

French journalists strike against appointment of far-right editor at *Le Journal du Dimanche*; ongoing strikes and protests in Iran against poverty and authoritarian rule; tanker drivers in Ghana hold national sit-down strike over poor conditions of roads

## 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.

### French journalists strike against appointment of far-right editor at *Le Journal du Dimanche*

Journalists at French weekly paper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (*JDD*) have been on strike since last week, voting by 97 percent to continue their walkout after Geoffroy Lejeune, former editor of the neo-fascist paper, *Valeurs actuelles*, was appointed editor-in-chief.

An open letter opposing the appointment of a far-right extremist as editor of *JDD* was signed by more than 650 public figures. During Lejeune's period as editor, *Valeurs actuelles* published a letter from 23 retired generals advocating a military coup.

According to a source quoted by *Libération*, Lejeune was fired from *Valeurs actuelles* because its owner, Franco-Lebanese billionaire Iskandar Safa considered him "too extreme" for his support of far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour. The billionaire Vincent Bolloré, who took over the company which owns *JDD* in 2022, was also a major supporter of Zemmour.

### National protests by court clerks in France

Court clerks throughout France protested on Monday at noon outside courts, opposing changes to their salary structure. One clerk told *Ouest France* the revaluation would provide only a "ridiculous increase" in salaries in return for decreasing their seniority levels, used to calculate pay and other benefits.

According to *Ouest France*, the protests were not called by the trade unions, but organised through a Facebook group "Greffiers/Greffières/Adjoints en colère" (Angry Clerks/Assistants), which reportedly had 2,500 members last week, but has almost doubled in size since the protests.

The government introduced the salary changes as part of a bill to

supposedly provide "more protective, faster and more efficient justice." *France Bleu* reported that the bill would increase the overall budget for the justice system from 9.6 billion euros to 11 billion within four years, but this would not even keep up with inflation.

### Hospitality workers strike over collective agreement in Bizkaia, Spain

Thousands of workers in the hospitality sector in the Spanish province of Bizkaia began a two-day strike on Thursday, demanding improvements to wages, working hours and job security in the next collective agreement.

According to *Europa Press*, the unions said prices increased by 12.9 percent since 2020, but the average pay of hospitality workers has not increased.

As many as 20,000 workers may join the strikes, and the unions said that if no agreement is signed then the Tour de France, which begins in Bilbao on Saturday, would be completely disrupted.

### German workers continue strikes at Amazon and other retailers

Strikes continue in Germany at Amazon and throughout the retail sector, in disputes over pay. Retail workers held numerous warning strikes in the past weeks, with hundreds striking at shops and warehouses in several federal states this week.

United Services Union (Verdi) members are calling for hourly wages to increase by 2.50 euros, which amounts to an annual pay rise of around 15 percent. Employers have called this "unrealistic" and made pay offers far below inflation. The employers' organisations in several states have also threatened lawsuits to impose damages of millions of euros against Verdi, because it asked that state-wide collective bargaining agreements be binding rather than advisory.

Around 300 Amazon workers in Leipzig also began a 48-hour strike on Monday, for the same pay demands. Amazon does not take part in the same collective bargaining negotiations as other retailers, and workers held a years-long campaign of strikes to demand it sign up to state-wide

collective agreements, but Verdi limited this campaign to a series of short walkouts.

### **Belgian postal workers strike against reorganisation**

Postal workers at Bpost, the Belgian postal service, have been on strike in Brussels and the French-speaking region of Wallonia since last week. General Union of Public Services (CGSP) members are demanding an end to the regular reorganisations of their responsibilities.

The CGSP said Bpost “only ever has one vision for reorganisation, and that is to decrease staffing levels.” The company claimed to respect the right to strike, report *L’Avenir*, but threatened workers who picketed their depots, saying “blocking pickets that take workers and customers hostage and endanger the viability of the company constitute an illegal obstruction of work, which management cannot accept.”

Bpost is 51 percent owned by the Belgian state, and a number of investment banks hold a significant stake.

### **Delhaize supermarket workers in Belgium continue strikes while the company seeks new court orders to ban pickets**

Workers at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium continue strikes against the company’s plan to turn its 128 shops into franchises. The majority of Delhaize shops are already franchised but pay and working conditions are usually worse than in the remaining directly operated shops.

Delhaize managed to get a court order banning all pickets outside its shops and warehouses, sending bailiffs and police to break picket lines, but this expired on June 16.

An official from the General Labour Federation of Belgium told *Nieuwsblad* that a bailiff still arrived at one picket line in Berchem but he “registered and photographed the action and was gone after five minutes.”

Several regional courts have already ruled in favour of the unions when they challenged the bans on pickets, but Delhaize managed to have the bans extended in some regions, including Brussels.

### **Local authority water workers in Ireland strike against forced transfer to state company**

Workers at local authority-run water services in Ireland will hold a one-day strike on Friday against plans to transfer them to Uisce Éireann (formerly Irish Water), the state-owned company which will soon be responsible for all water services in Ireland. Unite union members rejected a “framework” for the transfer last year.

Unite is calling for working conditions to be guaranteed during the transfer, and for more workers to be included in the voluntary redundancy scheme. It also said the “framework” should be amended to set the date for a referendum on including public ownership and management of the water system in the constitution.

*RTÉ* reported that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage said workers who did not want to transfer could remain employed by local authorities with no loss of earnings “until 31 December 2026,” but that councils would “no longer have any involvement in the direct provision of water services to the public beyond that date.”

### **Miners end strike in Chiatura, Georgia**

Miners at the Georgian Manganese mines, near the Georgian city of Chiatura, ended their strike this week, during which several began a hunger strike and resorted to more desperate measures such as sewing closed their mouths or eyes. Reportedly thousands of miners stopped work, halting production in most of the company’s mines.

The miners demanded a 20 percent pay rise, a reduction of working hours, which could be more than 12 hours, and a reversal of the company’s demands for increased productivity, which would have required even longer hours. According to *Agenda.ge*, a deal was signed increasing wages by five percent retroactively from January, and by a further 6.9 percent from the start of July. Working conditions themselves were not improved, with a joint inspection by the unions and state labour inspectorate set up to “investigate,” the *Caucasian Knot* reported.

### **Striking bin workers in Favara, Italy threatened with prosecution**

Bin collection workers in the Sicilian town of Favara held a four-day strike last week, demanding two months’ pay arrears, *Favara Web* reported. The mayor of Favara said that he signed an agreement with the union before the strike ended to pay one months’ arrears soon, and the remainder after mid-July.

According to *ANSA*, striking workers had not returned to work the morning after the deal was signed, and the police commissioner reported them to the prosecutor’s office for Agrigento province for “interruption of public service,” which can carry a custodial sentence.

### **Ambulance workers in Yorkshire, UK strike as part of long-running pay dispute**

Ambulance workers in Yorkshire, England walked out on Monday between 3pm and 10pm. The Unite union members held the strike as part of their long-running campaign for improved pay and against staff shortages.

The GMB and Unison unions, who also represent ambulance workers, signed a deal along with other health unions accepting a below-inflation five percent pay award for 2023-24, and two non-consolidated payments for 2022-23, under the Agenda for Change pay framework.

On June 12, 1,000 ambulance workers at the West Midlands Ambulance Services went on strike as part of the same dispute.

### **Refuse workers in Selby, UK, walk out over pay offer**

Around 40 UK workers employed by contractor Urbaser, in Selby, went on strike Tuesday over pay. Urbaser is contracted to North Yorkshire unitary authority to provide refuse services in the Selby area.

The Unite union members rejected an eight percent pay offer from the company. Bin loader and ground workers are paid only £10.64 an hour,

while drivers who must have HGV licences are paid only £12.51 an hour. Unite claims the workers are among the lowest paid in the country.

The strike hit bin collection and street cleaning services in Selby. A further stoppage is planned for Friday and then again on July 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 28 and August 4, 8, and 11.

### **Strikes by pump manufacturer Sulzer workers in Leeds, UK over pay offer**

Around 100 UK workers at pump specialist manufacturer Sulzer in Leeds have been striking each Friday in June, after rejecting a pay offer from the company. Sulzer makes pumps for the oil, water and nuclear industries.

The Unite union members rejected a 6.5 percent pay offer from the company, plus a £275 one-off payment. Sulzer made profits of £32.6 million in 2021. Further strikes are planned for June 30 and July 7.

### **UK homeless charity workers begin indefinite strike over pay**

Around 550 workers employed by homeless charity St Mungo's based in London, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol and Oxford began an indefinite strike Tuesday. Monday marked the end of a four-week strike. They have rejected a 2.25 percent pay offer.

The Unite union members voted by a 71 percent majority for the indefinite strike. After tax and other deductions, St Mungo's workers take home less than £20,000 a year. In talks, the charity refused to improve its original offer, despite having £16 million in cash as well as large reserves.

Unite noted, "Since 2013, St Mungo's chief executives have seen their average pay at the charity spiral by 77 percent—up from £107,000 to more than £189,000 (according to the latest published accounts). St Mungo's won't reveal the salary of the newly appointed CEO, Emma Haddad.

"In the last ten years, the pay of senior management at St Mungo's has increased by 350 percent. In stark contrast, over a similar time frame, the real value of the wages of St Mungo's workers, many of whom work on the streets helping the homeless, has plummeted by 25 percent. A frontline worker earns around £26,000."

A Unite union press release announcing the strike wrote, "This momentous decision has been provoked by the ongoing indifference of management who callously refuse to acknowledge the struggle frontline workers face to pay the bills. After tax and deductions frontline workers take home less than £20,000 a year. Many of the workers are now in fear themselves after being unable to pay their rent or mortgage on their current poverty wages."

A rally to launch the stoppage was held Tuesday in Thomas More Square in London near St Mungo's head office. Unite also announced a sit-in by around 150 of the striking St Mungo workers would take place outside the charity's head office in Tower Hill, London.

### **Refuse workers in South Gloucestershire, UK, pay strike to last until September**

Around 150 refuse workers employed by outsourcing company Suez to provide refuse collection for part of South Gloucestershire council in

England began a strike Monday. This is now scheduled as a continuous strike until September 3. It was originally planned as a two-week stoppage.

The Unite union members previously held a week-long stoppage beginning June 12.

They voted by an 89 percent majority to reject an eight percent pay offer from Suez. Refuse collection lorry loaders are currently paid £11.53 an hour.

### **UK rail workers set to strike as part of prolonged pay dispute**

Around 20,000 rail workers at 14 train operating companies (TOCs) are scheduled to walk out for three days on July 20, 22 and 29.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have carried out a prolonged fight for improved pay and against attacks on jobs and conditions. The RMT pushed through a below-inflation deal to wind up the dispute involving 20,000 workers at rail infrastructure company Network Rail in March.

Rail workers have twice renewed their initial strike vote in the fight for improved pay, defend jobs and conditions. Around 12,500 train drivers in ASLEF have voted in three ballots to strike over the same issues.

### **Bus drivers in Newbury, UK to strike over pay freeze**

Bus drivers working for Newbury and District Bus Company (NDBC) in Berkshire, England are to hold a series of stoppages over low pay.

The drivers previously worked for Reading Buses, but in 2020 they were transferred to the NDBC, providing services including school transport for West Berkshire Council. They have not received a pay increase since then. Other NDBC drivers received a 5.7 percent pay increase.

Unite branded the company the meanest in the UK, paying the drivers £12.55 an hour and £13.22 for weekend working. The company stated any pay increase offer would be accompanied by a significant cut in sick pay.

Dates for stoppages are July 6, 7, 10, 14, and 19-21.

### **UK Amazon workers at Coventry site to hold further stoppages**

Around 900 workers at the Coventry fulfilment centre, England are to walk out July 11-13. The dates coincide with Amazon's Prime week with promotion sales, busy periods which see an increase in sales volumes.

The GMB members have already taken 19 days of strikes as they push for pay to increase from £11 an hour to £15.

### **Glass cord engineers in St Helens, UK to walk out over pay**

Engineers employed by NGF, in St Helens, England which manufactures glass cord used in the rubber and plastic industries, are to strike after rejecting a 5.65 percent pay offer plus an £800 bonus.

The Unite and GMB members will hold 48-hour strikes on July 2 and 14. NGF is part of the Pilkington group, but the NGF workers were

offered lower increases than workers at nearby Pilkington sites, who were offered rises of between 6.75 and 7.5 percent.

### **Passenger support workers at Glasgow, Scotland airport to strike over pay offer**

Around 70 workers employed by OCS Group UK Limited in Glasgow, Scotland are to hold 24-hour stoppages on July 6 and 11.

The Unite union members are responsible for assisting passengers with mobility problems. They voted by a 95 percent majority on a 91 percent turnout to strike, after rejecting a pay offer which would have taken their hourly pay to £10.90 an hour. OCS reported profits of £19.6 million for 2021.

### **Hospital consultants in England announce two days of strikes over pay**

Around 24,000 hospital consultants in England plan to walk out on July 20 and 21. Junior doctors in England are to hold five days of stoppages from July 13 to 17 in their fight for higher pay.

The British Medical Association (BMA) members voted by an 86 percent majority on a 71 percent turnout for the action. According to the BMA, the take home pay of consultants has dropped by 35 percent since 2008. The BMA says the stoppages will go ahead unless the government comes up with a “credible offer”.

On Tuesday, the result of the ballot of nurses in England was announced. The Royal College of Nursing members voted by a massive 84 percent majority to hold further stoppages in their fight for improved pay and against staff shortages. However, with a turnout of 43.4 percent the result fell foul of the Tory government anti-trade union law requiring a minimum 50 percent turnout in industrial action ballots.

They previously rejected the government offer of five percent plus a lump sum of at least of £1,655, but Unison and the GMB managed to push the deal through with their members.

### **Aerospace parts workers in Leicester, UK to hold strike and overtime ban in pay dispute**

Around 50 UK workers employed by Howmet in Leicester are to strike Thursday, after rejecting a four percent pay offer.

The Unite union members produce aerospace engine bolts for companies such as Rolls Royce and Pratt & Whitney. Some of the workers only earn £11 an hour, with the average being £12.50 an hour. Following the one-day stoppage, workers will impose an overtime ban and work to rule.

### **British Museum staff plan walkout as part of UK civil service dispute over pay**

British Museum staff in London are to begin a six-day stoppage from

July 11.

It is part of a programme of partial strikes by UK civil servants belonging to the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union in a campaign for improved pay, against job cuts and worse redundancy terms. The PCS, with 100,000 members, has been involved since November in limited, rolling strikes across 132 government departments.

### **Unite union calls off planned strike by security staff at London's Heathrow airport as workers accept new pay offer**

The planned 31 days of strikes over the summer period by around 2,000 security staff at Terminals 3 and 5 at Heathrow airport in the UK capital was called off by the Unite union.

The staff employed by Heathrow Airport Limited had taken 18 days of stoppages over their push for higher pay. The workers voted to accept an increased offer from the employer, which Unite says will mean an increase of between 15.5 and 17.5 percent depending on pay band. According to Unite, the deal includes a 10 percent increase to basic pay, shift pay and allowances from January, an increase in line with inflation in 2024 with a minimum of four percent and the phasing out of the use of agency workers in security roles “as soon as we can.”

### **Unite calls off strike by refuse workers at Hertfordshire Borough Council, England after workers accept new pay offer**

The strike over pay by around 70 UK refuse workers employed by outsource contractor Urbaser to collect domestic waste on behalf of Hertfordshire Borough Council, begun June 19, ended after a few days. The areas affected were Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield.

The company made an improved offer, reportedly for a 13.5 percent pay rise and a proposed review of sick pay and overtime rates.

### **Unite union suspends strike of Xplore bus drivers in Dundee, Scotland for second time**

A planned three-month strike of around 200 workers employed by bus company Xplore in Dundee, Scotland, which began June 12, has been suspended for a second time.

The Unite union members, who work as bus drivers, duty managers, platform staff and administrative workers, voted by a 93 percent majority to walk out. They originally rejected a seven percent pay offer made by the company.

Last week the bus workers rejected a further offer from the company and the stoppage resumed over the weekend. However, Xplore has come back with a new offer and the workers returned to work on Tuesday. The workers are currently balloting on the new offer, with the ballot closing Thursday.

### **UK gas platform workers accept new pay offer after strike action**

Around 70 gas platform workers employed by TotalEnergies at its Shetland Gas Plant and on the Elgin Franklin and North Alwyn platforms in the North Sea have voted to accept a new pay offer following previous walkouts.

The Unite union members work as control room operators, engineers, mechanics and technicians. Under the accepted two-year deal, they will get a 5.5 percent rise this year and three percent next year. Under the new deal, the three weeks on/three weeks off rota will also be replaced with three weeks on and four weeks off with no loss of salary. Unite claims the deal works out a 15.5 percent pay increase over two years.

### **Protest by public sector workers in Northern Ireland over pay and cuts**

Public sector workers in Northern Ireland protested outside the Northern Ireland Office in Belfast on Wednesday.

The Unison, Unite and Nipsa members are demanding improved pay and reversal of cuts in services. With no functioning devolved government in Northern Ireland, the budget for the province is set by the London-appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

### **Ongoing strikes and protests in Iran against poverty and dictatorial regime**

On June 21, further protests by retired workers including teachers took place against the dwindling purchasing power of their pensions. The demonstrations took place in the cities of Kermanshah, Ardabil, Shiraz and Yazd.

On June 22, workers at the Iranian Karun Agro Industry went on strike demanding to be employed directly by the company rather than through contractors. The plantation and factory produce vegetable oil.

On Monday, telecommunication retirees held rallies in front of telecom offices in various cities. They were protesting the low value of their pensions as they face increasing prices and instability. The cities hosting the rallies included Abad, Arak, Hormozgan, Ilam, Isfahan, Khorram, Sari, Sanandaj, and Shahr e Kord City.

Around 50 percent of Iran's population live below the poverty line due to punishing US economic sanctions, and Iran's removal of price subsidies. Unrest against the cost-of-living crisis has focused on Iran's authoritarian regime since the murder of Mahsa Amini, 22, in September 13 at the hands of the morality police. She was arrested for improperly wearing the hijab.

### **General strike in West Bank city of Jenin following Israeli airstrike**

A general strike took place in the West Bank city of Jenin on June 22, in response to an airstrike on a car which killed three Palestinians the previous day.

The airstrike was the first since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2002. According to witnesses, an Israeli missile was fired directly at the car, causing it to burst into flames.

### **Farmers in Kirkuk province in Iraq hold strike**

Kurdish and Turkmen farmers living in several villages in Kirkuk province are striking in opposition to the occupation of their lands by the Iraqi army and non-indigenous Arabs. They are seeking to reclaim their land to farm it.

The policy of occupying Kurdish land in Kirkuk which began in the 1980s under the regime of Saddam Hussein is being continued by the current Iraqi government.

### **Ghanaian tanker drivers hold national strike over poor condition of roads**

Tanker drivers began a national sit-down strike on June 26 in protest at the unpassable road conditions in Tema, part of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The road links the Tema Oil Refinery (TOR) through a heavy industrial area to Kpone, a regional capital.

Raymond Aflo, secretary of the Ghana National Petroleum Drivers Union (GNPDU) said the road "creates a risk to our drivers" and that the strike would continue until the road is fixed.

Vehicles including oil and gas tankers and trucks carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) have to negotiate huge potholes in the road. LPG is highly inflammable and likely to explode unless handled with care.

Aflo said, "Last month a tanker loaded with petrol fell on its side and we had to call in the TOR emergency team." Without mentioning the likely deaths and injuries to GNPDU members, he said had the vehicle been carrying LPG it would have been disastrous "to the entire industrial enclave including TOR pipelines, the Asogli and Asaa power plants."

### **Workers at Nigerian university protest mass sackings**

Workers at the Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology in Ondo, Nigeria protested after 35 staff members were dismissed.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Non-Academic Staff Union members picketed the university on June 21 to prevent entry, demanding the sacked workers, first class graduates, are reinstated.

### **South African health workers strike over wages in Kwazulu Natal**

Health workers at Life Westville Hospital in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa took strike action last week over wages.

The Health and Other Services Personnel Union of South Africa (Hospersa) members, who marched from the shopping centre to the main entrance of the hospital, say management broke an agreement on wage increases.

Life Westville, a private hospital, agreed to a 6.8 percent wage increase across the board earlier this year for the 70 percent of workers who are Hospersa members. It was later revealed that the hospital had given 19 non-union members 7.2 percent. Workers are demanding an additional 0.4 percent increase and a response within 14 days.

## **EPWP scheme workers in King Sabata Dalindyebo, South Africa threaten strike action**

Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers in the King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) Local Municipality in South Africa are calling for strike action if their ongoing grievances are not resolved.

EPWP is a discredited African National Congress (ANC) government scheme in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector without the salary or benefits afforded to direct employees.

The workers marched to the KSD and ANC regional offices demanding an end to outsourcing and favouritism, and a R15,000 monthly locomotion allowance.

The South African Municipal Workers Union KSD chairperson Lwazi Madyibi told news24, “As KSD employees we are currently subjected to unsafe working conditions where workers must work in their civilian clothes, due to a lack of protective clothing. The Munitata building [municipal headquarters] is also a health risk as it leaks when it is raining, and there are no emergency exit points in the event of an emergency.”



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