

National 24-hour rail strike in Italy over pay and workload; journalists at French newspaper continue strike against appointment of far-right editor; unrest continues in Iran against authoritarian regime and cost-of-living crisis; truck drivers in Kenya paralyse trade around Mombasa in sit-down strike over conditions

## 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.*

### National strike by Italian rail workers over pay and workload

Italian rail workers, at both the public Trenitalia and private Italo networks, walked out on a 24-hour strike Thursday, although the commuter times between 6-9 a.m. and 6-9 p.m. were exempted from the stoppage.

Trenitalia workers are opposing unilateral changes to shifts and excessive use of overtime, according to *ADN*, and the unions at Italo are negotiating with the company over pay and working hours.

### Journalists at French paper *Journal du Dimanche* continue strike against appointment of far-right editor

Journalists at the French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (*JDD*) are now in the third week of a strike against the appointment of Geoffroy Lejeune, former editor of the neo-fascist paper *Valeurs actuelles*, as their editor-in-chief.

In daily votes on whether to renew the strike, *JDD* journalists consistently voted by 94 percent to continue until Lejeune's appointment is withdrawn, with the publication of three issues of the paper stopped. During Lejeune's period as editor, *Valeurs actuelles* published a letter from 23 retired generals advocating a military coup.

The journalists refused to attend meetings with Lejeune, and demanded the Lagardère group, which owns *JDD*, provide them with written guarantees of "legal and editorial independence." *Ouest France* reported that the Societies of Journalists at *JDD* and another magazine owned by Lagardère engaged a lawyer to draw up a document to guarantee this independence, which the company is reportedly "open to discussing."

*JDD* editorial staff wrote a joint letter to President Emmanuel Macron

last week, calling for him to "take a public position on this decisive issue," reminding him of his promise during last year's campaign to uphold the "right to information." Macron has made no public statements on the strike or Lejeune, but the official spokesperson for the government said in the National Assembly two weeks ago, "It is not up to the State today to interfere in the choice of an editorship of the private domain," reported *Ouest France*.

The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) made their own appeals to Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne to "initiate a revision of the legal and regulatory framework to guarantee pluralism and independence of the media." The letter, signed by the CGT and CFDT general secretaries, touched on the threat of the far right but was concerned with the "national cohesion" of France, which they said was being weakened by the "ideological and economic aggressiveness" of Lagardère's parent company.

### Strikes at airports across Italy

Workers at airports and airlines in Italy will hold several strikes on Saturday, with ground handling staff stopping work for eight hours, as will cabin crew at the airline Vueling. Pilots employed by Malta Air in Italy will also hold a four-hour strike.

The ground handling workers have been working with an expired contract for six years, *ADN* reported, and the three unions which called the strike demand its renewal. Malta Air pilots are opposing a new "totally unsatisfactory" collective agreement, and the unions accuse the Ryanair subsidiary of "total closure to dialogue."

Malta Air is a joint venture between Ryanair and the Maltese government. In 2019 Ryanair announced that most of its bases in Italy, France and Germany would be run by Malta Air so that taxes on wages would be paid locally instead of in Ireland where Ryanair is based, according to *Simple Flying*.

Ryanair pilots in Belgium will also be on a two-day strike this weekend, demanding the reversal of a 20 percent pay cut. According to *Nieuwsblad*,

the Belgian unions are opposing Ryanair's plan to cancel a collective agreement governing working hours and rest times, which they say is illegal, and demanding the reversal of a 20 percent pay cut pushed through at the start of the pandemic which has not been restored "despite the return of huge profits."

Workers at Ryanair's operation throughout Europe have held strikes over the past year to reverse similar pay cuts, but the unions divided these struggles on a national basis and agreed deals which only return pay to pre-pandemic levels over a period of years.

### **Strikes by justice officials, Galician legal aid lawyers**

Officials in Spanish courts held a one-day stoppage and protest on Tuesday, one of only two called by the unions, since they suspended the indefinite all-out strike begun in May until after the national elections.

Court officials are calling for a €430 increase to monthly salaries, in line with the €450 agreed with public lawyers.

The Lawyers of the Administration of Justice union, which reached the deal in March to end a two month-long national strike, also announced this week to *Europa Press* it would be taking legal actions to force the government to comply with the terms of the agreement, after the Council of Ministers rejected a decree implementing it.

On Wednesday, legal aid lawyers in the autonomous community of Galicia walked out on a one-day strike, with hundreds protesting in Santiago de Compostela and denouncing the "ridiculous" fees they receive from the government. The lawyers are not directly employed by the state but are self-employed and receive a fee via the Galician bar associations to represent clients, who cannot afford legal assistance.

### **Greek healthcare workers strike against underfunding**

Health workers in Athens stopped work for seven hours Wednesday, as part of a 24-hour set of strikes in the Attica region of Greece against underfunding of the National Health Service called by the Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Employees (POEDIN), *ef.syn* reported.

POEDIN explained that staff shortages and long hours are due to the low level of public spending on health, only 5 percent of GDP, well below the EU average of 7.5 percent. It added that 40 percent of health spending went on private healthcare, the third-highest figure in Europe.

### **Turkish municipal workers on one-day strike against understaffing**

Municipal workers in Turkey, including in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, joined a one-day strike called by the Genel-İş union on Tuesday, according to *Evrensel*.

Thousands of workers at protests in the major cities called for recruitment of new staff to begin immediately, and for wages to increase to keep up with inflation, officially at 38.2 percent but according to the independent Inflation Research Group as high as 108.6 percent.

### **Romanian healthcare workers protest wage law**

Romanian healthcare workers gathered in Bucharest on Wednesday to protest a new wage law which will not reverse the drastic fall in real wages due to inflation, *Spotmedia* reported. Around 1,000 workers joined the protest despite a heatwave and temperatures between 35 and 37 Celsius.

The Health Solidarity union denounced the government for "refusing to solve problems through negotiation," and plans to organise further protests and is deciding whether to call an all-out strike. It said that if "the Romanian Government maintains its abusive decision to prohibit a legal strike by Health employees," the union would accept the prohibition on strikes but the government "will have to endure a series of alternative actions, at with effects at least as severe."

### **Bus drivers in Skopje, North Macedonia stoppage over wages, overtime and safety**

Bus drivers at the Public Transport Company Skopje (JSP), North Macedonia's state-owned transport company, held a half-day strike on Tuesday, and protested outside the company's offices.

According to *MIA*, the union representing JSP workers is calling for an increase in monthly salaries of 2,170 denars, as well as opposing the non-payment of overtime and violations of health and safety.

JSP replied belligerently, posting a statement on their Facebook page calling the strike "illegitimate, since the salary of all employees in JSP was increased on June 1" and alleging that workers were being "instrumentalised by politicians and political bandits."

### **Teachers unions in England prepare to push through sellout pay deal in face of members demands**

Teachers' unions in England will urge their members to accept a new government pay offer of 6.5 percent, well below inflation at 11.3 percent. The offer is in line with that recommended by the School Teachers' Review Body.

This comes after members of the second biggest union, NASUWT voted 88.5 percent in a 51.9 percent turnout for industrial action to begin September. Teachers had rejected the Tory government's not fully funded pay offer of 4.3 percent plus a £1,000 one-off payment, and the other unions were in the middle of strike ballots. Joint strike action was expected in the Autumn term.

Schools, many of which are in deficit, will have to find 3.5 percent of the rise from existing budgets. Also, the government has offered a sweetener hardship fund of £40 million to schools, which goes nowhere near the funding necessary to make school buildings safe from asbestos and building collapse, let alone address the issue of teacher shortage and retention.

A joint statement with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Education Secretary Gillian Kegan and the National Education Union, NASUWT, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Leaders said, "This deal will allow teachers and school leaders to call off strike action and resume normal relations with the government." The deal "recognises the vital role that teachers play in our country."

Teachers must reject this substandard deal when it is put to a vote.

## **Bus drivers' strike in Greater Manchester, UK over pay escalates**

Around 360 bus drivers working for First Bus from its depot in Oldham, Greater Manchester, England are continuing their strike over pay with a walkout Tuesday and one planned for Thursday. It follows stoppages last week. They will also walk out from July 21 through to July 25 and again on July 28 with further dates to be added if no progress is made.

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 company has since made a revised three-part offer with a rise backdated from April, another rise in October and a final one in January next year.

Drivers rejected the latest offer and want the rise in full to be implemented from April. They 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 at the Oldham depot just as drivers at First West Yorkshire voted to walk out. Pre-pandemic work rosters were not restored, another demand of the Oldham workers. The previous year, the union negotiated a sell-out 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 at two UK companies balloting for strikes over pay offers**

Around 1,000 bus drivers at the Stagecoach bus company operating services across Manchester are balloting for strikes over pay.

The Unite union members rejected a 4 percent pay offer from June this year with a further 4 percent in December. The ballot closes on July 27. Stagecoach saw its pre-tax profits nearly double to over £36 million for the period of the six months to October 2022.

Also, around 1,000 bus drivers working for Arriva South in London are balloting for walkouts after rejecting a pay offer of around 7.3 percent. The ballot of Unite members at Arriva South's depots at Brixton, Norwood, South Croydon and Thornton Heath closes on August 2.

## **Amazon workers in Coventry, UK hold three-day stoppage over pay**

Around 900 workers at Amazon's fulfilment centre in Coventry, England were on strike Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

In their ongoing campaign for a £15 an hour wage and union recognition, the GMB members walked out for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening on each day of strikes. They currently earn around £11 an hour. The strikes coincide with Amazon's Prime Week sales promotion. The workers previously held a stoppage between June 12 and 14 over the same issue.

Amazon workers in Britain staged a series of strikes at several facilities last summer against the imposition of an insulting pay increase of 35 pence an hour, or 3 percent—a real-terms pay cut.

In January, workers at the site organised by the GMB union held the first official strike since Amazon began operating in the UK in 1998. This

week's strikes bring the total number of days of stoppages to 22.

## **Academic staff at Brighton University, UK continue indefinite strike over redundancies**

Academic staff at Brighton University in England are continuing their indefinite strike begun last week. The University and College Union (UCU) members are protesting plans to slash around 130 posts. Up to 400 posts may be at risk. The university released the names of 25 staff slated for compulsory redundancy.

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.

## **UK homeless charity workers continue indefinite strike after rejecting inferior pay offer**

Around 550 workers employed by homeless charity St Mungo's based in London, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol and Oxford are continuing an indefinite strike begun June 27, following a previous four-week strike.

The Unite union members are continuing their walkout after rejecting by a 62 percent majority a revised offer. They originally walked out after rejecting a 2.25 percent offer. The revised offer was for 3 percent plus extra leave days. The offer was put to the St Mungo's workers with Unite's agreement, following an ACAS mediated meeting. The vote was 71 percent majority for indefinite strike action.

After tax and other deductions, St Mungo's workers take home less than £20,000 a year. The charity has 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."

## **Strike of sewage and water tank manufacturing workers in Durham, UK over pay**

Workers employed by Premier Tech Aqua at Peterlee, Durham, which manufactures sewage and water treatment tanks, began a week-long strike on Monday.

The GMB members voted by 100 percent to walk out, seeking a 12 percent pay rise to bring their wages up to £12.50 an hour. The company offered a below inflation 7.9 percent rise.

## **UK rail infrastructure workers in Crewe hold second strike over pay**

Staff working for Unipart Rail based in Crewe, England held a 24-hour strike Wednesday following one last week. Unipart Rail produces and refurbishes signalling equipment for the rail infrastructure company Network Rail.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) and Unite union members rejected a 4.75 percent pay offer. The company saw its profits increase by more than a quarter in the last financial year. The workers also imposed an overtime ban until July 16.

### **Staff working for the London underground rail system to walk out over pay and conditions**

Staff working on the London Underground (LUL) rail system will walk out later this month over pay, attacks on conditions and job losses.

Around 10,000 RMT members will take action on July 23 and between July 25 and 28. Different underground rail lines will be affected on different days and the grades of those involved will vary. Transport for London (TfL) is proposing to cut around 600 jobs in response to Tory government budget cuts.

London tube train drivers in the ASLEF union will hold 24-hour stoppages on July 26 and 28. They are protesting a new attendance procedure to be imposed from January. Under the new procedure there would be no right to representation or appeal at the first stage of a disciplinary process. Additionally, warnings will apply for 52 weeks instead of the current 26. Sickness periods longer than one week will be classed as long-term, meaning a driver could be redeployed at the behest of a manager.

LUL is seeking to increase driver flexibility with remote booking on and off and increasing shifts up to 10 hours. Management also wants flexible cover built into every roster, making a work/life balance harder to maintain.

### **UK rail workers protest at stations across England in opposition to closure of train ticket offices with strikes to follow**

UK rail workers will stage protests outside railway stations in England to oppose plans by the train operating companies (TOCs) to close almost all the remaining 1,007 station ticket offices across England over the next three years, with massive job losses. Only those at the busiest stations will remain.

The main day of action by RMT members will take place at London's King Cross Station on Thursday at 6pm. Other protests will take place throughout the week at other stations, including Manchester Piccadilly on Tuesday, Plymouth on Wednesday, Birmingham New Street, Newcastle Central and York station on Thursday, Manchester Oxford Road Friday and Norwich on Saturday.

Further protests will take place at stations the following week.

RMT members working for TOCs are to strike in their long-running dispute over the closure of ticket offices as well as pay and working conditions on July 20, 22 and 29.

### **Revenue protection staff at UK rail company vote to walk out over bullying**

Revenue protection inspectors working for Arriva Rail London have voted to strike by an over 80 percent majority.

The RMT members voted after Arriva Rail failed to correctly deal with a collective grievance into bullying. No stoppage dates were announced, with RMT urging the company to adhere to the correct procedure over the bullying claim.

### **Strike by refuse workers in Leicestershire, UK over pay**

Around 40 UK refuse workers employed by Blaby district council in Leicestershire were on strike Wednesday as part of a series of stoppages for a 15 percent pay claim.

The GMB members walked out on June 28 and July 5. They are due to walk out July 19 and will begin a continuous strike August 1 until August 18. Managers responded by drafting in agency workers to try and break the strikes.

### **Northern Irish glass manufacturing workers to strike over pay and union recognition**

Around 150 workers at the Vista Therm factory in Craigavon in Northern Ireland are to walk out Friday after the company refused to make a pay offer or recognise the Unite union. Vista Therm manufactures insulated glazed units.

Unite members voted unanimously for the stoppage. The company had previously signed an agreement over union recognition with Unite in 2007 but withdrew it.

### **Aviation parts workers in Durham, UK to walk out over pay**

UK workers at Nicholsons Sealing Technologies in Stanley, County Durham are to walk out on Friday.

The GMB members rejected a company pay offer of 6.7 percent plus a one-off payment. The company produces parts used in the aviation industry. It will be the first strike in the company's 100-year history.

### **Protesters at university in Tehran, Iran victimised for refusing to wear the hijab**

At least 60 Iranian female students engaged in peaceful protests at a university in Tehran against the wearing of the hijab have been banned from campus.

According to the *Guardian*, students report being violently thrown out of classrooms, threatened with zero grading, and attending bogus disciplinarys.

*Al Jazeera* reported the sentencing of anti-regime rapper Toomaj Salehi to six years and three months for attacking the government in music videos online protesting the murder of Mahsa Amini. Amini 22 died at the hands of morality police last September 13 for improperly wearing the hijab.

Her death further fuelled protests and strikes by workers and pensioners against the cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by US economic sanctions, and Iran's removal of price subsidies. Around 50 percent of Iran's population live beneath the poverty line.

### **Sit-down strike by Kenyan truckers paralyses northern trade**

Truck drivers at the port of Mombasa, Kenya have blocked the northern corridor from Mombasa to Malaba, paralysing trade in a strike over conditions.

The Kenya Long Distance Truck Drivers Union members parked their vehicles on the highway after the government refused to address their demands, despite a 21-day strike notice which expired Tuesday.

The drivers demand the implementation of a 2012 Taskforce on Long Distance Road Safety, the reduction of roadblocks, traffic police to monitor unsafe vehicles, slimming down of procedures at the border with Uganda, and an end to mandatory retesting of drivers every three years.

Truck drivers in Ghana recently ended a national sit-down strike over ill-maintained roads.

### **Student dies in crossfire after Kenyan police attack cost-of living protest**

A student at Kisii Polytechnic in Kenya, 23-year-old Eunice Mutheu, died after police shot at protesting crowds and hit the young woman in her friend's home. Four others are currently in hospital with wounds.

Her friend Mary Ngui, in the same building as Eunice, said, "We were three people in the house and I heard a loud bang and thought it was a teargas canister hitting the window... Some bullets are stuck on the wall."

The death of Eunice Mutheu brings to five the number of people killed during recent Kenyan protests over rising living costs.

### **Aluminium factory workers walk out in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa over benefits**

Metal workers began indefinite strike action on Monday against attacks on their medical aid and retirement fund benefits, picketing and protesting outside the Hualmin aluminium factory in Pietermaritzburg. This dispute has been unresolved since 2014.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa trade union members want payments on a par with administrative workers.

Hualmin just reported a 50 percent increase in revenue due to increased production and sales, in which the US is its major customer.

### **South African workers at transport company march to Department of Transport in Pretoria to demand unpaid wages**

Workers at North West Transport marched to the Department of Transport in Pretoria, South Africa to demand overdue wages.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union members have

not been paid for the last four months. They demand transport minister Sindi Chikunga find a solution to keep North West Transport going. The union held meetings with the government with no payment made despite promises.

*IOL* reported that some workers have lost their houses, cars and medical insurance, others have had to change their children's schools.

The list of demands includes the protection of all employees' basic conditions of employment in the form of payments of outstanding staff salaries for four months, long service awards to employees, monthly salaries in line with the 7 percent wage agreement concluded at the Bargaining Council, medical aid and provident funds and that no employee should be retrenched during the business rescue process, guaranteeing job security.

### **Medical union in Nasarawa, Nigeria suspends state-wide strike**

Medical workers in Nasarawa State were told to return to work on July 10 due to the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) decision to suspend their strike.

The medics' grievances include non-implementation of their promotions and annual salary increments for more than nine years, and non-implementation of the N30,000 minimum wage. The medics oppose the non-implementation of hazard allowances and 19 months' worth of arrears, high taxes, inadequate staffing levels and overworking.

The NMA claimed the suspension was due to the suffering of patients in the state, but the union policies ensure long suffering both for their members and their patients.



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