

Education workers continue strikes and protests across Europe; UK rail strikes over pay, conditions and pensions continue; protests and strikes over death of Iranian Mahsa Amini enter seventh week; public sector workers in South Africa to begin national stoppage over pay

## 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.*

### Education workers continue strikes across Europe

Teachers and other educators throughout Europe continue widespread strikes begun since the start of the school year, opposing deteriorating working conditions and a funding crisis triggered by a deliberate lack of investment in schools.

In **Portugal**, teachers joined a national strike on Wednesday, protesting lack of investment in education in the government budget for 2023. According to teachers' union Fenprof, 80 percent of teachers nationwide joined the strike, and hundreds joined a demonstration outside the parliament building.

Fenprof also said teachers face insecure contracts, a lack of career progression and pay eroded by inflation. Unattractive working conditions in schools led to a lack of recruitment, and Fenprof pointed out an increasing trend of hiring unqualified teachers.

On the same day, teachers in **Turkey** held a one-day national strike against a new law governing career progression in schools. According to *Balkan Insight*, the law introduces a sequence of job classifications, which teachers can only ascend by exams, interviews and work reports.

Teachers oppose the exams and interviews, demanding they are cancelled, as well as calling for pay rises as inflation remains extremely high. Official inflation is currently 85.5 percent, but the independent Inflation Research Group reported consumer price inflation of 185.3 percent. Teachers also demand children's rights to education, accommodation and food be guaranteed by the state.

This week, more teachers in **Norway** joined a national strike in private sector kindergartens over pensions. Two thousand educators walked out three weeks ago, demanding workers in the private sector receive the same pensions as public sector kindergarten workers doing the same job. *FriFagbevegelse* reported that 2,400 workers are now on strike from kindergartens across Norway.

*FriFagbevegelse* also reported that the government appointed a body to monitor the impact of the strike. A major teachers' strike was shut down in September by Norway's Labour Party government under the pretext of the threat to children's mental health. If the monitor announces the same finding in the kindergartens, the government may intervene again and impose binding arbitration on kindergarten workers.

On Tuesday evening, workers at day care centres in the **German** city of Hamburg joined a strike and large demonstration against understaffing. According to *FINK.HAMBURG*, the shortage of skilled workers is expected to reach 6,200 next year, up from 4,000 in 2020. The United Services Union announced that around 3,000 workers and parents joined a march in support of the strike.

Educators at the children's detention centre La Clairière, in Geneva, **Switzerland**, held a strike on Wednesday against the imposition of a new work schedule. The centre has suffered from understaffing since the start of the pandemic, and the management announced recently it would resolve the staff shortage by introducing 11-hour shifts with a 30-minute break up to three days per week.

According to *20 Minutes*, the Public Services Union said the centre had tested 10-hour shifts with a one-hour break, and educators reported that after working such long shifts they no longer had the patience and attention span required to deal with the complex needs of children in custody. Another strike is planned for November 18.

**Albanian** university lecturers continue an indefinite strike they began at the start of term on October 17, calling for a 50 percent pay rise over two years and improvements to working conditions. Students joined protests to support the lecturers, who earn half as much as in neighbouring Kosovo.

*Novini.bg* reported that the prime minister of Albania opposed any concessions to the lecturers, saying, "There will be no increase in wages until ... after the end of winter."

### Major strikes by healthcare workers throughout Europe

This week, healthcare workers in hospitals and communities across

Europe held major strikes and protests, opposing deteriorating working conditions and care.

In **Greece**, hospital workers joined a three-hour strike called by the Federation of Associations of Hospital Doctors of Greece (OENGE) on Monday, opposing the government's new healthcare bill. The new law encourages doctors to work in parallel in public sector and private hospitals. According to the OENGE, the bill will "put a tombstone on free healthcare."

Hospital pharmacists in **Portugal** began a two-day national strike on Tuesday, demanding salary scales be redrawn, and workers' years of service be reflected in their pay. The National Union of Pharmacists also criticised the lack of secure contracts and poor working conditions in the sector. Another two-day strike is planned for November 15.

Nurses in Vila Franca de Xira near Lisbon also protested last week, demanding an increase in staffing levels and equal working hours with public sector workers. Nurses at the local hospital remain on the 40-hour week contracts they were hired on when the hospital was part of a public/private partnership, but they are demanding the ministry of finance authorise the hospital to hire workers on a 35-hour contract.

In-home care workers in the **Spanish** autonomous community of Galicia began an indefinite strike on Wednesday, called by the Galician Union Confederation (CIG), in opposition to a deal signed between the employers' association and the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers' Union (UGT). The CIG denounced the new contract as establishing a two-tier system, providing a higher pay rise for workers in companies with new tenders than those already in place, and called for a 6.5 percent pay rise for all workers.

According to *Faro de Vigo*, many local councils throughout the community established minimum service requirements for the in-home care workers' strike, in places effectively banning it.

The Amyts doctors' union called an indefinite strike of doctors in 24-hour healthcare centres throughout Spain from next week, saying there are not enough staff to operate them. Amyts rejected a deal establishing the centres signed by the CCOO, UGT and other unions.

Speaking to *Europa Press*, Amyts's general secretary said doctors "think they're already carrying a huge workload and they don't see themselves increasing that overload even more." The government also imposed minimum service requirements on 50 percent of emergency services, requiring at least two GPs to stay at work in each area.

It was widely reported in the Spanish media that around 60 percent of doctors who were assigned to work in the 24-hour care centres when they opened last week called in sick, suggesting widespread opposition to the unions' agreement to open the centres.

Care workers in the **Belgian** province of Liège held a 24-hour strike on Monday, denouncing understaffing and low pay after the directors of the provincial care organisation ISoSL were granted a pay increase of between 15 and 25 percent. A care home nurse told RTBF "We work understaffed all the time... Even after 20 years of career, I am not immune to error, but when I ask who would be held responsible in the event of a problem, the management tells me that it is me. It is unacceptable to work in such conditions. We realise that only profitability counts in their eyes."

Emergency care workers at the university hospital in the **French** city of Nantes continue their indefinite symbolic strike, continuing to care for patients but handing out protest banners and wearing slogans, which they began two weeks ago. They were joined last week by their colleagues in paediatrics. The strike in the emergency department began after a plan to cut capacity was announced, and paediatric care workers joined after a major outbreak of bronchiolitis overwhelmed their capacity, *France Bleu* reported.

On Monday, around 200 interns and medical students also protested outside the Nantes university hospital against the new social security financing bill, *Ouest France* reported. The bill will extend the internship

for trainee GPs by a year and deploy them "as a priority" in "medical deserts," remote areas with a lack of GPs.

### **Thousands of metal workers strike over pay in Germany**

Thousands of workers in the metal sector and other heavy industries joined warning strikes this week, as part of collective bargaining between the IG Metall union and manufacturers.

IG Metall, with four million members, is demanding a mere 8 percent pay increase, below current inflation of 10.4 percent. Employers rejected even this real-terms cut, offering only a one-off payment of 3,000 euros to cover a 30-month period, massively eroding workers' living standards, and an unspecified future increase to base pay, the *Berliner Morgenpost* reported.

### **Wildcat strikes at two airports in Cyprus over job cuts**

Ground handling workers at two airports in Cyprus, Larnaca and Paphos, walked out on wildcat strikes this week after nearly 200 workers were fired.

On Tuesday, workers at Larnaca stopped work for two hours, when 156 of them were handed redundancy letters, *Phileneews* reported. When the ground handling service was being taken over by a new company, workers were promised jobs would be protected. Workers at Paphos also walked out for five hours in response to 42 dismissals.

### **Delivery workers strike against "insulting" union-backed contract in Milan, Italy**

On Wednesday, dozens of delivery workers in Milan, Italy joined a strike called by the "grassroots" Union Sindacale di Base (USB) against the latest agreement between unions and the "gig economy" companies, entrenching poor conditions in the sector.

According to USB's press release, the three main unions—CGIL, CISL and UIL—are negotiating with employers' association Assodelivery, and are likely to agree a deal along the same lines as that signed by the three unions and Just Eat last year. The USB criticised this contract for the fact that, while it did recognise workers as employees of the company, rather than self-employed contractors, it was "insulting" compared with the national collective agreement for logistics workers.

In particular, the contract at Just Eat endorsed by the CGIL/CISL/UIL left workers responsible for providing their own means of transport and risking being fired if their bicycle or moped breaks down. USB demanded "gig economy" workers be covered by the same contract as the rest of the logistics sector.

### **Further strike by ScotRail staff over pay**

Around 2,000 rail workers employed by ScotRail in Scotland held a 24-hour strike October 29.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are seeking an improved pay offer. The stoppage led to an almost complete shutdown of the ScotRail network. The rail workers rejected a five percent pay offer.

Prior to Saturday's stoppage, ScotRail upped the offer by promising a £500 payout on top of the five percent. RPI inflation is currently 12.6 percent. The offer was withdrawn when the strike went ahead.

RMT members at Network Rail, that runs most UK rail infrastructure, will walk out on November 5, 7 and 9.

The Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) cancelled their action at Network Rail in favour of talks. TSSA members will walk out at other train operating companies (TOCs) that run 2,500 stations.

The RMT is balloting 1,000 cleaners working for contractors like Mitie and Churchill for strike action. They demand £15 an hour, sick pay, improved holiday pay and pensions. The ballot closes November 22.

The 40,000 RMT union members employed by the major train TOCs, and Network Rail have already taken part in nationwide stoppages against massive restructuring.

### **Pay strike of dockers in Liverpool continues**

Around 600 UK dockers at the Mersey Docks and Harbour company (MDHC) in Liverpool are in the second week of their current two-week strike.

It is the third round of strikes by the Unite union members, following a one-week stoppage earlier this month. The second round saw control operating staff join the dispute. An initial two-week strike was launched in September.

During the dispute, the company provocatively issued formal redundancy notices for 132 of the workers.

The dockers rejected the latest pay offer, which the employer described as the final offer. MDHC says the offer represents an average 10.2 percent increase made up of an 8.9 percent rise in basic pay plus a 0.3 percent rise in the night shift allowance and a further increase in rates of pay of up to four percent. Unite disputes the figures and says the real amount is just 8.3 percent.

MDHC is part of Peel Ports, owned by the Peel Group based on the Isle of Man tax haven. Peel Ports paid out around £300 million in dividends the past five years.

### **Workers at biscuit manufacturer in Liverpool continue strike over pay**

Around 700 UK workers at the Jacob's biscuit and cracker factory in Aintree, Liverpool are continuing their strike over pay, now entering its sixth week.

At a meeting last week, the GMB members voted to escalate the action into an all-out strike, rather than the current selective days. They want an 8.5 percent rise, yet RPI inflation is currently 12.6 percent. The company offered just 4.25 percent plus a £500 one-off payment and 4.5 percent next year. Jacob's has manufactured biscuits at the site for over 100 years.

### **Vinyl floor manufacturing workers in Greater Manchester, England begin two-week pay strike as company profits increase**

Around 200 UK workers employed by vinyl flooring manufacturer Polyflor in Greater Manchester began a two-week strike October 31.

The GMB members at the Whitefield site rejected a one-off £400 payment on top of an already rejected eight percent pay offer. This follows stoppages in October.

Polyflor's parent company, James Halstead PLC, 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 to begin a series of two-hour strikes against low pay on September 7. However, they were informed by email not to turn up for their shift and were locked out for a week. While unions cancelled strikes after the queen's death, the lockout was not lifted.

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. The company brought in agency staff to try and break the strike.

### **Strikes continue by light rail workers at UK's West Midlands Metro over low pay**

Strikes by 176 UK workers employed on the West Midlands Metro, which runs a light rail service between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, are continuing with stoppages Tuesday to Friday this week.

The Unite union members first walked out on October 15 and plan 53 stoppages until January 5.

They voted by an 86 percent majority on an 84 percent turnout for the action. The tram workers seek a minimum £27,000 for drivers and customer representatives and an additional £5,000 a year for other grades.

### **Strike of workers at UK coal mine museum over pay**

Around 45 workers at the National Coal Mine Museum near Wakefield, England held a five-day strike from October 26 to October 30.

The strike partly coincided with school half-term holiday, which would normally see an uptick in visits to the museum. The Unison union members voted by a 94.4 percent majority to walk out in protest at a below-inflation pay offer.

The museum is run as a charity and gets funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. It is offering the maximum allowed under government guidance, a 6.8 percent rise for the lowest paid.

The strikers want a £2,000 flat rate rise. According to the *Yorkshire Post* newspaper, the hourly rate for museum guides has only risen by £1.16 since 2008 and is currently £10.35 an hour.

Many of those who work as guides at the museum are former coal miners who took part in the 1984-85 miners' strike.

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

Around 50 coffin makers employed by Cooperative Funeral Care at their factory in Bogmoor Place, Glasgow in Scotland walked out on Monday until 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 strike in August. They rejected a pay offer less than half the current inflation rate. Unite was to meet with the government mediation service Acas, but informed the Co-op of a further stoppage to begin November 14 if there is no resolution.

### **Strike by oil terminal logistics workers in Immingham, UK over pay**

Around 40 workers employed by Briggs Marine in Immingham, England held a 24-hour stoppage on October 28. Around 30 GMB union members formed a picket.

They voted overwhelmingly for the strike after receiving a well below inflation pay offer. Briggs Marine provides marine and environmental services.

### **Further strikes by food production workers in Rochdale, UK over pay offer**

Around 50 workers at Mizkan Euro's food production plant in Rochdale, England were to begin a three-day strike Thursday.

The Unite union members held a previous three-day strike, begun on October 18. They rejected a five percent pay offer. They are paid as little as £11.50 an hour.

Mizkan makes well-known brands such as Branston Pickle and Haywards Pickled Vegetables.

### **Teachers at school in Nottingham strike over excessive workloads, as teachers across England and Wales begin strike ballot over pay**

Teachers at the Nottingham Academy in England went on strike Tuesday. The National Education Union (NEU) members were protesting heavy workloads.

This week, ballot papers for strike action over pay were received by teachers and support staff in England and Wales. The ballot closes January 13.

In recent indicative ballots of NEU members, 98 percent of teachers said they should be given a fully funded above-inflation offer and 86 percent were prepared to strike.

### **Scottish ambulance staff vote to strike over pay**

Around 8,000 ambulance staff working for the Scottish Ambulance Service and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board voted by a near 90 percent majority to strike.

The GMB members have rejected the well below inflation pay offer from the Scottish government. Separately, in the first pay ballot of

physiotherapy staff working for NHS Scotland, 79 percent voted for industrial action. They are represented by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, which released the ballot result Tuesday.

### **Further strikes by Stagecoach bus drivers in Sunderland, UK over pay**

Bus drivers working for the Stagecoach bus company in Sunderland, England are to hold further stoppages.

The GMB union members have held strikes on six days to protest a four percent pay offer with a further two percent to follow later in the year. The boss of Stagecoach was paid £1.7 million the last financial year, and the regional company made £58 million profits.

### **Thousands attend UK protests against childcare costs**

Thousands of protestors, mainly women, took part in protests on Saturday to protest the high cost of childcare in Britain.

Organised by the Pregnant Then Screwed campaign, the protests were titled March of the Mummies. Marches took place in London, with a rally in Trafalgar Square. Other cities hosting protests included Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester and Norwich.

A press release ahead of the action noted, "Pregnant Then Screwed has carried out a survey to understand more about the cost and impact of childcare on families, it has found that the exorbitant cost of childcare creates financial anxiety in 84 percent of households. These findings support recent research by the OECD that singled out the UK as having the most expensive childcare system in the world, with 35.7 percent of income being spent on it (OECD, April 2019).

"The financial burden of childcare has meant that 17 percent of parents have had to leave their jobs, with 62 percent saying they work fewer hours because of childcare costs. It is mostly women who bear the brunt of childcare, so this further adds to the motherhood penalty and the gender pay gap."

### **Protest by students at Durham University, England over poor and expensive housing**

Durham University students in England protested outside the Bill Bryson library on October 28 over poor and expensive housing accommodation.

Students have queued overnight outside estate agents for suitable accommodation. The protestors raised the lack of accommodation, the poor condition of properties and that rents have shot up by as much as 150 percent.

### **Protests and strikes over death of Iranian Mahsa Amini enter seventh week**

A strike was set for Saturday by oil contract workers in Iran over the

death of Mahsa Amini.

The stoppage was announced by the Organising Council of Oil Contract Workers in Iran on October 27. The following day they announced permanent oil workers would join the action. They demanded the release of 250 colleagues detained in the course of previous protests.

The 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was arrested by the 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.

The nationwide protests continued on Sunday. On Tuesday, sit-down strikes took place in universities and several cities including Tehran and Isfahan, defying the orders of the Revolutionary Guards that protests should cease.

According to one human rights organisation, Iranian security forces have killed 253 people, including 34 children, during the protests. Several thousand were taken into custody.

### **General strike in Jerusalem-area town after Israeli forces kill Palestinian**

A general strike took place Monday in the town of al-Eizariya east of Jerusalem, Israel.

The strike, which led to the closure of all shops, schools and other institutions, was to protest the shooting death of 49-year-old Palestinian Barakat Moussa Odeh. Israeli forces shot him dead after claiming he rammed his car into Israeli soldiers, injuring five.

### **Protests by teachers in Syrian city continue over low pay**

At the end of last week teachers held protests in the eastern Syrian city of Deir Ezzor. They rejected the low pay increases proposed by the “Autonomous Administration.”

The teachers are hit by the high cost of living compounded by the deteriorating exchange rate of the Syrian pound against the US dollar.

They also protested the delay in maternity payments, called for the appointment of qualified teachers and for security staff to guard schools. They said their protests would escalate if the government paid no heed.

### **Egyptian government carries out arrests ahead of planned protest over deteriorating social conditions**

Egyptian authorities arrested dozens of people ahead of a planned protest called for November 11. Arrests took place in Cairo and Giza, including those of young men by security forces in plainclothes.

The protest will highlight deteriorating social conditions as the Egyptian pound continues to slide against the US dollar, recently reaching an all-time low.

Egypt recently finalised a deal with the International Monetary Fund over its parlous economic situation. Hashtags such as “Liberate your country” and “Leave [president] Sisi” are trending on Twitter.

### **Public sector workers in South Africa to begin stoppage over pay**

Public sector workers in South Africa rejected a three percent across-the-board pay increase, and are demanding ten percent. The Public Services Association members are due to start strike action and picketing on Thursday.

Other public service unions, covering nearly 800,000 workers, including the Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA, National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union, and Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of SA, gave seven days’ notice to walk out on Monday.

### **Catering workers at Makro, South Africa down tools to demand a 12 percent wage increase**

Catering workers at Makro stores in South Africa downed tools October 26-29, demanding a 12 percent wage increase.

According to *Eyewitness News*, negotiations over four months between Makro and the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union are deadlocked.

The union’s spokesperson Sithembele Tshwete said the union submitted a memorandum of demands to management, adding, “If after seven days there’s no progress, we will again go out on strike, not a limited duration strike this time but a full-scale, full-blown indefinite strike.”

### **Two hundred farm workers in South Africa march to parliament**

Over two hundred women farm workers from Western and Northern Cape farms in South Africa marched to parliament October 28. They are demanding changes to land distribution, a moratorium on evictions from farms, a ban on hazardous pesticides and social protection in the form of a basic income grant.

The women live on the farms and are paid minimum wages. They are under constant threat of eviction.

They handed in a memo quoting the Freedom Charter, which states, “It is still the will of farm workers and dwellers that ‘The land shall be shared among those who work it’.”

According to *Groundup* news, farm injuries are not reported, and employees are coerced into signing illegal contracts. A farm worker from the Northern Cape said, “We provide this country with food yet we don’t have any food.”

### **Workers shut down Lagos Airport, Nigeria over job cuts**

Workers stopped work and blocked the entrance gates of the Murtala Mohammed Airport 2 (MMA2) Terminal in Lagos, Nigeria in the morning of November 1.

They demand the operators of the airport terminal, the B-Courtney Aviation Services Limited drop the “unprovoked termination” of 34 aviation workers.

The Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria members barricaded the entrance to terminal 2 of the airport from 2 a.m.

on November 1 until the evening.

The head of corporate communication, Oluwatosin Onalaja, said, “The alleged cause of this industrial action is our decision to lay off some of our staff who we consider unproductive. It is our inherent right to manage our business in the most prudent manner and we should not be intimidated by external forces as is being done in this case.”

### **Lagos bus drivers’ strike impacts Nigeria's commercial capital**

Nigerian bus drivers in Lagos declared a seven-day strike from October 31, to demand an end to extortionate charges by motor park touts who recruit and organise passengers. Many commuters rely on the buses to get to their workplaces.

The Joint Drivers Welfare Association of Nigeria members planned a protest at the state secretariat, Alausa, but it was later called off.

The bus drivers demand the removal of illegal checkpoints and abolition of multiple levies that oppress them.

### **Kenyan pilots face court injunction to stop upcoming strike**

Kenyan pilots facing a court injunction as they prepare to strike against nearly 200 job cuts.

Kenya Airways (KQ) intends to reduce the number of pilots from 400 to 207 over a three-year period. KQ rushed to court and was granted an injunction on October 31 against the Kenya Airline Pilots Association planned action.

Prior to the strike call and injunction, talks overseen by Central Organisation of Trade Unions secretary general Francis Atwoli failed to produce any agreement.



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