

Court clerks' national 24-hour walkout over pay alongside journalists' strike over far-right editor at French weekly; ongoing protests against authoritarian regime in Iran over deteriorating social conditions; workers in South Africa hold national stoppage to protest cost-of-living crisis

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.

One-day national strike by French court clerks over pay

Court clerks in France held a one-day national strike on Monday, following protests by hundreds of clerks last week. They are opposing changes in their salary structure which would increase basic salaries by only a small amount, in return for decreasing their seniority levels, used to calculate pay and other benefits.

Participation was reportedly widespread. More than half of clerks in Nice stopped work according to *France Bleu*, and the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions claimed nearly 100 percent of clerks walked out of some courts.

The protests and strikes were not organised by the unions, but through a Facebook group "Greffiers/Greffières/Adjoints en colère" (Angry Clerks/Assistants). Since the first protests, the group has grown from 2,500 members to over 5,500. Despite not having called the strikes, all the major trade unions immediately began negotiations with the government, hoping to gain control of and derail the clerks' movement.

French journalists continue strike against appointment of far-right editor

Journalists at the French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (*JDD*) continue a strike, begun two weeks ago, against the appointment as editor-in-chief of Geoffroy Lejeune, former editor of the neo-fascist paper *Valeurs actuelles*.

On Wednesday, the members of *JDD*'s Society of Journalists (an organisation of journalists at the paper) voted by 94 percent to continue the stoppage, which has already stopped the publication of two issues.

The journalists refused to attend a meeting with Lejeune, and demanded the Lagardère group, which owns *JDD*, cancel Lejeune's appointment and "offer the editorial staff guarantees of legal and editorial independence," *Ouest France* reported. The Lagardère group was recently taken over by billionaire Vincent Bolloré who, like Lejeune, backed far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour last year.

During Lejeune's period as editor, *Valeurs actuelles* published a letter from 23 retired generals advocating a military coup. An open letter opposing the appointment of a right-wing extremist as editor of *JDD* was signed by 650 public figures. Notable opponents of the open letter were the leader of the right-wing Les Républicains, Éric Ciotti, and the founder of the pseudo-left La France Insoumise (LFI) party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Ciotti openly supported Lejeune, saying opponents of his appointment believed "the press can only be free if it is on the left." Mélenchon, opposing LFI's official position in support of the strike, called the striking journalists "Bolloré minions" who support the extreme right, an LFI deputy reportedly told *Radio France*.

Journalists and other workers at France Télévisions, the state-owned broadcaster, also held a three-day strike from Tuesday against plans to replace several national programmes with multiple regional programmes. One reporter told *France Bleu* that the time spent on the news broadcasts "will double, as will the workload and number of hours, on overworked personnel," and that the evening broadcast would end at 8pm rather than 7.20pm. "So that means that people who have a family life will come home at 8.30pm."

French hospital doctors hold symbolic strike for increase in pay and overtime

Doctors in French hospitals held a symbolic strike on Monday and Tuesday, reporting to work but declaring themselves on strike with armbands and posters. The unions reported that more than half of doctors nationwide took part.

According to *Doctissimo*, doctors say the profession is becoming less and less able to attract and retain young people. They are demanding a

“general increase in all remuneration to take inflation into account,” as well as an “immediate revaluation” of payments for working nights, weekends and for remaining on call.

Wave of strikes by Portuguese healthcare workers

There have been numerous strikes by healthcare workers in Portugal recently, over pay, workloads and staffing levels.

Pharmacists at National Health Service (SNS) hospitals joined a three-day rolling regional strike last week, *The Portugal News* reported, and the National Union of Pharmacists (SNF) said that 90 percent walked out. The SNF said it was asking for “salary review, for hiring more pharmacists and for the guarantee of safety and quality care for SNS users.”

Nurses also stopped work on June 28 and 30, with 60 percent participation in the strike, according to the Portuguese Nurses Union. According to *Lusa*, nurses are calling for equal pay with technicians and other hospital workers, increased staffing levels and early retirement due to the hardships of their work.

Doctors also walked out on a two-day strike this Wednesday, called by the National Federation of Doctors (FNAM). The FNAM said that working conditions for doctors are worse than before the pandemic, and there was a crisis in recruitment, with 17 percent of the population not having a family doctor and 'gynecology and obstetrics emergencies across the country.' It called for a 'real salary increase.'

FNAM plans to call more strikes in August, and the Independent Physicians Union called a three-day national strike from July 25.

Spanish justice officials' unions “suspend” indefinite strike until after elections

Officials in Spanish courts returned to work this week, after the strike committee suspended the indefinite all-out strike, which began in May and postponed hundreds of thousands of hearings. Striking officials were calling for a 430 euro increase to monthly salaries, in line with the 450 euros agreed with public lawyers, *Europa Press* reported.

The unions in the strike committee called 24-hour protest strikes on July 11 and 20 but said the indefinite strike will not resume until after the constitution of a new government on July 23.

National manufacturing workers' strike in Italy

Italian metal, auto and other manufacturing workers will hold the first part of a national strike on Friday, stopping work for four hours throughout northern and central regions, the *Corriere Della Sera* reported. The walkout was called by the three union federations FIM, FIOM and UILM, with another four-hour stoppage planned for July 10 in the remaining regions.

The unions called for an industrial policy based this on a nationalist, pro-capitalist perspective. Referring to the formerly state-owned Ilva metal company, the general secretary of FIM said the government should take a majority share (most shares are currently held by ArcelorMittal) before 2024, but did not call for full nationalisation. It said that if ArcelorMittal did not meet its commitments, it should be replaced by another private

partner, because “In the steel industry you need competent entrepreneurs, the state is not enough.”

Union agrees wage deal, calls off strike by Norwegian oil workers

Last week, the Industri Energi union signed a collective agreement with the Norwegian Shipping Association, calling off a planned strike by over 1,600 workers on floating and fixed oil rigs on the Norwegian continental shelf.

From the start of negotiations over wages for 4,000 workers, Industri Energi said it was seeking a deal which only ensured “this industry is competitive in the battle for labour,” i.e., in line with the other below-inflation collective agreements signed in other industries.

The agreement increases basic wages by 6.5 percent, below the current inflation rate of 6.7 percent. Increases to the extra rate for working at night and pay for public holidays were even lower.

Workers on the Island Captain, a ship servicing oil wells on the Norwegian continental shelf, have also been on strike for three months. Nine of the British crew are members of Industri Energi, which accuses their employer SLB of not paying compensation for overtime or work at night, and says workers regularly work 14-hour days. SLB UK, the British company which runs the ship, claimed its employees cannot be represented by a Norwegian trade union and made threats to fire striking workers.

Armenian lawyers hold strike against police violence

Armenian lawyers held a one-day strike on June 26 to oppose police violence against themselves and their clients. *News.am* reported several recent instances of police violence, including lawyer Karen Alaverdyan in Yerevan, who was assaulted by police on June 7 when intervening to stop violence against his client. Alaverdyan and his client were both subsequently charged with “hooliganism” and “obstruction of lawful police actions,” *Panorama.am* reported.

Protest by Austrian university workers against shorter teacher training

Around 300 university educators at the universities of Vienna, Graz and Linz in Austria protested on Tuesday against plans to reduce the length of teacher training courses, the *Kleine Zeitung* reported.

The government plans to reduce the time taken to qualify as a secondary school teacher by one year, citing a shortage of qualified teachers. The protestors argued that student teachers are already working too many hours in schools due to the teacher shortage, and a shorter course would leave them with even less time to complete their studies in the evenings and on weekends.

Union ends strike at Switzerland's Geneva Airport with “postponement” of attack on wages

On June 30, Switzerland's Public Sector Union (SSP) called off a strike of Geneva Airport workers, which had cancelled 150 flights. According to *Reuters*, workers were fighting against a new salary policy, which would have ended automatic annual pay rises.

The SSP announced the deal, reached at an arbitration meeting called by Geneva State Councillor Nathalie Fontanet, as a "Union victory at Geneva Airport!" However, the agreement did not stop the attack on wages, but only delayed it. The SSP wrote that "The salary system will not be changed before January 1, 2025."

Bus drivers in Greater Manchester, UK strike over pay

Around 360 bus drivers working for First Bus from its depot in Oldham, England began a 48-hour stoppage on Tuesday over pay. It is due to be followed by further strikes on July 7, 10, 11 and 13.

The Unite union members are seeking a pay rise and parity with workers at other bus companies in the area. Currently, drivers working for First Greater Manchester are paid around £1 less an hour than those at other local companies. First Bus made a pay offer, half of which would be paid from April and the remainder from October, meaning the rise would not be fully backdated. The drivers say low pay at the company has led to severe staff shortages.

In February 2022, Unite pushed through a below-inflation pay deal after eight days of stoppages, isolating the dispute to the Oldham depot just as drivers at First West Yorkshire voted to walk out. Pre-pandemic work rosters were also not restored, another demand of the Oldham workers. The previous year, the union negotiated a sellout deal at Go North West in Manchester, accepting attacks on sick pay and a de facto pay cut.

Unite refuses to unify drivers' disputes across the bus companies, in every case siding with the companies to ram through substandard deals.

Bus drivers in Newbury, UK to strike over pay freeze

Bus drivers working for Newbury and District Bus Company (NDBC) in Berkshire, England are set to strike Thursday and Friday 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, itself a pay cut with RPI inflation at 11.3 percent.

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 increased pay offer would be accompanied by a significant cut in sick pay.

Further strikes are due July 10, 14 and 19-21.

UK train drivers' overtime ban over pay

Around 12,500 train drivers across 15 train operating companies (TOCs) in England began an overtime ban on Monday, due to last until Saturday.

The ASLEF members recently voted by mostly over 90 percent majorities in a third ballot to continue their long-running dispute over pay. The ban meant drivers not working rest days, impacting services,

including to the Wimbledon Tennis tournament, which began Monday.

The drivers will also ban overtime July 17-22. This will partly coincide with a strike of around 20,000 rail workers at TOCs. The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members are scheduled to walk out for three days on July 20, 22 and 29 over pay and massive restructuring.

Academic staff at Brighton University, UK begin indefinite strike over redundancies

Academic staff at Brighton University in England began an indefinite strike Monday. The University and College Union (UCU) members are protesting plans to slash around 130 posts. Up to 400 posts may be at risk.

The lecturers were previously on strike after having their pay cut for taking part in the marking and assessment boycott over pay, pensions and working conditions.

Radiographers in England vote to strike over pay

Around 20,000 radiographers in England at 43 NHS trusts including Liverpool University, Royal Marsden, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and University College London have voted to walk out over pay.

The Society of Radiographers (SOR) members rejected a five percent pay offer from the government. Radiographers are responsible for performing x-rays, MRI and CT scans, as well as ultrasounds and breast screening among other procedures. According to the SOR, while total average earnings increased by around 55 percent since 2005, that of radiographers increased by less than half that.

The SOR is consulting with members about when and where to walk out before announcing any action, which is expected to be in July, and called on the government to enter talks.

Refuse workers in Bristol, UK announce pay stoppage

Around 200 UK refuse workers employed by Bristol Waste are to strike over pay. Bristol Waste operates as a company wholly owned by Bristol Council. The workers are responsible for refuse collection, street cleaning and running recycling centres.

The Unite union members rejected a below-inflation 17-month pay offer of seven percent or £2,000, whichever is the greater. Many of the workers are only paid just above the minimum wage. Unite announced a seven-day stoppage from Monday July 10, followed by a 14-day walkout from July 24.

Refuse workers in Somerset, UK to strike over pay offer

Around 200 refuse workers employed by contractor Suez, will strike from Wednesday to Friday each week from July 12 until August 4. They will also ban overtime and catch-up work.

The Unite union members rejected a below-inflation pay offer of 5.8 percent. Loaders are currently paid £10.98 an hour, while drivers who

must hold an HGV licence are paid £13.63 an hour. Suez is contracted to provide waste disposal services for Somerset Waste Partnerships, a Somerset-council-owned company.

Another dispute involving Suez is also continuing, involving around 150 refuse workers who provide refuse collection for part of South Gloucestershire council. They walked out June 26 in a continuous stoppage scheduled to last until September 3. The Unite union members 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.

Workers at Welsh farm feed manufacturer vote to strike over pay parity

Dozens of workers employed by ForFarmers in Carmarthen in Wales have voted to strike. The company failed to make a pay offer that would give the GMB members pay parity with workers at ForFarmers manufacturing facilities in England.

ForFarmers makes bulk feed for farm animals and poultry. The workers in Wales earn around 30 percent less than their co-workers in England.

The GMB press release announcing the strike gave no dates for stoppages, but called on the company to resume negotiations.

Staff at iconic bar in Glasgow, Scotland to strike over pay, conditions and union recognition

Staff working at the music venue bar, 13th Note in Glasgow, Scotland are set to walk out over pay and conditions and union recognition.

The Unite Hospitality union members, comprising around 95 percent of the workforce, will walk out July 14, and then every weekend until August 6. The workers have been in dispute since March, when they lodged a grievance over pay, health and safety concerns and union recognition.

Workers at Trelleborg polymer technology factory in Leicester, UK to strike over pay

Around 100 UK workers at the Trelleborg factory in Leicester are due to begin continuous strike action from July 11. The company manufactures polymer technology products for firms such as Bombardier, Caterpillar and JCB. It is an international company, with headquarters in Sweden.

The Unite union members rejected a one-year deal comprising a £700 lump sum plus four percent. Recent strikes by Trelleborg workers in Somerset and Gloucester resulted in “significantly improved offers,” according to Unite. Trelleborg reported a gross profit of £9 million for the year ending 2021.

Airport security staff at Birmingham airport, England to strike over pay

Around 100 UK security staff and terminal technicians working for

Birmingham Airport are to begin an indefinite strike on July 18.

The Unite union members rejected a 7.75 percent rise plus a £850 one off payment. This would come on top of a previous below-inflation pay rise. Around 75 percent of the workers work as security officers on unsociable hours shift rotas, earning as little as £11.50 an hour.

Packaging workers in Darlington, UK to walk out over pay offer

Around 90 UK workers including printers, operatives and engineers working for Cepac in Darlington have voted overwhelmingly to walk out over a pay offer. Cepac manufacturers corrugated packaging for companies such as Aldi, Greggs, Sainsbury’s and Tesco.

The Unite union members rejected an eight percent pay offer. Even this was dependent on the workers increasing their work week from 37 to 40 hours, an inferior sick pay scheme, reduced overtime rates and shift pattern changes. They will take 10 days of stoppages beginning July 18 up to the end of September. Further walkouts could be called if no improved offer is made.

Cepac reported gross profits of £34 million for 2021.

School support staff in England balloting over pay claim

School support staff in the National Education Union (NEU) in England are balloting over pay. The ballot closes August 11.

They were offered a rise equating to 9.42 percent for those at the bottom of the pay spine and 3.88 at the top, to be financed from existing school budgets, putting more financial pressure on schools. Unison, GMB and Unite unions are also balloting school support staff.

Ongoing protests against authoritarian regime in Iran over deteriorating social conditions

On Monday, permanent and contract workers at Haft Tappeh sugarcane factory protested outside the company offices. They called on the company to honour its pledge to reclassify job roles which would give them small wage increases.

Around 50 percent of Iran's population live beneath the poverty line due to US economic sanctions and Iran's removal of price subsidies. Unrest against the cost-of-living crisis was further fuelled by the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini on September 13 by the morality police. She was arrested for improperly wearing the hijab.

Plans to build wind turbines on occupied Golan Heights put on hold after protests

Israeli government plans to build wind turbines on the occupied Golan Heights have been put on hold after protests.

Around 1,000 acres of land would have to be confiscated from local farmers to build the wind turbines. Two weeks ago, protestors at the site were met with rubber bullets and tear gas from Israeli police.

nothing has changed.”

National strike over cost of living and job losses in nine South African provinces

Workers throughout South Africa took national strike action on Thursday, protesting in all nine provinces for an end to high interest rates, corruption, crime and job losses.

The union umbrella Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is appealing to the government to intervene as the social crisis intensifies for millions of workers.

In Cape Town, demonstrators marched to the steps of the Provincial Legislature and the gates of Parliament. In Johannesburg, workers marched to the National Treasury and the South African Reserve Bank. Workers also marched to the Human Rights Commission, Labour Department and the Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi’s office to deliver their memorandum of demands.

Labour commentators noted that the turnout for the demonstrations were small, which shows the increasing level of hostility developing among workers to the unions represented in COSATU. COSATU’s chairperson in Gauteng, Amos Monyela said he was not deterred by the small turnout.

Protest by community health workers in Cape Town, South Africa demands jobs back

Dozens of South African community health workers from Nyanga and Guguletha protested outside Lentegeur Day Hospital in Cape Town on Wednesday to demand their jobs back.

Placards saying, “Stop exploiting the community health workers” and “We want our jobs back,” were held by the workers, who were employed by St Johns Ambulance until its contract expired with the Western Cape hospital. Non-profit organisations are assessed every three years. Only some of the workers were transferred to Anova.

Funeka Hala, who is now unemployed, told Groundup, “I have switched my fridge off because it is empty.” She explained that the department always transferred them all when contracts changed but did not do so this time.

Workers transferred from St Johns are owed pay, as the date on their contract started two weeks after the Anova workers’ contract.

South African food workers’ picket demands reinstatement of sacked workers at Durban factory

South African workers at the Frimax Food Chip factory in Verulam, Durban, staged a picket on Tuesday, after workers were sacked for walking out over pay on June 5. A notice on the factory states that workers who took strike action have been sacked.

The company refused to recognise the new African and Meat Industry and Allied Union (AMITU) but reinstated 100 of the 257 sacked workers. AMITU are taking the company to the Commission for Conciliation and Arbitration, who will hear the case on July 7.

One worker told *Ground Up*, “The employer here will tell you he only pays for nine hours. Most of us work twelve hours a day. Each and every year we strike but the previous union promised things will change but

Union instructs Ghanaian tanker drivers to end sit-down strike after meeting government

The tanker drivers’ union in Ghana has told workers to end a national sit-down strike, begun June 26 to protest the unpassable road conditions in Tema, part of the Greater Accra Region.

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

The Ghana National Petroleum Tanker Drivers Union met with the Ministry of Roads and Highways and the Ministry of Transport on June 29. Minister of Roads, Kwasi Amoako-Attah claimed the roads had been improved by pouring stones into the biggest potholes.

The communiqué after the meeting included a promise that work on the roads “will commence by today, June 30,” without any word on when the work would be completed.

The meeting was originally to take place at the union offices but the venue was changed due to the strength of feeling of the union members, who oppose any return to work while road conditions remain treacherous. Dozens of drivers opposed ending the strike without winning their demands.

Kenyan health workers to strike in mid-July

Health workers in Kenya are set to strike unless the government accedes to the unions’ demands for collective bargaining.

The workers are members of the Kenya National Union of Nurses, the Kenya Union of Clinical Officers, the Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers, the Kenya National Union of Pharmaceutical Technologists and Officers the Kenya Union of Nutritionists and Dietitians and the Kenya Environmental Health and Public Health Practitioners Union.

The unions issued a 60-day strike warning, soon to run out, demanding the government negotiate and implement Collective Bargaining Agreements with them. A stoppage could begin on July 13.



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