

Stoppage continues at French weekly newspaper as journalists oppose imposition of far-right editor; protests by pensioners and workers continue in Iran; mass protests in Kenya over cost-of-living crisis

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 July 2023

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

### Journalists at French newspaper continue strike against imposition of far-right editor

Journalists at the French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (*JDD*) are continuing their strike into its fourth week, against the appointment of Geoffroy Lejeune as their editor-in-chief. They voted by 98 percent on Wednesday not to return to work.

Lejeune is the former editor of the neo-fascist paper *Valeurs actuelles* and supporter of far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour. While Lejeune was editor, *Valeurs actuelles* published a letter from 23 retired generals advocating a military coup.

*JDD* journalists refused to meet with Lejeune, and demanded the Lagardère group, which owns *JDD*, provide them with written guarantees of “legal and editorial independence.” Lagardère was recently acquired by billionaire Vincent Bolloré, another supporter of Zemmour. Last week, the company offered to delay Lejeune’s arrival but did not withdraw his appointment, and provocatively offered to open a redundancy scheme for any journalists who did not want to serve under the right-wing extremist, *Le Monde* reported.

Members of eight of the ten political groups in the National Assembly presented a bill on Wednesday, which would reportedly establish a “right for journalists to agree on the nomination of their editor” as a condition of the state aid most papers, including *JDD*, receive. Only members of the Republicans and National Rally groups, both of which have openly supported Lejeune, opposed the bill. *JDD* journalists held a rally near the National Assembly just before the bill was presented.

### Municipal workers strike over wage cuts in Orenburg, Russia

Workers at municipal company BiOZ in the Russian city of Orenburg held a one-day strike on Wednesday, angrily denouncing BiOZ for cutting

wages.

One worker at BiOZ told *Orengard*, “You work for eight hours, but they pay for six... We were only told that this is to save money.” Around 40 workers reportedly joined a protest. BiOZ claimed that there was a “misunderstanding” over wages, and the city government claimed to have answered workers’ questions, but workers told *My Orenburg* this was not true, and nobody listened to them.

### Portuguese rail infrastructure workers strike over pay

Workers at the Portuguese state-owned rail infrastructure company, Infraestruturas de Portugal (IP), held a one-day strike last week, the latest in a long-running campaign of individual strikes.

According to *The Portugal News*, IP workers are demanding monthly salaries rise by at least 37 euros, and that the government carry out a review of the career progression system.

IP claimed that only 2.8 percent of workers scheduled to work joined the walkout, but this is unlikely given the large impact of the strike. *Lusa* reported that nearly 82 percent of scheduled trains were cancelled, and the majority of those which did run were covered by the minimum service requirement imposed by a court.

### Greek civil servants join two-hour strike over pay

Employees of the Greek Ministry of Finance held a two-hour strike and demonstration on Wednesday, calling for a pay rise of at least 10 percent. The Civil Servants’ Confederation (ADEDY) described the government’s offer of a pay rise between 40 and 50 euros per month as a “mockery.”

### Workers at Greek archaeological sites stop work due to extreme heat

Guards at archaeological sites and museum workers in Greece began stoppages from Thursday, opposed to being made to work in the extreme heat, which reached 45 Celsius in recent days. The Panhellenic Union of Antiquities Custodians said that more than 20 visitors to the Acropolis passed out from the heat, and called four-hour stoppages each afternoon at archaeological sites, and two-hour stoppages in museums.

After the stoppages were announced, the Ministry of Culture said it would modify opening hours of archaeological sites, closing between noon and 5:30pm.

### **One-day strike at arms factory in Spain**

Workers at an arms factory in Trubia, near the Spanish city of Oviedo, held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday.

According to the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union, "Virtually the entire workforce" joined the walkout, which was called during negotiations for a new collective agreement. According to *Europa Press*, CCOO also called one-hour-per-shift stoppages in the past two weeks.

The factory is owned by Santa Bárbara Sistemas, a subsidiary of the American aerospace and weapons company General Dynamics. Santa Bárbara makes the Spanish military's main battle tank, the Leopard 2A6E. Spain announced this week it would send four of the older Leopard 2A4 tanks as part of its support for the NATO-instigated proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, having already allocated six tanks earlier in the year.

### **Rail strike in several Spanish provinces**

On Wednesday, workers in the Spanish provinces of Barcelona, Seville and Cantabria joined a 24-hour strike called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), with another planned on Friday.

According to *Europa Press*, the CGT is opposing outsourcing by the national rail company Renfe, which it said was "increasingly evident," and called for a reduction in the working week.

The CGT called off strikes at the last minute in three additional provinces. The CGT represents a minority of Renfe workers, and the company claimed that only two percent of the workforce, eight workers, joined the walkout.

Nevertheless, according to *Europa Press* only 66 percent of normally scheduled trains ran in Barcelona, which was the minimum service level set by the government. Renfe said it did not exceed the minimum service requirement because of the "need for forecasting."

### **Lorry drivers on strike again in German service station against non-payment of wages**

Lorry drivers working for the Polish Mazur group began another strike in the Gräfenhausen service station in Germany, after not receiving wages. Several drivers told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* they had not been paid for over two months.

In April, following a six-week strike at Gräfenhausen in which they were attacked by hired thugs, drivers succeeded in getting their withheld money from the Mazur group. Now, many drivers have the same issue as

before, spending months away from home without being paid.

### **Workers vote to accept pay deal at Vestas, Germany, ending strike after 123 days**

Workers at the Vestas wind turbine manufacturer in Germany voted by 92 percent last week to accept a pay agreement between the company and the IG Metall union. Several hundred Vestas workers have been on strike intermittently since November last year, stopping work on 123 days in total.

The deal raises wages by 5.4 percent from January 2024, and for subsequent years Vestas will abide by the collective agreement between IG Metall and the rest of the metal and electrical industry. A one-off "inflation compensation premium" of 2,750 euros was also included. IG Metall celebrated workers' acceptance of the deal as a "vote of confidence in this extraordinary collective bargaining and strike movement."

It is more likely a result of exhaustion and a recognition that IG Metall would not fight for anything more, as the deal means wages will fall behind current 6.4 percent inflation. In its collective bargaining agreement for the metal and electrical sector, IG Metall signed up to a massive real wage cut, with a 5.2 percent pay rise in June and a further 3.3 percent next year, signed at a time when inflation was 11.6 percent.

### **Workers threaten strike due to "asphyxiating heat" at battery plant in Italy**

Workers at a car battery plant in Sulmona, Italy, threatened an eight-hour strike due to what the unions call "Excessive heat with asphyxiating heat peaks that endanger the lives of workers." The three unions say the heat is caused by "poor maintenance, obsolete machinery, and dilapidated and infuriating work organisation" at the Magneti Marelli factory.

Italy remains badly affected by the global heatwave, with temperatures above 40 Celsius and red alerts still in place for 18 cities as of Thursday.

### **Irish local authority water workers hold new strike against forced transfer to state company**

Water workers at major local authorities across Ireland held two days of stoppages last week 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, and held a one-day walkout last month.

Around 110 workers joined the strike, *RTÉ* reported, and residents in areas of Waterford and Tipperary were warned to boil water by Uisce Éireann.

Unite is calling for working conditions to be guaranteed during the transfer, and for more workers to be included in the voluntary redundancy scheme, but said it mainly wanted to "sit down with" the government to modify the framework rejected by its members. A government spokesman told *RTÉ* the framework was already the "right way forward."

### **Consultant medical staff in England begin two-day strike over pay**

Tens of thousands of consultant doctors working for the National Health Service (NHS) in England began a two-day strike Thursday over pay. It follows a five-day strike by junior doctors in England, which ended Tuesday.

The British Medical Association members voted by an 86 percent majority to reject a six percent pay offer from the government and walk out. The BMA says the pay of consultants fell by 27 percent since 2008, but considering inflation the figure is 35 percent. They are seeking pay restoration in stages, beginning with pay rises in line with inflation.

The consultants will provide "Christmas day cover," meaning they will provide emergency cover with a small amount of routine work. The NHS warns the action will further impact waiting lists. The BMA announced a further two days of stoppages by consultants on August 24-25.

### **Munitions supply workers in Scotland strike over pay parity**

Around 50 workers at the Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S) depot in Beith in North Ayrshire, Scotland walked out on Monday and the previous Friday. DE&S is a government munition supply agency.

The GMB members, who work as non-craft workers, are seeking bonuses in line with those paid to craft workers and managers. They voted by an over 90 percent majority for the stoppages. The depot is responsible for supplying Storm Shadow and Brimstone missiles being supplied to Ukraine by the UK.

### **All-out pay strike by South Gloucestershire refuse workers in England continues**

The all-out strike begun June 26 by around 150 UK workers employed by contractor Suez to remove domestic waste on behalf of South Gloucestershire council is continuing.

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 only £11.53 an hour. Suez was using agency workers to break the strike, but following a High Court ruling the company will not be able to use agency workers from August 10.

### **All-out strike by refuse workers in Canterbury, UK over pay continues**

UK refuse collection workers employed by Canenco, under contract to provide domestic waste services for Canterbury council, are continuing their strike begun July 5. Canenco is owned and run by the Labour-controlled council.

The GMB members want improved pay, and rejected as inadequate the three offers made by Canenco. The council is using agency staff to try and break the strike. GMB officials told the *KentOnline* news website the stoppages will last till August 20 at least.

### **Workers at London airport to walk out over pay but strikes by one section suspended after improved pay offer**

Around 1,000 workers employed by four companies at Gatwick Airport in the UK capital, ASC, Menzies Aviation, GGS and DHL Services Ltd plan to strike over unacceptable pay offers.

However, the strike threat by 600 DHL workers, who work on the EasyJet contract at the airport was suspended after DHL came back with an improved pay offer which the Unite union members are balloting on. Should they reject the offer, they will join the other workers in the planned strikes.

The strikes by the 450 Unite members working for the other three companies in various roles, including baggage handling, dispatching and check-in, will go ahead. They are paid at various rates, but on average earn less than £12 an hour. The companies failed to make an acceptable offer.

Workers will walk out on July 28 for four days, followed by a further four days from August 4. The timing coincides with the peak holiday period and will have a big impact. Flights of British Airways, Ryanair, TUI, Westjet and Wizz will be impacted.

Unite union members at DHL Gatwick Direct, Red Handling and Wilson James are currently balloting over pay. The ballot closes July 31, and any possible stoppages could begin mid-August.

### **Car parking workers at Luton airport, UK to strike over pay**

Workers employed by APCOA Parking UK to provide car parking services at Luton airport near London are to strike.

The Unite union members rejected an imposed six percent pay rise. RPI inflation is currently 11.3 percent. They are calling for the company to begin negotiations over an improved pay offer. They will hold a 24-hour stoppage beginning 6.30am on July 28, and again on August 1.

### **UK train drivers announce further overtime ban over pay**

Train drivers in the UK announced a further overtime ban at 15 train operating companies.

ASLEF union members will hold an overtime ban from July 31 to August 5. It follows previous bans and a current ban this week, which started Monday and ends Saturday.

### **Further strikes by Northern Irish glass manufacturing workers over pay and union recognition**

Around 150 workers at the Vista Therm factory in Craigavon in Northern Ireland held a one-day stoppage July 14, after the company refused to make a pay offer or recognise Unite. Vista Therm manufactures insulated glazed units.

Unite members voted unanimously for the stoppage. The company previously signed an agreement over union recognition with Unite in 2007 but withdrew it. Since the July 14 stoppage, Unite report that a union representative was suspended, and other members threatened with

disciplinary action.

A Unite union press release of July 19 noted, “On Friday [July 14], representatives of Vista Therm came out to the picket to note the names of workers and police were called out. Since returning to work, union members have been subject to an extreme campaign of union-busting—including the suspension of an elected workplace representative and numerous trade union members being threatened with disciplinary action.

“The workforce, which is overwhelmingly Polish speaking, report exclusively English-language warnings being issued questioning their absence from work and management adopting tactics of repeatedly shifting trade unionists around the factory.”

In response to the actions of management the workers will walk out Thursday and Friday this week.

### **Strike vote by workers at second UK Amazon site over pay**

Around 100 workers at Amazon’s Rugeley fulfilment centre in the English midlands have voted to strike over low pay.

The GMB members voted by an 86 percent majority to walk out, but dates are yet to be announced. The strike vote comes on top of a further three days of stoppages by around 900 workers at Amazon’s fulfilment centre in Coventry last week, bringing the total to 22 days.

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. Last month, the GMB members at Coventry voted by a 99 percent majority to renew their strike mandate for a further six months.

### **Strike announced at paint manufacturing factory in Gateshead, UK over pay**

Around 230 workers at International Paints factory in Gateshead, England announced a series of strikes after rejecting a 4.8 percent pay offer.

The Unite union members will walk out on July 27, and then every Monday and Thursday until August 24. The workers taking part include production and distribution staff as well as administrative and research personnel. International Paints specialises in marine paint products.

### **Union representing UK civil servants to ballot membership to suspend strikes**

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union is to ballot its 130,000 UK civil service members, asking them to endorse the PCS National Executive Council’s (NEC) call for a “temporary cessation of industrial action.”

PCS members took part in sectional departmental strikes along with three national days of action. They began their action in November over pay, job losses and attacks on redundancy terms. The NEC is also proposing to suspend the reballots required under the Tory anti-trade union laws for industrial action beyond six months.

The government initially offered a two percent pay rise, later increased to 4.5 percent, with five percent for the lowest paid, and many departments were offered a £1,500 lump sum. The NEC is calling for industrial action to continue at the few departments not offering a £1,500 payment. The NEC is promoting as a concession by the government the more than doubling of the original two percent pay offer and its agreement not to make any changes to redundancy terms until 2025.

The ballot runs from August 3 until August 31.

### **Workers at UK snack manufacturer ballot over pay offer**

Around 130 workers employed by KP Snacks at their sole UK factory in Hellaby, Rotherham, South Yorkshire are balloting for stoppages over pay.

The Unite union members rejected a below-inflation six percent pay offer plus a £1,000 one-off payment. The six percent offer is not being offered to cleaners on the hygiene team, who earn only £10.66 an hour. KP Snacks profits increased by 275 percent since 2018, while the pay of workers fell by 14 percent over the same period.

### **Unite union calls off strike by Ellesmere Port, UK oil refinery workers as employer makes offer**

A 48-hour strike by around 450 workers employed by six separate companies at the Stanlow oil refinery at Ellesmere Port in England, due to begin Tuesday, was called off at the last minute as the employer made a new offer.

The Unite union members, who work in several roles including as welders, scaffolders, electricians and crane drivers, were seeking an improved bonus payment. Their bonus rate was paid at 80p, but following the strike threat the rate was upped to £2.37 an hour and the strike called off. Their substantive pay rates are set by the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI), but bonus payments are negotiated on a local basis.

The refinery made a quarter of a million pounds in profits in the first half of the 2023 financial year.

### **Ongoing protests in Iran over social conditions and poverty**

Protests by retirees took place this week outside pension fund and governorate offices in cities across Iran, including Ahvaz, Shiraz, Kermanshah and Yazd.

They are demanding higher pensions to cope with their deteriorating economic plight. In Ahvaz, Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers protested against changes to job roles. In Shiraz, teachers protested in the streets against the continuing incarceration of teachers arrested in previous demonstrations.

The current wave of mass protests was sparked off by the death of Mahsa Amini, 22, who died on September 13 last year in the custody of the regime’s morality police. They accused her of wearing her hijab “improperly.”

The unrest against Iran’s authoritarian regime reignited ongoing protests by pensioners and farmers and strikes by factory workers against the

regression in social conditions. Around 50 percent of Iran's population live beneath the poverty line due to punishing US economic sanctions, and Iran's removal of price subsidies.

### **BBC staff at Cairo office, Egypt strike over pay**

The 75 staff working at the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Cairo office in Egypt began a three-day stoppage Monday over pay.

They demand to be paid in US dollars in line with other BBC employees in the Middle East region, such as those in Beirut and Istanbul. The Egyptian pound lost half its value over the last year and inflation is running at over 30 percent. The BBC workers held a one-day stoppage June 14 over the same issue.

### **Israeli medics plan stoppages to protest limiting power of judiciary**

Amid ongoing protests against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legal changes to limit the power of the Israeli judiciary, Israeli medics plan industrial action this week against the measures.

The public health union representing 95 percent of Israeli medics says its members will work in "emergency mode" only for a few hours this week. The timing of the action will coincide with further discussion on limiting the powers of the judiciary in the Knesset. Last week, around 1,000 doctors signed a letter to Professor Zion Hagay, chair of the Israel Medical Association, calling on him to declare strike action against measures to weaken judicial independence and strengthen dictatorial tendencies of the Israeli government.

### **Protests in southern areas of Yemen over living conditions**

Last week, night protests took place in southern Yemen including Aden and Hadhramaut over power cuts and cuts in essential services.

The protests blocked roads as demonstrators vented their anger at the deteriorating conditions. The collapsing currency, with 1,500 Yemeni rial to US\$1, has exacerbated their plight.

### **Mass protests in Kenya against cost-of-living crisis met with police violence**

Mass protests across Kenya against the rising cost of living this week were in many cases met by armed police.

Two protestors in Migori were shot by the police on July 19. Administrator of Oruba Nursing Home Hospital, Mike Ochere, confirmed that two middle-aged men were receiving treatment for gunshot wounds. Both were shot in the legs. The police were tasked with preventing masses of protestors from reaching the town's Central Business District.

In Kisumu, masses protested by barricading roads with boulders and lighting bonfires on the street, blocking the flow of traffic.

### **Doctors walk out over pay and conditions in Busia County, Kenya**

Around 800 doctors in Busia County, Kenya walked out on July 14 over poor working conditions, delayed salary payments, lack of promotions and shortages of staff.

Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), Kenya National Union of Nurses and the Kenya Union of Clinical Officers members marched to the offices of Busia Governor, Paul Otuoma, and the Public Service Commission to deliver lists of their grievances.

The KMPDU said more than 200 doctors were promised promotions but never received them and that the last time doctors had any salary increase was in 2016. This caused a decline in the value of their salary by more than 40 percent.

The unions gave the state government 14 days' notice of their intention to call a strike and made "various efforts to try and reach the governor," hoping for an offer to deflect their members' anger. Only when no such offer was forthcoming did the unions call the strike.

### **Doctors in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria, begin indefinite strike over kidnap of colleague**

Doctors in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on July 16, after a female colleague, Dr. Ekanem Ephraim, was kidnapped from her home in Calabar on Thursday July 13 by armed men posing as patients.

The Chairman of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) in Cross Rivers responded with a call that "The state government should activate all necessary instruments at its disposal to ensure the timely and unconditional release of our member in the hands of her abductors."

### **Hospital workers protest in Chatsworth, South Africa against poor working conditions**

Nurses, administration and general staff protested outside RK Khan hospital in Chatsworth, Durban, South Africa last week, against poor working conditions.

The National Education, Health and Allied and Workers' Union (NEHAWU) members told *GroundUp* they are forced to perform cleaning duties in addition to patient care due to staff shortages. Cleaners had their pay cut from R7,800 per month from a previous contractor to R3,000.

Nurse Zizakele Ndlovu said the union leaders told them in February that working conditions would improve, but nothing changed. She explained, "The department treats us as if we don't know our job, and we don't deserve what we are asking for. We lost many workers to COVID; some retired and others resigned. Those vacancies have not been filled. Even at top management there are lots of vacancies and this leads to poor service."

### **Taxi drivers in South Africa begin a national strike over pay and safety conditions**

Taxi drivers on e-hailing platforms including Uber and Bolt began

unofficial national strike action in South Africa on Monday, and said they will continue until their demands are met.

National reports say the action was organised by driver associations in different provinces with the National E-Hailing Association, confirming that an official strike had not been registered.

The main issue in the strike is the pricing of rides, which drivers report are too low, and the 25 percent service fee the e-hailing platforms charge. With the massive price increase in fuel and maintenance including tyre changes, drivers are struggling to keep going.

A driver on the Uber platform, Danny Mamabolo, told *News24* drivers were “left with nothing” after paying 25 percent commission.

Thato Ramaila, chair of Soweto United E-hailing Association said that in 2016 a client was charged R250 for a 15km trip, but this year the same trip dropped to R86.

In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), drivers’ main concern is safety, robbing and hijacking. Siphso Mabika from KZN e-hailing council told *News24*, “We are deeply concerned about safety and think that is the biggest concern. Drivers are being killed weekly, some are robbed and forced to withdraw money and others are hijacked.”



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**