Teachers, other educators across Europe continue widespread strikes over funding, pay and conditions; Greek healthcare workers on 24-hour national strike over funding and staff shortages; rail strikes over pay, pensions and job losses continue in the UK; Iranian sugar factory workers join in protests over death of Mahsa Amini; South Africa's Transnet workers' unions agree below-inflation deal to end strike

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, other educators across Europe continue widespread strikes over funding, pay and conditions

Teachers and other education workers across Europe continue a wave of strikes begun at the start of this school year, opposing widespread underfunding, deteriorating working conditions and pay.

Thousands of teachers in Berlin walked out on a one-day warning strike on Tuesday, demanding a reduction in class sizes and more teachers for the capital's schools. According to the Education and Science Union, 3,500 teachers joined the strike, which followed another stoppage in September.

Teachers in vocational high schools in France also held a national strike on Tuesday, coinciding with a national one-day general strike, although the teachers' strike was called beforehand. The vocational teachers are opposing a "reform" announced by President Emmanuel Macron, which doubles the amount of time students spend working as interns, drastically reducing teaching time, teachers' magazine *L'Expresso* reported. The magazine quoted a press release from the seven unions involved, "We refuse to allow the opening and closing of courses to be decided solely through the prism of the local and immediate needs of local businesses."

In Hungary, teachers continue to oppose government retaliation for a long-running series of stoppages over pay. *ATV* reported that workers in crèches in one district of Budapest will stop work on Friday, to oppose the firing of several teachers who went on strike at a local high school after the government declared the strikes "illegal." According to *24.hu*, more than 660 teachers in and near the city of Szeged signed a pledge that they will immediately strike if any of their colleagues are victimised, as did 250 members of the "Teachers for Teachers" association.

A student organisation in Hungary also planned a protest on Sunday in solidarity with the teachers' strikes, following rallies last week which drew thousands of supporters. Teachers announced a new nationwide strike for October 27.

Around 13,000 teachers demonstrated in the Belgian city of Namur last week, demanding smaller class sizes, less administrative work, and reforms to the system of evaluating teachers, *RTBF* reported. Teachers at the protest denounced overcrowding in classrooms, including the impact on children with special needs, who often do not receive the attention they need in regular schools.

Teachers in the Spanish Balearic Islands held a partial strike on Tuesday, stopping work for two hours, called by the teachers' unions to demand the islands' government negotiate over pay. According to *Europa Press*, 690 teachers stopped work. One union official told the agency "The teachers of the Balearic Islands are the only ones who have not seen their payrolls increase like the rest of their colleagues in the state."

In Madrid on Wednesday, 500 teachers from across Spain joined a protest in front of the Ministry of Education called by the Independent Civil Servants Trade Union Center, *Europa Press* reported. Teachers at the protest denounced high student-staff ratios and demanded "Less bureaucracy, more education."

In the Azores Islands in Portugal, public sector workers including teachers held a one-day strike last week. According to the Union of Workers in Public Functions and Social Services of the South and Autonomous Regions (STFPSSRA), this closed "the majority of schools," with 90 percent of teachers joining. The STFPSSRA accused the regional government of not doing enough to improve working conditions, and demanded improvements to public services as well as a 100-euro salary increase.

Around 2,000 workers in Norwegian crèches are on indefinite strike since Monday, in a dispute over pensions. Workers at private sector crèches are demanding equality with public sector workers doing the same

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job. One striker told *FriFagbevegelse* “The money is there, it is public funds, but they will still not give us the same pension rights as they get in the municipal crèches.”

A major teachers’ strike was shut down last month by Norway’s Labour Party government, which imposed binding arbitration under the pretext of a threat to children’s mental health. The head of the Education Association, one of three unions involved in the crèche strike, told *FriFagbevegelse* he was afraid the government would intervene again.

Workers in crèches in the Bosnian city of Banja Luka also began an indefinite strike on Thursday. The head of the Trade Union Organisation of the Centre for Preschool Education said, “We are asking to increase the salary by 50 marks [25.56 euros] for all employees, as was promised earlier, but was not realised. The second requirement is the conclusion of a collective agreement which would further increase salaries,” *Novosti* reported.

Thousands of university students joined a one-day national protest in Ireland last week, against the high cost of living and a lack of affordable education. *RTÉ* reported that the Union of Students in Ireland called the protest as many students were struggling to support themselves, and landlords were exploiting the lack of alternative student accommodation to put up prices.

Greek healthcare workers in 24-hour national strike over funding and staff shortages

Healthcare workers in Greece joined a 24-hour national strike on Thursday, warning about the deteriorating state of the healthcare system.

The Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Employees (POEDIN) issued a statement, quoted by *ef.syn*, warning “Hospitals suffer from understaffing and underfunding. It is possible that in the winter, with the meeting of flu and corona, the hospitals will again end up [treating only those diseases] at the expense of patients of other diseases with the suspension of surgeries, treatments, examinations, etc.”

POEDIN warned against privatisation of the healthcare system and said, “30 colleagues died from the coronavirus and 50 were hospitalised in ICUs.” According to *ef.syn*, striking healthcare workers at a protest in Athens called for better funding and mass recruitment, secure contracts and an end to outsourcing, among other demands.

Airport workers in Italy hold national strike

Workers in air traffic control and ground handling at Italian airports join a one-day national strike on Friday, coinciding with a strike at airlines Vueling and easyJet, *Investireoggi* reported.

The “grassroots” USB union said that “like all other Italian and European workers, [airport workers] also find themselves paying for the folly of an imposed war and the galloping cost of living, with inflation at 10 percent and loss of wages between 3,000 and 4,500 euros while wages and pensions are at stake.”

Indefinite strike in the port of Genoa, Italy against insecure work

Insecure contract workers in the Italian port of Genoa continue an indefinite strike begun last weekend, after almost half of them did not receive any work. According to *ANSA*, only 46 of the 86 “on-call” workers received any work at all for the several days to come.

The CGIL, CISL and UIL unions called for the walkout, writing “it is time to give a future to all 86 workers.”

Dutch public transport workers strike for new collective agreement

Bus drivers in the Netherlands began a three-day strike on Wednesday, as part of collective bargaining negotiations between the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and the Association of Public Transport Employers (VWOV). According to the *Algemeen Dagblad*, the FNV is demanding a 10 percent pay rise, as well as measures to deal with high workloads and a staff shortage.

The VWOV called for the FNV to call off the strikes, pointing to its agreement with the Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) for a one-off payment of 1,000 euros. However, the payment is barely a fraction of workers’ loss of real income due to inflation, currently at 14.5 percent. Even the FNV’s demand would leave workers worse off, in line with its directors’ statement in July: “We are in favour of decent wage increases, but we cannot pass everything on to the employers.”

Three-day strike at Frankfurt University Hospital, Germany against overwork

Workers in some departments of Frankfurt University Hospital, Germany held a three-day strike from Tuesday, called by the United Services Union (Verdi). Verdi is calling for a “relief collective agreement,” which is supposed to deal with persistent overwork and stress in the hospital.

However, other agreements struck by Verdi in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia entrenched rather than eliminated overwork. The agreements mean points are awarded for working on understaffed wards, and accumulating enough points entitles workers to an additional day-off. This allows university managements to leave wards understaffed as part of their budgeting strategy.

Trade union employees in Denmark strike against manager

Employees of Denmark’s second-largest trade union, HK, stopped work for around 24 hours last week, in protest against their manager.

Few details were made public, but *Frihedsbrevet* reported that between 300 and 400 workers stopped work on Thursday, and wrote a statement accusing their manager of discrimination as well as shouting and shaming employees. According to *Ritzau*, workers resumed work the next day, after HK began negotiating with them.

Struggle of UK rail workers continues over pay and working conditions

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Around 140 UK rail workers employed by East Midlands Railway, owned by Abellio, walked out Monday and Tuesday.

The Unite union members, employed as cleaners, engineers, inspectors, lathe operators, shunters, supervisors, team leaders and technicians are protesting a four percent pay offer. The strike followed a 48-hour strike on October 6. The strike impacted train services around the city of Nottingham area.

Train managers working for Avanti West Coast are due to strike on October 22 and November 6. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are opposing the imposition of new work rosters.

Around 2,000 rail workers employed by ScotRail, which serves Scotland, are to strike October 29. The RMT members' strike is part of a five-month running dispute over a five percent pay offer. The rail workers are also carrying out an overtime ban.

This week, the RMT announced further planned stoppages at Network Rail on November 3, 5 and 7, over pay and attacks on jobs and conditions. An RMT press release announcing the strikes noted, "in a dramatic U-turn, Network Rail bosses reneged on their promises of an improved pay offer and sought to impose job cuts, more unsocial hours and detrimental changes to rosters."

Separately RMT members working for London Underground and London Overground will strike on November 3.

UK postal workers hold stoppage over pay and attack on jobs and conditions

Around 115,000 UK postal workers held a 24-hour strike on October 13. It is the seventh stoppage in a programme of strikes by Royal Mail staff who are responsible for sorting and delivering letter and parcels to homes and businesses.

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) members are seeking improved pay and opposing plans to reorganise the postal service, which would entail job losses and increased exploitation.

An additional 17 days of stoppages are planned, with company-wide stoppages on October 25 and 28. Sectional strikes covering network staff will also be held on November 2, 8, 14, 23 and 30. Workers in processing, area distribution, international, collections, admin and manual data entry will strike on November 3, 9, 15, 24 and December 1. Delivery workers will strike on November 4, 10, 16, 25 and December 2.

The planned action will cover very busy periods for parcels, including Black Friday and Cyber Monday, in the run-up to Christmas.

Final week of pay strikes by UK further education staff over pay

Thousands of further education (FE) staff, including lecturers, admin, IT and library workers at 22 FE colleges across England including London began their final tranche of planned stoppages this week.

They walked out for three days from Tuesday. The strike at some London colleges took place on different days. At the end of September, the colleges began 10 days of action over four weeks, with two- and three-day strikes.

Over 30 colleges began the action, but this was whittled down to 22 as some colleges made local pay agreements.

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. RPI inflation has reached 12.6 percent.

FE lecturers' pay fell by 35 percent since 2009. They are paid around £9,000 less than school teachers. A report produced in the summer by the UCU highlighted the impact of financial insecurity on FE staff. It found 80 percent had mental health problems resulting from having to skip meals and restrict the use of hot water, while 70 percent intended to leave the sector if things did not improve.

Nationwide pay strike by UK telecom workers

Around 40,000 BT and Openreach call centre workers and engineers in the UK walked out Thursday. This follows strikes on October 6 and 10, when they were joined by 999 emergency call staff, who did not take part in the previous four days of action begun the end of July.

The CWU members oppose management's implementation of a flat rate pay rise of just £1,500 in April this year.

A further one-day stoppage is planned for October 24.

Meat alternative production workers in Billingham, England to begin all-out 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, were set to begin an all-out strike on Thursday.

This follows nine previous days of stoppages by the workers, who rejected a four percent pay offer plus £1,000 bonus and are seeking a nine percent pay rise—the rate of inflation in April, when pay negotiations began.

Quorn is part of the Philippines-based Modne Nissin food and beverage company. Its latest profits were £236 million and its CEO is paid £1.7 million. The strike is likely to lead to shortages of the popular meat alternative products in supermarkets.

Renewed strike by brewery workers in Lancashire, UK over pay after mediated talks break down

UK brewery workers employed at the Budweiser site in Salmesbury, Lancashire renewed strike action Tuesday, over pay. They will remain out until Monday. The renewed strike follows the breakdown of government mediation service Acas-brokered talks last week.

Around 275 GMB members have held stoppages since the summer in the long-running dispute. They voted by a 93 percent majority to walk out following an inadequate pay offer from the company. At the talks which broke down last week, Budweiser upped their offer by only £250 for 2023.

The brewery produces Becks, Boddingtons, Export Pale Ale and Stella Artois as well as Budweiser beers.

North Sea offshore oil workers set to strike

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Around 300 UK offshore oil and gas workers in the North Sea were set to strike Thursday and Friday, with further strikes planned over the next eight weeks, including November 3-4, 17-18 and December 15-16.

The Unite union members voted by a 95 percent majority on an 86 percent turnout to take the action after rejecting a five percent pay offer from a variety of companies covered by the UK Drilling Contractors Association (UKDCA).

Energy Voice has stated that, "Affected installations include: BP's Clair and Clair Ridge, Repsol Sinopec's Claymore and Piper Bravo, Apache's Beryl, Brae and Forties assets, Shell's Brent Alpha, Ithaca's Alba North and Captain, Taqa's Cormorant Alpha, EnQuest's Magnus and Equinor's Mariner platform.

"Individual drilling rigs including the Maersk Innovator, Maersk Resolve and Paul B Lloyd Jr will also be affected."

Bus drivers in Sunderland, UK to strike over pay offer

Around 200 bus drivers working for Stagecoach in Sunderland, England are to hold 24-hour strikes on October 28 and 31.

The GMB members are protesting a pay offer of four percent with a further two percent rise later in the year. They voted by a 97 percent majority on an 83 percent turnout for the stoppage.

Home delivery workers at UK firm set to strike over pay offer

From Monday October 24, around 350 staff employed by Arrow XL home deliveries are due to strike each Monday, Wednesday and Friday until Christmas Eve. They are employed as drivers and warehouse staff.

The Unite union members demand an improvement on a five percent pay offer. The starting wage for Arrow employees is the minimum wage of £9.50 an hour.

Arrow XL operates out of four depots in Airdrie, Enfield, Wigan and Worcester.

Vinyl floor manufacturing workers in Greater Manchester, England set for further pay strike as company profits increase

Around 200 UK workers employed by vinyl flooring manufacturer Polyflor at their site in Whitefield, Greater Manchester, were set to strike Thursday and Friday this week. This follows two weeks of stoppages already this month.

Polyflor's parent company recently announced a near 10 percent rise in profits, and dividends paid out to shareholders will match last year's record high.

The GMB union members were 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 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 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 employees returned to work. They then held a two-hour strike on September 21, and protested outside the factory before beginning the current action.

Food manufacturing workers in Spalding, UK to strike over pay

Around 700 UK workers employed by food manufacturer Bakkavor at Spalding, Lincolnshire, are to strike November 1-9, after rejecting a 6.5 percent pay offer. Further strikes may be announced.

Many of the Unite union members are currently paid only one penny an hour more than the national minimum wage of £9.50 an hour. The company made £100 million in profits.

The factory makes food for supermarket giants such as M&S, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

Coffin makers for major funeral care company in Scotland to strike over pay

Around 50 coffin makers employed by Cooperative Funeral Care at their factory in Bogmoor Place, Glasgow in Scotland are due to walk out from October 31 to November 7.

The site supplies coffins to the Co-op funeral business throughout the UK. The Unite union members voted by a 96 percent majority to walk out back in August. They did so after receiving a pay offer less than half the current inflation rate.

Unite union suspends strike of bus drivers in Kent, UK to ballot members on new offer

Three days of strike action by around 600 bus drivers working for Arriva Kent, England, due to begin Wednesday, was suspended while Unite members ballot on a new offer from the company.

The drivers, based in depots in Gillingham, Gravesend, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells walked out in September, after rejecting a revised pay offer of 10 percent. The drivers' pay is as low as £12.12 an hour.

Unite states should the workforce reject the new pay offer, planned stoppages for October 24-28 will go ahead.

Protest by UK offshore wind maintenance staff over pay

Technician and maintenance workers employed by Danish-based offshore wind generating company Orsted held a protest outside their HQ in London on Monday, to protest a 3.5 percent pay offer.

This follows 48-hour strikes by technicians and maintenance workers employed by Orsted Energy in Barrow-in-Furness and Birkenhead in September. The workers maintain and repair nearby offshore wind turbines.

The RMT union members rejected a 3.5 percent offer from the Danish company. The workers are also protesting the victimisation of a worker at

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the Barrow-in-Furness site. The company, which refuses to enter negotiations, announced profits of £664 million in April.

The RMT also handed in a letter to the Danish embassy, calling on the Danish government to intervene to compel Orsted to enter negotiations with the RMT.

Iranian sugar factory workers join protests over death of Mahsa Amini

The widespread protests across Iran now in their fifth week were joined by the workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar factory in the southwestern city of Shush. The Haft Tappeh workers were involved in militant struggles over many years against low wages, job losses and corruption at the factory.

The 22-year-old Mahsa Amini 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.

Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei voiced full support for the security forces cracking down on the protests. According to Iranian rights groups, over 200 deaths have resulted from security forces' interventions, with thousands arrested and hundreds injured. According to the Iranian authorities, some security force personnel were killed as protesters resist their attacks.

Protests in Tunisian capital over police violence and food and fuel shortages

Protests which began last Friday in the Tunisian capital of Tunis continued into this week. Police clashed with the protestors. The protests followed the funeral of Malek Selimi, who died as a result of injuries after being chased by police at the end of August.

The demonstrators also protested the deteriorating social conditions in Tunisia, with food and fuel shortages resulting from the authoritarian rule of President Kais Saied. In the impoverished Tadamon area of Tunis, protestors blocked roads by setting fire to tyres.

A general strike was launched in the south-eastern city of Zarzis this week, to protest the response of the authorities to the sinking of a boat carrying migrants last month.

Teachers in rebel-held Syrian province of Ibid strike to demand payment of wages

Teachers in the rebel-held Syrian province of Idlib came out on strike on Monday. Many work as volunteers. They were protesting the Syrian Salvation Government's failure to fulfil its promise to start paying them a monthly salary. On the Saturday prior to the start of the strike, teachers held protests in government schools over the issue of paid employment.

Protests by teachers in Syrian province of Deir Ezzor over wages and living conditions

Teachers in the Syrian province of Deir Ezzor held protests over wages and living conditions. Teachers at schools in the town of Al-Tayyanah went on strike on October 10 over the same issues. They demand to be paid in US dollars, increased pay and for teaching unions to operate freely.

South Africa's Transnet workers' unions agree below-inflation deal to end strike

Less than 24 hours after the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) said it would continue their stoppage, calling the United Transport & Allied Trade Union's (UNTU) agreement to a three-year wage deal a betrayal, they agreed to send their members back Thursday.

With inflation running at 7.6 per cent, the deal fell way short of the original 12 percent demand. SATAWU also agreed to a six per cent increase this year, 5.5 per cent next year and six per cent in 2024.

According to *Eyewitness News*, UNTU spokesman Dan Khumalo said they do not have a problem with the proposed offer, as long as it does not carry the risk of job losses.

The strike, which lasted two weeks, closed the majority of the country's main ports and railroads and cost billions.

South African public sector workers in strike vote over pay

Over 235,000 South African civil servants intend to walk out within the next week over the government's pay offer. The majority of Public Servants Association members rejected a three percent wage increase and demand 6.5 per cent. It is more than three years since they had a rise.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), the largest public sector union, the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa and the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union members also rejected the offer and intend to walk out.

Makro workers in South Africa threaten strike action for pay rise

Makro warehouse store workers in South Africa are balloting for a 12 per cent wage increase or R900, whichever is the greatest. The South African Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) said Makro offered 4.5 per cent.

The dispute involves more than 5,000 workers, who are also demanding: a minimum wage of R8,000; an improvement of commission for salespersons from 10 to 20 percent; an increase in category 3 working hours from 160 to 195 per month; a uniform allowance of R100, amongst others. A SACCAWU spokesperson, Sithembele Tshwete, told the *Citizen* that the bulk of employees earn meagre salaries, and, "The current offer by Makro will not be able to sustain workers and their families to meet even the basic of their household needs."

Mortuary workers picket health department offices in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa

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On Monday, mortuary workers from forensic pathology services picketed outside the health department offices in the KwaZuluNatal province, South Africa to demand changes in how the morgues function. Earlier this year some mortuary facilities had too many bodies to process, creating overwork and putting workers at risk from disease.

The NEHAWU union threatened to shut down all the mortuaries in the province if the Department of Health does not fill all funded vacant posts and comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act. In many facilities the fridges and air condition do not work, making conditions intolerable.

Union leaders instruct Nigerian lecturers to end long-running strike

Striking university lecturers in Nigeria are being told to return to work on October 21 by the unions, despite their demands not being met. The lecturers have been on strike since February 14, over issues relating to funding as well as salaries and allowances.

The National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Emmanuel Osodeke said, “The major reason we are resuming [work] is because we are obeying the industrial court’s judgement,” adding that the union is “a law-abiding organisation.”

Osodeke admitted the issues behind the strike were not resolved, but sought to spread illusions that the House Speaker would now secure the interests of lecturers against the government and its Minister of Labour and Employment, Chris Ngige. “We are also hoping that the intervention of the Speaker as promised by him will resolve this problem within a very short time.”

Workers at Sheraton Hotel in Nigerian capital protest non-payment of wages

Staff at the Sheraton Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital, held a protest at the hotel entrance to demand their employers, Marriot International, pay them outstanding salaries and benefits before the hotel is closed for renovation.

Protesters held up placards proclaiming, “Marriott Pay Us What is Due to Us,” “Marriott Stop Manipulating the Workers,” “Enough of Exposure to Safety Hazards,” and “Marriott Stop Manipulating the Workers.” The placards highlighted how the dilapidated state of the hotel made life difficult for the staff.

The managers responded by calling the police. Later that day, the staff union and hotel managers held a meeting and agreed that around 70 percent of the staff would be re-employed after the renovation.

Ghanaian university staff walk out over change to conditions of service

University staff at universities in Ghana walked out over a cut to the amount paid to reimburse travel costs and vehicle maintenance. Both teaching and administration were brought to a halt.

The unions involved in the strike are the University Teachers Association of Ghana, the Tertiary Education Workers Union, the Senior Staff Association of Universities of Ghana and the Ghana Association of University Administrators.

After the unions met with the National Labour Commission, they stated the government had not kept its promises.

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