

Cost-of-living strikes in Greece, Belgium and France; Healthcare workers across Europe strike against understaffing and poor working conditions; 24-hour strike over job cuts, pensions and working conditions brings London Underground services to a halt; striking pilots at Kenya Airways defy government threats and union sabotage; public servants walk out in South Africa 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.

Europe

Belgian workers join one-day general strike against inflation and energy prices

On Wednesday, workers across Belgium joined a one-day general strike. They called for pay rises and government intervention to reduce prices, especially of energy.

Workers in public transport, airports, hospitals, and many private companies stopped work. According to *Het Laatste Nieuws* workers in the country's three main ports, Zeebrugge, Antwerp and Ghent, struck "en masse" and paralysed shipping.

Employers and politicians lined up to denounce the strike. Prime Minister Alexander de Croo called for workers and employers to "unite," claiming the government already implemented "a unique system, like nowhere else, which protects Belgians from the loss of purchasing power due to inflation." The head of the Walloon Union of Companies employers' association told *RTBF* they opposed the strike because Belgium was in "a state of war."

The unions emphasised they had no objection to de Croo's call for workers to "unite" with the companies making record profits at their expense. The president of SETCa, a subsidiary of one of the largest trade union confederations, told *RTBF* that the unions "are not asking for a general increase in wages... We are not irresponsible, we are not thieves of companies, far from it."

Belgium has an automatic system of "wage indexation," which increases pay in line with a measure of inflation at regular intervals. However, the heads of the major Belgian unions wrote in *Social Europe*, 850,000 workers only receive this increase in January, so their pay will fall far behind rising bills. They also pointed out that the "index" excludes

fuel price rises, which are particularly high.

Workers in Greece hold one-day general strike against inflation and attacks on workers' rights

Workers in Greece held a one-day general strike Wednesday, called by unions representing workers in both the public and private sectors.

Thousands joined rallies in Athens and other cities, calling for pay rises to offset inflation, denouncing the New Democracy government's recent attacks on workers' rights, including the right to strike.

National strike in France

Workers throughout France joined a one-day strike and demonstrations on Thursday, protesting plummeting real wages, and attacks on pensions and right to strike. The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) called the one-day stoppage of workers in schools, hospitals, and other services.

The CGT, as well as the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions and Force Ouvrière, also called a one-day strike at the Parisian public transport authority RATP Thursday, which had a large impact on transport in the capital and Île-de-France region.

Healthcare workers throughout Europe strike against understaffing and poor working conditions

Workers in hospitals and health services throughout Europe continue

widespread strikes against the deterioration of services.

In **Spain's** capital, Madrid, doctors in the newly opened 24-hour healthcare centres began an indefinite strike on Monday, opposing the extra burden when there are not enough workers to staff them. The strike was called by the Amyts union after other unions signed an agreement allowing the centres to open, but 60 percent of doctors called in sick last week when the centres opened, showing widespread opposition.

Healthcare workers and emergency phone operators in Madrid held a three-day strike from November 4, demanding an increase in investment and a reduction in working hours, particularly on night shifts. Both Madrid strikes were effectively banned by the Ministry of Health, which imposed a 100 percent minimum service requirement and hired temporary workers into the 24-hour centres through labour exchanges. Many were not informed they were being hired to break the strike.

In the autonomous community of Cantabria, doctors in primary care also began an indefinite strike Monday, demanding a reduction in schedules so that they see a maximum of 35 patients each day, and calling for the Minister of Health to be dismissed.

Nurses from across **Turkey** joined a rally in Ankara last week. They demanded a pay rise, an end to oppressive working environments and an increase in hiring to deal with the shortage of nurses, *Cumhuriyet* reported. A newly graduated nurse earns barely half of the official poverty line.

In **France**, local protests and strikes continue in hospitals and care homes. Workers at the in-home care service Domidom in the town of Caen have been on indefinite strike since October 18.

The care workers demand a pay rise and increased fuel allowances. One striker told *France Bleu*, "It is no longer possible to continue working under these conditions. The straw that broke the camel's back is the price of diesel. Today, we go out of pocket to go to work."

Medical interns in France continue partial strikes begun last week, walking out on Thursday and Friday. Interns are opposing the new social security financing bill, extending the internship for trainee GPs by a year and deploying them in "medical deserts," remote areas short of GPs.

In **Portugal**, the Pre-Hospital Emergency Technicians Union called an overtime ban from Tuesday. According to *Lusa*, ambulance workers are calling for pay rises and hazard payments. The union told the media that more training needed to be provided to ambulance workers, and that the service was understaffed.

Transport workers in Brest, France walk out for funeral after suicide of colleague

Hundreds of workers at Bibus, the transport network in the French city of Brest, walked out for a one-day strike Wednesday, and drove in a procession across the city in memory of colleague Didier Cabon following his suicide last week.

After hearing the news Monday, drivers on the bus and tram network stopped work for the day. A representative from the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) union told *actu.fr*, "It was work that killed him."

Cabon was employed in technical maintenance for the past two years, having worked as a driver for 30 years at Bibus. He was taking computing courses in his own time to improve his skills in the role. After he was told that he would be demoted from this position and returned to full-time driving, he wrote a suicide note in which, according to the CFDT, "he spoke of shame, of a stab in the back. They took away his dignity as a man."

On Wednesday, another Bibus driver also attempted suicide, accusing

RATP Dev, which runs the service, of "cold and cynical management", the CFDT told *Le Figaro*.

German train drivers' union suspends indefinite strike for pay parity

On Thursday, the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) called off an indefinite strike begun November 2 at the state-owned Southwest German Regional Transport (SWEG) and its subsidiary, Bahn Stuttgart (SBS), according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

GDL suspended the strike without receiving any compromise from SWEG, because it supposedly wanted to give the company "breathing space ... to admit the instability of their position."

Workers walked out on several strikes to demand the same collective agreement apply to workers in both SWEG and SBS, which was recently acquired by SWEG from Abellio. SWEG refused to agree to this demand because it intends to re-privatise SBS.

24-hour strike hits London Underground over job cuts, pensions and working conditions

Workers employed by Transport for London (TfL) on the London Underground rail system LUL began a 24-hour strike on Thursday, bringing services to a halt.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members oppose job cuts and worsening pensions and working conditions. London Overground services are also affected, as RMT members there are on strike. Around 1,000 Unite union members working for TfL also walked out over pay.

Last-minute talks between RMT and LUL broke down. The RMT issued a statement reading, "Your RMT negotiators met London Underground yesterday (8/11/22) and offered to suspend our strike action if management agreed to: Suspend the implementation of 600 station job cuts until the end of this year;

"Make a clear statement that LUL would not agree to detrimental attacks on our pension arising out the current pension review that they are conducting with government."

The RMT bureaucracy recently called off planned stoppages by 40,000 rail workers to enter "intense negotiations" with the government and rail companies, which demand a major restructuring involving attacks on jobs, pensions and safety.

On the day of the London Underground strike, Aslef, the train drivers' union, announced its members at 12 train operating companies (TOCs) would hold a 24-hour walkout on Saturday, November 26. The TOCs to be affected are: Avanti West Coast; Chiltern Railways, CrossCountry, East Midlands Railway, Great Western Railway, Greater Anglia, London North Eastern Railway, London Overground, Northern Trains, Southeastern, Transpennine Express, and West Midlands Trains.

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

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

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 UK bus drivers at First South West over pay

Around 400 drivers employed by First South West, which covers the English counties of Cornwall and Somerset, held a 24-hour strike on November 4.

It was the third such stoppage by the RMT members, seeking a pay increase. Some of the drivers are only paid £11 an hour. The company says it made an offer of a 17.4 percent increase over the next two years. The RMT disputed the figure, and say it represents only a small increase to £12 an hour.

Further walkouts are planned for November 18 and 21.

Coffin makers in Scotland plan further pay strikes

Around 50 coffin makers employed by Cooperative Funeral Care at their factory in Bogmoor Place, Glasgow in Scotland, who recently completed a week's strike, are to walk out again.

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 of less than half the RPI inflation rate of 12.6 percent.

Talks brokered by the government mediation service Acas broke down, and the coffin makers will begin a week-long strike on November 14.

Unite union calls off strike of dockers in Liverpool, UK and recommends a pay deal

The Unite union has suspended a planned strike of around 600 UK dockers at the Mersey Docks and Harbour company (MDHC) in Liverpool after Peel Ports put forward a new offer.

The offer was overwhelmingly accepted at mass meeting of the dockers held on Thursday. The offer had been recommended by Unite. According to a Unite press release of November 10 the deal is for pay rises between "14 percent and 18 percent plus, according to job grade."

The dockers finished a two-week strike on Friday. This was the third round of strikes, after a previous one-week stoppage. The second round saw control operating staff join the dispute. An initial two-week strike was launched in September.

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

The dockers had rejected a previous pay offer, which the employer described as the final offer. MDHC said the offer represented an average 10.2 percent increase. Unite disputed the figure and said the real amount was just 8.3 percent.

Dockers at the largest UK container port, Felixstowe, also walked out over a seven percent pay award, with two eight-day pay strikes and a further week's stoppage from September 27. But no further action was

organised by Unite, leaving Liverpool dockers isolated.

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.

UK dairy workers in Gloucestershire strike over work rotas

Around 70 shunters and drivers at the Stonehouse Muller dairy distribution centre in Gloucestershire, England are continuing a rounds of stoppages begun August.

The latest walkouts by the Unite union members, begun on November 2, will end Saturday. They are fighting an imposed change to a working rota of five days on followed by two days off. The plant supplies milk and dairy products to retail chains Marks and Spencer and Waitrose.

Further stoppages are scheduled if Muller continues with its plans to impose the rota changes.

Construction engineers at UK refinery to strike over pay

Construction engineer workers employed at the Fawley petrol refining facility near Southampton, England are to walk out over pay from November 21-26 and November 28-December 3.

The 130 Unite union members and some GMB members are employed by contractors Altrad, Bilfinger and Enerveo to provide maintenance at the Exxon Mobil refinery site. They demand the restoration of a £2.37 hourly bonus payment, withdrawn with union agreement during the pandemic.

Around 100 contract workers at the refinery carried out strikes earlier in the year over an inferior pay offer. The Unite union oversaw a return to work with a deal that fell short of the strikers demands.

Lecturers at private UK college in Sheffield to strike over pay

Lecturing staff at a private Sheffield college in England voted to strike over low pay.

The University and College Union (UCU) members work for the University of Sheffield International College, owned by Study Group. It prepares international students for courses at Sheffield University, including improving their English, with students paying up to £22,000 a year.

The lecturers voted by an 84 percent majority to walk out. Dates for the stoppages are November 17-18 and 28-30. They will work to rule from November 21.

Planned strike action by the lecturers in April over the same issue was suspended by the UCU.

Ancillary staff at UK government department to strike over pay

Ancillary workers including cleaning and catering staff at the UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, based in

Westminster, London are to strike.

The Public and Commercial Services members want a pay increase and have concerns over health and safety. They are employed by contractor Aramark to provide ancillary services at the department. Dates for walkouts are November 16, 23 and 30, and December 7 and 14.

Some workers said they miss meals because they cannot afford to feed themselves properly.

Tyne and Wear, UK light rail engineers to strike over pay

Around 50 engineers employed by Stadler Rail Service Ltd on the Tyne and Wear Metro light rail system in England are to strike.

The Unite union members will begin a two-week stoppage on November 14, and are currently conducting an overtime ban. Further strikes are scheduled.

They are protesting a proposed four percent pay rise. Stadler posted profits of £119 million for 2021.

Packaging workers at DS Smith in UK vote for stoppages over pay

Around 1,000 workers employed by package manufacturer DS Smith have voted to strike over pay.

The GMB members based at five sites, Louth, Featherstone, Clay Cross, Devizes and Livingston in Scotland, voted by a 93 percent majority for the action. DS Smith offered a three percent consolidated increase plus a consolidated payment of £760 for 2022/23. Walkouts could begin before the end of this month.

DS Smith produces packaging material for leading companies such as Seabrooks crisps, PepsiCo and Amazon.

Unite union suspends strike of bus drivers in Hull, UK as company offers new deal

Unite has suspended the all-out strike by around 250 drivers, engineers, cleaners and customer assistants at UK bus company Stagecoach in Hull on Monday. The strike began on October 7.

Drivers are demanding an increase from £11.14 an hour to £13, with the same percentage increase passed on to all staff. They rejected the claim by the largest bus and coach operator in the UK that this is unaffordable. Their demand is viewed as a step towards parity with drivers at Stagecoach Merseyside, who are on £14 an hour.

Stagecoach originally offered a two-year deal to raise pay for drivers to £12.50 an hour by December and to £13 an hour by May next year. Under the new offer, which is over two years, drivers will achieve the £13 an hour figure earlier than May 2023. The Unite union members are balloting on the deal, and should they reject it they will resume their strike on Monday. Unite is recommending the deal.

Unite union suspends strike of biscuit manufacturing workers in Batley, UK

The Unite union suspended a planned strike by 36 engineers employed by biscuit manufacturer Fox's at Batley, England.

The planned four-day strike was scheduled to begin on November 6. The engineers rejected a five percent pay offer, dependent on agreeing to move from weekly to monthly pay and giving three months' notice rather than the current one week.

Following talks brokered by the government mediation service Acas, the company came back with an improved offer. The engineers are balloting on the new offer. Should they reject it, a planned four-day stoppage will begin November 14.

Fox's is part of the multinational Italian-based Ferrero group. According to the latest figures, its revenues from its UK and Ireland operations increased by 10 percent to £450 million. Unite estimate the engineers' claim would only cost the company £140,000.

Africa

Public sector workers in South Africa on pay strike

Thousands of public sector workers in South Africa began strike action on Thursday, including education and health care workers and nurses.

Some 235,000 Public Servants Association members rejected a three percent pay offer and demand a 6.5 percent rise. They also want an extension of the R1,000 gratuity payment. The government threatened to impose the offer if the strikes go ahead.

Public administration workers have also taken part in lunchtime pickets since Monday.

According to South Africa Broadcasting News, thousands of workers from all provinces will meet in Pretoria for a march to the treasury to submit a memorandum of demands.

50-year-old woman killed during South African protests over electricity outages and lack of water

During protests on Monday against electricity outages and lack of water, a 50-year-old woman was shot dead by police, and two others were injured in Vosman township, Mpumalanga in South Africa.

Around 40,000 homes have been without electricity and water for a month after a transformer was damaged. Shops were looted and tyres torched as protesters blockaded the roads surrounding the township.

Taraba State House of Assembly workers in Nigeria begin indefinite strike

Workers at the House of Assembly in Taraba State, Nigeria, walked out on indefinite strike on November 7 against the non-payment of their outfit allowances.

The State Chairman, Ibrahim Bala Yusuf, and Secretary Abdullahi Abubakar expressed sadness that despite numerous attempts at a roundtable dialogue, the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria did not succeed in averting a strike. The state government ignored a 21-day and seven-day warning of strike action.

Workers are also angry over the dilapidated office accommodation in which they work, compared to those under previous administrations.

The strike is likely to prevent the passage of the upcoming budget for 2023.



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