Unite has negotiated a series of below-inflation pay deals across the UK, refusing to mobilise bus workers within and between companies.

Offshore drillers and contractors at four UK companies to strike over pay

Around 300 workers employed on offshore oil rigs by UK companies Archer, Maersk, Transocean and Odfjell are to hold a series of 48-hour strikes, with the first due to begin October 20. Further strikes are planned for November 3 and 17, and December 1 and 15.

The Unite union members voted by a 95 percent majority to reject a five percent pay offer. The offshore workers are covered by the United Kingdom Drilling Contractors Association.

UK barristers balloting over new inferior pay offer

A ballot of 2,273 UK barristers opened on Tuesday and closes Sunday on whether to end their strike. The result will be announced October 10.

The Criminal Bar Association (CBA) members 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, 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, only £19 million of which 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 several years after a case ends.

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

UK firefighters’ consultative ballot over pay offer

UK firefighters will take part in a consultative ballot over whether to strike.

The Executive Council (EC) of the firefighter’s union, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) announced on Wednesday it rejected the latest pay offer from the employers’ body. The latest “final offer” was for a five percent pay increase. This followed a previous “final offer” of two percent.

The EC said it will organise a series of briefings and a consultative ballot of its 32,500 members. No dates were announced for the ballot.

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.

Protests continue in Iran over police killing of Mahsa Amini

Widespread protests across Iran are continuing into a third week following the death of Mahsa Amini, with solidarity protests taking place across the Middle East, Europe and the United States.

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

In-person classes for undergraduate students at the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran were suspended on Monday, and virtual classes only will be held. This follows clashes between police and students at the university last week. Protests took place at other universities, including Kermanshah and Yazd. School students are also demonstrating.

On Monday, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei voiced full support for the security forces cracking down on the protests. According to Iranian rights groups there have been over 130 deaths resulting from security forces’ interventions, and thousands have been arrested and hundreds injured. According to the Iranian authorities, some security force personnel were killed as protesters resist their attacks.

General strike in West Bank after deadly raid by Israeli army on refugee camp

A general strike was observed in the West Bank Palestinian city of Jenin leading to the closure of shops and schools across the city on September 29.

The strike was called after the Israeli army raided the refugee camp in the city the previous day. The raid resulted in the killing of four Palestinians and left more than 40 injured.

Port and railroad workers’ indefinite strike across South Africa over pay

Tens of thousands of Transnet port and railroad workers began indefinite strike action throughout South Africa on Thursday, demanding a 12 per cent pay increase. Inflation is currently at 7.6 per cent.

Transnet’s rail and ports facilities play a central role in South Africa’s exports of bulk commodities such as coal, iron ore, chrome and manganese.

The United National Transport Union (UNTU) members rejected Transnet’s new offer of three percent, paid at the end of October with back pay deferred to next year. Members of South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) will join the strike on Monday if they vote to reject the latest offer.

Nigerian government uses courts to try and break strike of university lecturers

The Nigerian government is trying to break the months-long stoppage by university lecturers with legal action. 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 government instructed the leaders of the Academic Staff Union of Universities to follow a court order issued by the National Industrial Court of Nigeria or face state retribution, which the Minister of Labour and Employment Chris Ngige called “consequences of contempt of [the] court order.”

The government also recognised two breakaway unions on October 4, the National Association of Medical and Dental Academics and the Congress of Nigerian University Academics, which oppose the strike. The two government-approved bodies are said to have a presence in 12 universities.



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