

Portuguese doctors strike over pay while nurses fight for secure contracts; resident doctors in Nigeria walk out indefinitely against low pay and understaffing; strikers at Iranian copper mine join protests against collapsing living standards

## 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.*

### Portuguese doctors hold new strike against insulting percent pay offer, and Lisbon nurses fight for secure contracts

Doctors in the Portuguese National Health Service (SNS) began a new two-day strike on Tuesday, after the Independent Doctors' Union (SIM) rejected a 1.6 percent pay offer, saying it "does not make any sense." The SIM says doctors have lost 20 percent of their real wages over the last decade.

Participation in the strike was widespread, with an average of 95 percent of doctors across the country joining, according to the SIM. New 48-hour strikes are planned for August 9 and 16, and in September.

Nurses in the Lisbon metropolitan area also began a four-day strike on Tuesday, called by the Democratic Union of Nurses of Portugal (Sindepor). Sindepor is calling for the immediate hiring on permanent contracts of precariously employed nurses, as well as increases in staffing levels and promotions, *Lusa* reported. Reportedly between 80 and 90 percent of nurses joined the walkout.

### Widespread strikes by public transport workers in Portugal

Public transport workers in Portugal have held several strikes over the past two weeks, fighting for higher wages and against long hours. In the Algarve, workers at two coach companies, EVA Transportes and Vizur, held a one-day strike on Tuesday and began a week-long overtime ban.

The Union of Road and Urban Transport Workers of Portugal/Federation of Transport and Communications Unions (STRUN/Fectrans), which called the stoppage, demanded a 100 euro pay rise and "the payment of holiday pay in accordance with the law," *Lusa* reported.

Other strikes coincided with World Youth Day in Lisbon this week, a major event called by the Catholic Church. Workers at the French

multinational Transdev began a seven-day strike on Tuesday, against long working hours and a lack of breaks. The STRUN told *Lusa* that during World Youth Day some "drivers have no guarantees about where they will sleep or where they will have lunch."

Workers at the Lisbon Bus Station also stopped work for five hours on Tuesday, demanding the payment of their meal allowances, and accusing management of not complying with an agreement on the length of meal breaks. At two transport companies, workers began a week-long overtime ban from July 29 over the same issues.

### Metal workers in Portovesme, Italy, hold 24-hour strike to save jobs

On Monday, metal workers at the Portovesme plant, owned by Swiss multinational Glencore, held a 24-hour strike during a meeting between Glencore and the Meloni government's "Minister of Enterprise and Made in Italy." Workers are demanding the defence of the 1,500 jobs at the plant, according to *Conquista del Lavoro*.

### Spanish PSOE government delegate imposes draconian minimum service requirements on strike at Barcelona-El Prat airport

This week the Spanish government delegate to Catalonia, Carlos Prieto of the Catalan branch of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)—part of the coalition government currently acting during the parliamentary crisis—imposed a draconian 90 percent minimum service requirement on next week's strike by security staff at Barcelona-El Prat airport.

Around 500 workers at I-SEC, the private company which provides the security service at the airport, planned the strike because, the unions told *el Periódico*, "the company does not respect staff breaks, nor family reconciliation and some managers abuse authority and put pressure on subordinates." They also demand I-SEC pay for parking at the airport, as security staff who drive to work are paying out of their own pocket, and accuse the company of charging the airport for language bonuses which were never paid out to staff.

The government delegate justified the onerous restriction on the right to strike by claiming that the airport was “critical infrastructure,” a strike might harm the profits of the tourist industry during a busy period, and the anti-terror alert level was four out of a maximum of five, *Europa Press* reported.

### **Strike by international lorry drivers in German service stations expands**

A stoppage by lorry drivers in two service stations in Germany has continued to expand, with around 200 drivers parked and refusing to work until they receive overdue payments. Several drivers told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* they had not been paid for over two months. Some are owed thousands of euros.

The drivers work for the Mazur Group, a group of Polish freight companies, and many are from Georgia, Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia. In April, following a six-week strike, drivers were paid the money they were owed, but now many have the same issue again. Mazur, which hired thugs to attack drivers during the previous strike, has responded to the latest stoppage by opening a police complaint for defamation.

One driver told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* “We’re staying. The strike lasts. Even if it’s to the death.”

### **Journalists at French paper JDD end strike after imposition of far-right editor**

Journalists at French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* (JDD) voted by 94 percent on Tuesday to accept a deal signed between the Society of Journalists (SDJ) and the paper’s owners, the Lagardère Group, ending a strike begun June 22. JDD journalists walked out after Lagardère announced the appointment of right-wing extremist Geoffroy Lejeune as their new editor-in-chief.

Lejeune is the former editor of the neo-fascist paper *Valeurs actuelles* and supporter of far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour. Many of the striking journalists linked Lejeune’s appointment to the acquisition of the Lagardère Group by billionaire Vincent Bolloré, another prominent Zemmour supporter. While Lejeune was editor, *Valeurs actuelles* published a letter from 23 retired generals advocating a military coup.

The deal signed between the SDJ and Lagardère established a redundancy scheme for journalists who refuse to work under a far-right editor. The SDJ said in a press release “Although we have put the issue of journalistic independence back in the public square, against our owner, we have not won. Today, Geoffroy Lejeune takes office. It is an empty editorial office that he will enter. Dozens of journalists refuse to work with him and will leave the JDD.”

### **Ryanair pilots at Charleroi Airport, Belgium, strike to reverse pay cut**

Ryanair pilots based at Charleroi Airport in Belgium held a strike over the weekend of July 29, cancelling nearly 100 flights. The pilots are

demanding the restoration of their salaries to pre-pandemic levels. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ryanair forced through 20 percent pay cuts, signed off by trade unions across Europe, claiming this was needed to save jobs. Pilots and cabin crew across the continent have held strikes over the past year for restoration of their pay, but the unions have divided them across national lines and signed deals which entrench pay inequality and do not reverse the cuts for many years.

The National Centre of Employees says wages are around 18 percent lower than in 2019. While Ryanair refuses to restore the wages of its crew, *The Irish Times* reported that the salary of Ryanair’s CEO Michael O’Leary increased by 140 percent this year to 1.2 million euros, out of a total 2.7 million euro pay packet, reversing a 50 percent salary cut he took as a publicity stunt during the pandemic.

One pilot informed *Le Soir* that Ryanair also told pilots at Charleroi during negotiations that they will reduce rest periods from four days to three. He said this was “solely to punish the pilots at the Charleroi base.”

### **Belgian Delhaize supermarket workers continue strikes in Brussels as courts continue to ban pickets**

Workers at Delhaize supermarkets in Brussels held a new strike on July 24, closing 18 of the 22 shops in the Belgian capital. They are opposing the company’s plan to convert its 128 directly operated stores into franchises, where pay is generally lower.

Delhaize initially claimed that workers would be able to retain their existing pay and working conditions, but the trade unions report some workers are already receiving redundancy letters.

The strike was on the day a court order banning pickets expired, but Delhaize immediately went to court again and got a new ban approved the next day. Since the strikes broke out in March, Delhaize has repeatedly had picket lines broken up by bailiffs and the police. Several regional courts have struck down the injunctions against picketing, but many have been approved.

### **Workers at Gamzigrad rehabilitation hospital in Serbia strike for unpaid wages**

Workers at the Gamzigrad hospital in Serbia, which specialises in rehabilitation from diseases of the blood vessels, have been on strike since July 20 demanding the payment of overdue wages.

According to *Danas*, they have only been paid a third of their wages from April, and many workers told *Glas Zaječara* that they were facing lawsuits and being pursued for debts as they cannot pay their bills. The president of the strike committee told the news site that many were at “the edge of existence.” He also said, after the strike had lasted a week, that the hospital’s management had not spoken to the 86 striking workers.

Several patients also told *Glas Zaječara* that they supported the striking workers, and the hospital was in a terrible state. One said “I’m afraid of infection. I buy toilet paper, hygiene products myself—there is nothing. The cleaners have nothing to maintain hygiene.”

### **Further strikes at UK Amazon sites in fight for improved pay**

Hundreds of workers at Amazon's fulfilment site at Rugeley, England will strike Thursday and Friday, while those at the Coventry site will walk out on Friday and Saturday.

The GMB members are campaigning for a £15 an hour wage and union recognition. The stoppages this week will bring the total to 26 days. The workers currently earn around £11 an hour.

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 three percent—a real-terms pay cut, with RPI inflation at 10.7 percent.

In January, workers in the GMB at the Coventry site held the first official strike since Amazon began operating in the UK in 1998. A rally in support of the Amazon strikers will take place on Saturday outside the BHX4 Amazon warehouse at 5.30pm, the anniversary of the wildcat action in August last year.

### **Car parking staff at UK airport strike over pay**

Staff working for APCOA Parking Ltd at Luton airport near London held a 24-hour strike on July 28, and again on Tuesday. The workers are responsible for supervising car parking and transport to the terminal at the airport.

The Unite union members walked out after rejecting a six percent pay offer from the company.

### **Refuse collection workers in Selby, UK step up stoppages in pay dispute**

Around 40 UK workers employed by contractor Urbaser, in Selby, who have been taking single days of strikes since late June, are intensifying their industrial action. Urbaser is contracted to North Yorkshire unitary authority to provide refuse services in the Selby area.

The Unite union members rejected an eight percent pay offer from the company. Bin loaders and ground workers are paid only £10.64 an hour, while drivers, who must have HGV licences, are paid only £12.51 an hour. Unite claims the workers are among the lowest paid in the country. The strikes have hit bin collection and street cleaning services in Selby.

On Tuesday, workers started a four-day stoppage, with further four-day walkouts to begin August 15, 29, September 12 and 26.

### **Train drivers in England continue overtime ban in long-running pay dispute**

Train drivers at 15 train operating companies (TOCs) across England began an overtime ban on Monday, due to last until Saturday.

The ASLEF union members finished a previous week-long overtime ban on Saturday as part of their campaign for improved pay. A further overtime ban has been announced from August 7 to Saturday August 11. ASLEF members last voted in June by over 90 percent at most TOCs to continue the dispute. They previously took strike action in the long-running dispute. The overtime ban is impacting services, as there is a shortage of drivers.

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

### **Bus drivers in Manchester, UK to walk out over pay offer**

Around 1,000 UK bus drivers working for Stagecoach in Manchester are to strike after rejecting an inadequate pay offer.

The Unite union members turned down an offer of four percent from June, followed by an additional four percent in December. The stoppages will take place August 11-14. Stagecoach almost doubled its pre-tax profits for the six months to October 2022 to £36.4 million.

Meanwhile, strikes by around 360 bus drivers working for First Manchester at their Oldham depot are continuing. The union is keeping the strikes separate.

The Unite members rejected a 15.2 percent pay offer—which workers say is over two years—not backdated to April, but paid in instalments from April, October and January. They already held several days of stoppages and walked out Monday and Wednesday this week, with a stoppage scheduled for Friday. Further strikes are scheduled for August 7, 10 and 11.

### **Aircraft refuelling workers in Birmingham, UK to walk out over below-inflation pay offer**

UK workers responsible for refuelling aircraft employed by aviation services company, John Menzies Ltd at Birmingham airport will begin an indefinite strike on August 15.

The Unite union members rejected a nine percent pay offer from the company. They are responsible for refuelling three-quarters of planes at the airport, with aircraft belonging to TUI, EasyJet, Lufthansa, Ryanair and Wizz Air among others. Menzies reported operating profits of over £60 million for 2021.

### **Roller bearings manufacturing workers in Kings Lynn, UK to strike over pay offer**

Around 100 workers at Cooper Roller Bearings in Kings Lynn, England are to hold a one-day stoppage on August 21. This would be followed by an overtime ban and strikes in subsequent weeks with the number of days doubling each week.

The Unite union members rejected a 5.5 percent pay offer with “strings-attached,” performance-related bonuses. Cooper produces specialised roller bearings used in mining, power, cement and other industries. It made pre-tax profits of £7 million for the year ending December 2022.

### **Glasgow, Scotland, parking and arena staff to strike over pay**

Around 70 workers in Scotland employed by the culture and sports body

Glasgow Life at the Emirates Arena, along with City Parking wardens, will begin a 48-hour strike on Thursday.

The Unite members at each organisation voted overwhelmingly to reject a five percent pay offer from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The first day of the action is timed to coincide with the opening of the UCI Cycling World Championship in the city, which takes place over two weeks across the city. Pickets are planned at the Emirates Arena and Cadogan Square Car Park. A rally of striking workers from the two organisations will take place at the Donald Dewar statue in Buchanan Street at midday on Thursday.

### **Refuse collection drivers in Coventry, UK vote to strike over attacks on terms and conditions**

Around 40 UK HGV lorry drivers working for Labour Party-controlled Coventry council's refuse collection service voted to strike over the council's attempts to cut terms and conditions.

The Unite union members voted in response to the council's plans to end industry "task and finish" provisions, whereby refuse collectors are able to leave work early if they have finished their round. The council is also considering outsourcing the refuse collection service.

Talks on Monday between council staff and Unite union officials broke down, after which a Unite press release said unless the council backs down a strike would be "inevitable."

A seven-month long strike by the Coventry refuse collection drivers in a pay dispute ended in August last year, during which the council used its arms-length council-owned waste disposal firm Tom White Ltd to try and break the strike.

### **Packaged tea workers at Teesside, UK factory in strike ballot over pay**

Around 150 workers at the Tata Consumer Products Limited factory on Teesside, England are balloting for strike action. Tata, an Indian-based international company, produces consumer goods. Its Teesside factory produces Tetley tea products.

The GMB members rejected a pay deal from the company by an 88 percent majority, after years of real-term pay cuts. The ballot closes Thursday.

### **All-out pay strike by South Gloucestershire refuse workers in England suspended by Unite as company makes new offer**

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 was suspended on Monday. This was to allow the workers to vote on a new pay offer from Suez. Should the new offer be rejected, it was planned that the strike restart on Thursday.

Unite members originally 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.

### **Iranian protests continue over inadequate pensions and living standards**

Sunday saw further protests across Iran by retirees, as the declining value of their pensions impacts their standard of living.

Protests took place in the cities of Ahvaz, Kermanshah, Isfahan, Rasht and Shush. Protestors in Ahvaz highlighted the government's failure to provide adequate healthcare. In Isfahan, steel industry retirees held a rally in front of the Steel Industry Retirement Fund offices.

Also on Sunday, oil and gas sector workers rallied in Gachsaran county in the province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad demanding the implementation of a 2012 law requiring the oil ministry to raise their wages. Nurses at the Imam hospital in Tehran rallied to protest unpaid wages.

Other protests about living conditions continue to take place. On Monday, a protest rally was held in the city of Divandarreh in western Iran over severe water shortages, after the city suffered three days of water outages. Security forces tried to break up the rally using tear gas.

Tuesday saw a large rally in the city of Zabol in Sistan and Baluchestan province over water outages and poor air quality.

### **Strike by Iranian copper miners over pay**

Around 1,200 workers employed by the Tous Complex and Asphalt Company, which runs the Chadormalu copper mine, began an all-out strike on July 23. Their action stopped all production at the mine, which is in the central desert region of Iran.

Their demands include higher pay in line with inflation, improved insurance coverage, and full payment of the workers' share from the dividend scheme. They are also protesting poor living conditions.

### **Nigerian resident doctors strike over low pay and overwork**

Nigerian resident doctors began indefinite strike action on July 25, after the expiration of a two-week period imposed by the union for the government to implement the resolutions of a previously agreed Memorandum of Understanding.

The doctors are demanding payment of this year's Medical Residency Training Fund, upward review of the Consolidated Medical Salary Structure, and payment of all salary arrears that have accumulated since 2015. They also want to see a huge recruitment programme to increase clinical staff in hospitals to reduce overwork and stress, and an immediate review of hazard allowances in both state-run hospitals and private tertiary institutions involved in training.

Resident doctors make up the majority of medical staff in Nigerian hospitals and their strike has brought the main hospitals in Abuja and Lagos to a standstill. At the Federal Medical Centre in Jabi, a nurse said they were running only a skeletal service.

A communique from the National Association of Resident Doctors said it "cannot continue to watch its members lose their lives and break down under the weight of work overload."

### **Nigerian university workers protest four years of unpaid salaries**

Protestors at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, in Anambra State, Nigeria complained they had worked there since 2019 and have never been paid.

They explained that they had not been enrolled in the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS).

Banners featured slogans including “We are dying of hunger and depression,” “Federal Government, come to our rescue,” and “It’s been 4 years of employment with NAU without pay.”

The spokesperson for the group, Echezonam Ibezi, said, “We come to work regularly, the students I taught from year one have all graduated. What is our crime? We are suffering, many of us cannot afford to pay our rents and pay other bills.”

“Since 1 January 2019, when we got our employment letters and resumed work, we have not been paid a dime till today. The school management said we have to be captured in IPPIS.” He said 1,311 members of staff are currently not being paid.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Labour Congress keeps threatening a nationwide strike against federal government policies which have impoverished the working class, though it has withdrawn the threat on five previous occasions.

### **Municipal workers in Tshwane, South Africa strike against pay cuts**

Municipal workers in Tshwane in South Africa’s Gauteng Province held three days of unofficial action last week in response to a zero percent wage offer for 2023/24.

During a march by South African Municipal Workers’ Union members to Tshwane House on Wednesday, to demand the 5.4 percent pay increase previously agreed with the Tshwane municipality in 2021, a group of workers clashed with police. The police claimed they were protecting the newly installed union leaders workers accused of making “empty promises” and selling them out. As a result, 15 workers were arrested and charged with public violence.

The municipality Mayor Cilliers Brink told strikers last Friday it was made clear to the union representatives that the pay increase was no longer affordable and exemption has been applied for.

According to *IOL* news, a 10-day compliance order was issued by the SA Local Government Bargaining Council to pay the wage increase by August 6. The striking workers were issued with an interdict to prevent any further action.



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