

Strikes across Portuguese National Health Service over pay, conditions and staffing; electricity workers in Lebanon join indefinite public sector strike; Nigerian doctors at University College Hospital begin three-week strike in solidarity with unpaid colleagues

## 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.*

### Widespread strikes in the Portuguese National Health Service over pay, conditions and staff shortages

GPs and pharmacists in the Portuguese National Health Service (SNS) held a one-day national strike on Monday, and on Tuesday doctors in SNS hospitals began a three-day walkout.

The National Union of Pharmacists (SNF) is calling for new negotiations over the revision of salary scales, career progression and staffing levels, *The Portugal News* reported. Hospital doctors are also fighting over pay scales.

All the strikes were widely supported. Both the SNF and the Independent Doctors' Union reported that more than 90 percent of healthcare workers able to join the strike did so.

### Unions calling off court workers' pay strike in Croatia to accept new government offer

Unions signalled the end of an eight-week indefinite strike by around 5,000 court workers in Croatia yesterday, following a new government emergency pay offer. So far 47 union branches—representing 3,000 of the workers—have voted, 25 of them accepting the 12 percent offer.

On this basis the union strike committee is calling the strike off, although it remains on until the deal is signed. The strike committee decision to accept the government offer was not unanimous.

The strike began June 5, following the government's unsuccessful attempt to obtain a court order banning the walkout for a 400 euro increase to monthly salaries.

A three-day extraordinary session of parliament was held over the weekend on the judicial strike and a separate scandal at the state energy company.

*portal* reported that the government put forward a bill to enable it to

take “all necessary measures immediately, and within 15 days at the latest, to ensure the orderly functioning of the judiciary in Croatia.”

Prime Minister Andrej Plenković signalled his intention to use court workers as an example to other workers considering fighting for pay increases, saying “we are not interested, and I'm sure neither is the Croatian public, in a solution that would end [the judicial strike] but we have a series of strikes in other sectors.”

The government's strike-breaking proposal was rejected by 77 votes to 65, but a proposal from the opposition that court workers should be paid for the days spent on strike was also voted down.

The government subsequently withdrew the decision not to pay workers for days spent on strike, and made their emergency 12 percent offer.

### Four-hour public transport strike across Italy

On Monday, workers in local public transport services across Italy joined a one-day strike called by the USB union, to demand an end to lower-tier contracts for new workers, subcontracting, investment in public services and an end to arms shipments to Ukraine.

USB, a self-designated “grassroots” union, denounced the “arrogance” of the traditional trade unions which “claim the right of a monopoly at the expense of all the workers in the sector.”

According to USB, anti-strike laws only allow a four-hour strike at first, and workers in several major cities were not able to join the walkout. Despite the restrictions, and larger unions not calling their members to stop work, widespread participation in the strike was reported. USB reported 90 percent of workers joined the strike at Rome TPL, which operates some of the capital's bus services, and 65 percent stopped work in Lazio, the region containing Rome.

### Workers across Italy oppose working in deadly heat

Workers in Italy held numerous strikes and protests to oppose working in the current deadly heatwave. Temperatures in Italy frequently rose

above 40 Celsius, and as high as 47 Celsius in Sicily this week where massive wildfires broke out. *The Guardian* reported that five deaths have been attributed to the heat alone, and “[t]he true death toll is likely to be far greater.”

Following the threat to strike last week at the Magneti Marelli car battery plant in Sulmona, other workers took steps to protect themselves. Workers held a four-hour strike on July 20 at the Rossi auto parts factory in Modena, where the FIOM union says “excessively high temperatures have been reported more than once in the past, but the company’s interventions did not resolve them.”

On the same day, in another auto parts factory owned by the Japanese multinational HI-LEX in Chiavari near Genoa, workers began a series of strikes in the last hour of each shift, reported *Euronews*, after the company refused to keep the air conditioning on after 7pm, despite the last shift ending at 10.

Workers in two McDonald’s kitchens in Apulia started a strike on Sunday due to the temperatures in the kitchen, which are even worse than outside because of the heat from the fryers. Before the strike began, McDonald’s closed one of the two restaurants to the public, but kept the other open, arguing the air conditioning was sufficient, *ANSA* reported.

### **Retained firefighters resume national strike in Ireland after rejecting Labour Court offer**

Irish retained firefighters resumed an all-out strike on Wednesday, responding only to life-threatening emergencies, after an 82 percent vote to reject an offer proposed by the Labour Court last month.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which represents the 2,000 retained firefighters, recommended rejecting the offer, but postponed a strike planned for June 22 until after the ballot.

Retained firefighters are paid an annual retainer of around 8,600 euros in return for remaining on call 24/7 for 48 weeks per year, and hourly wages when they are called to an emergency. According to *RTÉ*, the Labour Court recommendation would increase the retainer by between 24 and 32.7 percent. SIPTU pointed out that the large percentage figure is not much money, given how small the retainer is.

During previous walkouts, many firefighters told the media they were unable to take leave because of understaffing, and being near-permanently on call meant they frequently missed their children’s birthdays and other events. The Labour Court recommended that another 400 retained firefighters be hired, but according to SIPTU this would only just leave staffing levels above what they should officially be and would not allow improvements to rosters.

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

Journalists at the French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (*JDD*) continue their strike, now in its fifth week, against the appointment of far-right extremist Geoffroy Lejeune as editor-in-chief. They have held daily votes on whether to continue the walkout, recently voting by 98 percent to remain on strike.

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.

The Lagardère/*JDD*, Group, announced owns on Lejeune will begin work on August 1, after previously suggesting it might delay his arrival. It said it would open a redundancy scheme for any journalists who did not want to work under Lejeune. The company was recently acquired by billionaire and Zemmour supporter Vincent Bolloré. In negotiations over a draft code of ethics, the Society of Journalists (an organisation representing journalists) at *JDD* accused the Lagardère Group of removing a passage forbidding “any publication of racist, sexist and homophobic remarks.”

MPs from eight of the 10 parliamentary groups in the National Assembly put forward a bill last week which would require media companies receiving state aid, including *JDD*, to allow journalists a vote on the appointment of an editor. President Macron’s group, Renaissance, supported the parliamentary manoeuvre but the president has not commented on the strike at *JDD*.

The only cabinet member to voice support for the *JDD* strike, Pap Ndiaye, was removed as Minister of National Education in last week’s reshuffle. Ndiaye was subject to racist and fascistic attacks from the Zemmourist right and “centre-right” Republicans after commenting that *JDD* journalists did not want to have an extreme-right editorial line imposed like other Bolloré-owned media.

### **Striking workers threatened with dismissal at Disneyland Paris**

Five workers who took part in strikes over the past few months at Disneyland Paris have been summoned to interviews prior to possible dismissal, *Ouest France* reported, including two stewards from the UNSA trade union.

Around 1,500 workers joined six days of stoppages between March and June, demanding a 200 euro pay rise for all workers at the theme park. Nine hundred people, many of them workers at Euro Disney, signed a petition “against all sanctions or dismissals against participants in the anti-inflation [wages] movement.”

UNSA said that it was waiting to hear what was alleged against the five workers, but “we can’t not make the link: they were all strikers!” Despite the evident targeted nature of the threats, UNSA did not call any action, saying only there may be new strikes in the autumn over wages. In a grovelling letter to Disney management, the union wrote “Although it is not for us to interfere in your management prerogatives, these procedures seem to us to target employees who have used their most absolute right, namely the right to strike on legitimate demands.”

### **24-hour strike in Patras, Greece, after bridge collapse kills two**

The Labour Centre of Patras (EPS) called for a 24-hour strike and rally on Monday, following the collapse of a bridge in the Greek city which killed two people. *902.gr* reported that large numbers of construction workers from major projects in the city joined the walkout.

The bridge, which was scheduled to be demolished, collapsed unexpectedly on Sunday, injuring several people. The two people killed were not involved in the construction project, but some reports suggest they were sheltering from the heat under the bridge. According to *New Civil Engineer*, the safety manager and three employees of the construction company hired to demolish the bridge were arrested.

The EPS questioned whether the government’s announcement that work should be minimised between 12 and 5pm during the heat wave was

obeyed, as the bridge collapsed while being worked on at 12.47pm, and questioned whether there was any enforcement of the ban on working in extreme heat.

### **Miners occupy pit in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, against unpaid wages**

On Tuesday, around 30 miners in the Zenica brown coal mine in Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to leave their pit, demanding their salaries for June be paid, *Sarajevo Times* reported.

According to a union spokesperson, the mine's management refused to allow miners to enter the mine during the following shift on Tuesday or the first shift on Wednesday, fearing they would also join the occupation.

### **Thousands of radiographers in England walk out over pay and staff shortages**

Thousands of radiographers in England began a 48-hour strike on Tuesday.

Society of Radiographers (SoR) members at 37 health trusts throughout England had a mandate for the stoppage. The hospitals affected include the Royal Marsden cancer hospital in London, Liverpool University hospitals and Sheffield teaching hospitals.

Workers oppose the imposition of a five percent pay offer, arguing that ongoing low pay has led to staff shortages as it becomes more difficult to recruit new and retain existing staff.

Radiographers are responsible for taking x-ray pictures as well as other screening such as ultrasounds, MRI and CT scans. According to the SoR, 90 percent of patients attending hospital have some form of investigation administered by a radiographer.

### **Traffic wardens in London borough begin continuous strike over low pay**

Around 100 traffic wardens working for outsource company NSL on behalf of Camden council in the UK capital began a continuous walkout on Monday.

The Unison union members rejected a 4.5 percent pay offer which would have meant only a 57p an hour rise to their current £12.70 an hour. They voted unanimously on a near 75 percent turnout for the stoppage. They demand a pay rate of £15.90 an hour.

### **All-out pay strike by South Gloucestershire refuse workers in England continues as union accuses employer of delaying negotiation talks**

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. It is scheduled to last until September 3. The Unite union accuses Suez of "deliberately prolonging"

the dispute by refusing to meet with the union until July 31.

The Unite members voted by an 89 percent majority to reject an eight percent pay offer. 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 continue this from August 10.

### **Junior doctors in England announce further walkouts over pay**

Junior hospital doctors in England will walk out for a further four days from August 11.

The British Medical Association members completed a five-day stoppage on July 18, in the latest round of industrial action after rejecting the government's six percent pay offer. They are also currently balloting to extend their mandate for industrial action. The ballot closes August 31.

Tens of thousands of consultant medical staff in England who held a two-day stoppage last week are also to hold two further days of walkouts on August 24-25. While medical staff are in dispute over pay, their main concern is historic, chronic underfunding of the National Health Service leading to staff shortages.

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

Train drivers in the UK will hold a further overtime ban August 7-12 at 15 train operating companies.

ASLEF union members will hold an overtime ban in their long-running dispute over pay and conditions. This will follow an overtime ban by ASLEF members due between July 31 and August 5. It would be the fifth week-long overtime ban since May.

Both ASLEF and the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union refuse to unite their members in a joint offensive against the government's massive restructuring on the railways, including job losses, the closure of ticket offices and attacks on safety.

This week, the RMT called off four strike days planned on the London Underground after talks at government conciliation service Acas, accepting a deal to delay but not withdraw attacks on jobs and pensions.

### **Charity advice workers around Hull, England to strike over pay**

Advice workers employed by Citizens Advice in the Hull and East Riding areas of England are to hold a series of walkouts, on July 31, August 7, 9 and 11.

The Unite union members will take the action after Citizens Advice said it will not increase pay in line with National Joint Council (NJC) pay rates applied to local government workers. The latest NJC increase was for a £1,925 rise for all grades for last year. The charity has paid its workers in line with NJC guidelines for the last 20 years. It would be the first strike by this group of workers.

According to Unite, the charity recorded reserves of £18.8 million in March 2022, up £1.6 million from the previous year.

### **Soft drink workers in Cumbernauld, Scotland to walk out over pay**

Drivers and shunters working for the soft drink company A G Barr in Cumbernauld, Scotland plan a series of 24-hour stoppages over pay.

The Unite union members rejected a well below-inflation five percent pay offer, in an 83 percent vote. The dates of the walkouts are August 11, 18, 25, September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 and October 6. They will also impose an overtime ban from August 8.

A G Barr manufactures the IRN-BRU brand, and the proposed action could rapidly deplete stocks over the summer period. A G Barr increased its revenues by more than 18 percent to £317.6 million for the latest financial year.

### **Strikes by some workers at London airport suspended or cancelled after new pay offer**

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

Unite, however, cancelled the strike threatened by 600 DHL workers on the EasyJet contract, after the workers accepted what the union describes as a 15 to 31 percent rise, including a new shift premium for working between midnight and 5am.

Also, the strike planned by Unite union members at Menzies and ASC was suspended as the workers are balloting on a new pay offer. Unite is currently in negotiations with GGS management.

The workers were to walk out on July 28 for four days, followed by a further four days from August 4. Coinciding with the peak holiday period, this was timed to have a big impact.

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.

### **UK university academics and students to protest in dispute over pay and conditions**

On Wednesday, academics in Britain will stage protests as part of their long-running dispute over pay and working conditions.

The University and College Union (UCU) called for UK-wide protests, to be supported by the National Union of Students (NUS), ahead of “crunch” talks with the employers’ body the Universities and Colleges Employers’ Association (UCEA).

The UCU press release said it met with the UCEA last week in an attempt to end their members’ marking and assessment boycott (Mab), which meant students’ graduation degrees not being graded. Some staff taking part in the Mab had punitive pay deductions, up to 100 percent in some cases.

### **Protesting Lebanese electricity supply workers to join public sector strike over pay and conditions**

Workers employed by state-run Lebanese electric power supplier

Électricité du Liban (EDL) protested outside the company headquarters on July 20, demanding higher wages and improved conditions. They gave a list of their demands to the head of the Lebanese General Labour Union who met with EDL senior management representatives.

The same day, the Lebanese Union of Electricity Workers and Employees members announced they were joining the indefinite strike of public sector workers that has been ongoing for over four months. The Lebanese pound has depreciated by 98 percent since 2019, leading to a collapse in wages.

### **Protests by Iranian pensioners against ongoing poverty level pensions**

Sunday saw further protests in Iran by pensioners against the low level of their pensions and deteriorating social conditions.

Protests took place in the cities of Ahvaz, Kermanshah, Rasht and Shush. The protest in Shush included retirees from the Haft Tappeh sugar cane factory. Around 200 retirees gathered in Rasht to protest, despite attempts by Iranian security forces to intimidate them by filming and threatening them with arrest.

### **Nigerian doctors at UCH begin three-week strike over colleagues’ unpaid wages**

Doctors at University College Hospital (UCH) at Ibadan, Nigeria began a three-week strike on July 20 to demand 250 of their colleagues are enrolled on the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIIS) in order to receive their unpaid salaries.

The 250 Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) members began their appointment at UCH in May, but are yet to receive their first wage. ARD leaders at UCH made it clear that they hoped to do a deal with top managers to avert the stoppage.

### **Thousands of Senegalese and Ivory Coast fishermen strike over super-exploitation**

Nearly 2,000 workers on fishing vessels walked out for more than two weeks from June 5 due to super-exploitation and low pay. The strike, which brought fishing to a halt, was called off by the unions after government intervention to kickstart talks with the vessels’ owners.

The fishermen are not paid the International Labor Organization minimum wage of \$658 per month. At least 23 of the affected vessels are owned by EU-based companies flying flags of convenience, such as those of Seychelles, Mauritius and Panama, to avoid complying with the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements that are supposed to stipulate minimum pay levels.

Aliou Ngom, 44, a mechanic on a French-flagged tuna-catching vessel fishing off the coast of West Africa and in the Indian Ocean said, “The conditions are very tough, and we don’t get paid what we deserve. We don’t work to buy a car or build a house. We work just to eat.”

Senegalese fisher, Ibra Diop, 50 described his former job on European vessels as “endless hours of work.” He did this for 18 years until he was diagnosed with arthritis in his feet last year.

The workers are at sea for months at a time, doing jobs that are among

the hardest and most hazardous in the world.

### **Water workers strike against hijackings in Johannesburg, South Africa**

South African water workers at Ennerdale Depot, South Johannesburg held a sit-in strike last week against hijacking incidents involving two vehicles. These occurred while workers were on duty.

The workers concerned for their safety and security are among a growing number of utility workers who face increasing challenges as social tensions escalate due to mass poverty. The response of Johannesburg Water is to threaten further delays to water and sanitation while this continues and offer counselling to those hijacked.

In the same period, a similar hijacking of City Power electricity workers was reported by *IOL* news. Four technicians were assaulted, robbed and made to transfer money from their cellphones.

### **Northern Cape Community Health Workers in South Africa protest against attacks on pay and conditions**

South African community health workers (CHWs) from the Northern Cape area protested Thursday outside public hearings to change their conditions of employment at the Kimberley Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) offices and the Dr Harry Surtie Hospital in Upington.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) members are in a struggle over basic pay and conditions. Thapelo Thole, NUPSAW provincial organiser, told *DFA* the DEL intends to remove CHWs from the public sector and move them to non-governmental organisations in 2025 after the national government elections, with less pay.

The CHWs earn R4,100 per month and are already unable to support their families. They told *DFA*, “We are given letters without notice instructing us to retire at the age of 60 years without any benefits. We are not entitled to unemployment, pension, bonuses or medical aid,” and have to purchase their own uniforms and PPE.

The workers explained, “We are doing the work of nurses and are caring for the vulnerable and ill while our needs are not taken into account. Many of us are single parents or are grandmothers taking care of children, where we cannot send them to university.”

### **Wesizwe Platinum shuts Bakubung mine in South Africa due to ongoing strike**

On July 20, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed Wesizwe Platinum company closed the Bakubung Platinum mine, South Africa, until further notice in response to an unprotected strike by miners.

According to *Mining Weekly*, the Bakubung mine, located in the Bushveld Complex, near Rustenburg (the most populous city in the North West province), has been plagued by repeated delays “to its full construction and commissioning, partly owing to technical faults and partly owing to bouts of unrest in the surrounding Ledig community.”

When up and running, the mine produces platinum, palladium, rhodium and gold.



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