

Hospital strikes over pay and conditions across Turkey; protests by youth in Gaza strip meet opposition by Hamas; public sector workers strike across Nigeria against cuts in fuel subsidies

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 August 2023

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

### Multiple walkouts in Turkish hospitals

After a national two-day strike at the start of the month, Turkish healthcare workers recently held several local walkouts.

Health workers in İzmir held a two-day stoppage last week, during collective bargaining negotiations at hospitals across the city. *Eyvensel* reported that the strike was called by a joint platform of 19 unions and two federations of GPs, which issued a statement denouncing that “we are only given a 17.5 percent raise in the face of real inflation,” officially at 47.8 percent, and that the “diluted raise is not reflected in our pensions and we are condemned to retirement in the grave.”

On Monday, workers at Ege University Hospital, also in İzmir, held a half-day walkout after not being paid the money from a collective agreement which should have been paid on July 31. According to *Eyvensel* they are owed between 55 and 60 thousand lira.

At Istanbul’s Koç University Hospital, porters and cleaners employed by subcontractor Euroserve also walked out for two hours last week, demanding the same wages and conditions as other workers at the hospital. Protesting workers told *Eyvensel* they do not receive the same pay for working nights as directly employed workers and called for a living wage.

### Turkish construction workers walk out after two months without pay

Construction workers in the Turkish city of Bursa stopped work last week, after not receiving their salaries for two months.

The strikers are employed by a subcontractor building a factory for the electric car firm TOGG (Turkey’s Automobile Joint Venture Group). The Building and Construction Workers Union (IYI-SEN) said in a press release, “Construction workers are not slaves.” *Haberler* reported IYI-SEN saying twelve of its members were fired after the strike began, but the next day announced a victory and that the payments had been made.

### Journalists at Sputnik Turkey protest layoffs following strike notice

Journalists working for the Turkish branch of Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik protested outside its Istanbul office on Tuesday, opposing the firing of 24 of their colleagues after a strike was announced.

After no deal was reached in pay negotiations, the Turkish Journalists’ Union last month filed a strike notice, and a walkout will begin on August 17. Following the strike notice, Sputnik Turkey announced it was beginning “restructuring” involving job losses, *Cumhuriyet* reported. Journalists denounced this as illegal retaliation for the strike.

### Delhaize supermarket workers in Belgium continue strikes against franchising

Workers at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium continue strikes against the company’s plan to convert its 128 directly operated shops into franchises, which would lead to lower wages and more “flexible” hours.

The first sales will be finalised in October. At the picket line outside the shop in Berchem last week, an assistant manager told *Nieuwsblad*, “I am leaving after sixteen years of service... is broken. Delhaize was always a good employer, but now it is broken.”

She said Delhaize promised a 1,500 euro bonus plus an extra 100 euros per year, but that came with “simply unfeasible” productivity targets, which was “a dirty trick to break the actions.”

Delhaize has repeatedly obtained court orders to send bailiffs and police to break picket lines. One bailiff reportedly visited the picket line in Berchem to inform them that Delhaize “will no longer receive a writ of execution from the court in Antwerp to ban the picket. We have heard it said that judges on the Flemish side are no longer prepared to restrict the right to strike in this way.”

Workers at another Delhaize supermarket in Brussels walked out on Thursday in protest after one of their colleagues was fired. The National Centre of Employees union (CNE) says the fired worker had put his hand on a window somebody else had kicked, which then fell out of its frame. Delhaize accused him of endangering lives and fired him, *VRT* reported.

Delhaize is part of the Ahold Delhaize group, which had 87 billion euros in revenue worldwide in 2022, and 2.5 billion euros in profits. An article by financial paper *De Tijd* quoted the group’s CEO explicitly laying out

the lower wages in franchised supermarkets as a reason for the restructure, and a move to a “more agile business model” to get around Belgium’s automatic inflation-linked pay index system.

The article wrote, “Delhaize’s labour cost problem will eventually solve itself automatically, because the old and expensive employees will disappear due to retirements and spontaneous departures. In addition, the question arises of what the independent franchisees will do once the issue is out of the spotlight.”

### **Belgian Ryanair pilots call new strike to reverse pay cut**

Ryanair pilots based at Belgium’s Charleroi Airport announced a new two-day strike for August 14, following four days of strikes in July.

The pilots are demanding the reversal of a 20 percent pay cut pushed through by the Irish airline at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which it said was necessary to save the company. These cuts have not been reversed, although a 50 percent cut to the salary of CEO Michael O’Leary, taken as a publicity stunt, was restored in his most recent 2.7 million euro pay package, according to *The Irish Times*.

The CNE union accused Ryanair of violating Belgian labour law, having shortened rest times unilaterally at Charleroi and demanding that 40 pilots withdraw lawsuits over the pay cut before it will negotiate.

The same 20 percent pay cut was made across Europe, but the unions kept the fight by pilots and cabin crew for pay restoration divided along national lines. In many countries, the unions have signed deals which do not restore pay for many years, allowing Ryanair to mount an international strike-breaking operation. According to *bxl*, pilots’ strikes have only affected Charleroi Airport because all Ryanair flights out of Belgium’s largest airport in Zaventem, Brussels are operated by crew from other countries.

### **De Lijn bus drivers’ strike against restructuring in Limburg, Belgium**

Bus drivers in two depots in the Belgian province of Limburg stopped work on Monday to oppose a new timetable plan which would see many transfer to a different depot.

The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions says that the new timetable at state-owned De Lijn would see 18 drivers transferred from one depot and 10 from the other. According to *VRT*, following a meeting with De Lijn management, the drivers agreed to return to work on Tuesday.

### **Union calls off strike at Barcelona-El Prat Airport, Spain**

The Spanish Central Independent and Public Employees’ Trade Union (CSIF) called off an indefinite strike by 500 security guards at Barcelona-El Prat airport, due to begin this Thursday, with a last-minute deal.

On Tuesday, following a 15-hour meeting with I-SEC, the private company which provides the security service at the airport, with the Catalan Government as a “mediator,” the CSIF announced it had signed an agreement.

Workers were calling for the hiring of more women, who are currently

only a third of the workforce but must perform all searches of female passengers, leading to a high workload, and also for a bonus for using multiple languages and for I-SEC to cover parking costs at the airport. According to *el Plural*, the deal reportedly agreed to “advance” the level of parity between men and women and pay a 42 euro travel bonus.

The government delegate to Catalonia, from the Spanish Socialist Party, all but banned the strike, imposing a 90 percent minimum service requirement. In a 2017 walkout at the airport, the Civil Guard gendarmerie was called in to break the strike, which ended with an agreement to attend arbitration, *el Plural* reported.

### **Workers at historic palaces and parks in Sintra, Portugal, strike against new contract**

National Union of Local and Regional Administration Workers (STAL) members working for Parques de Sintra – Monte da Lua (PSML), the company which manages historic palaces and parks in the popular tourist destination of Sintra near Lisbon, held a four-day stoppage last week against a new collective agreement.

The agreement was signed between PSML and the Union of Public Administration Workers (SINTAP). STAL says SINTAP has “very little representation in the company” and accuses it of “selling off rights.” PSML says 64 percent of workers signed the deal.

According to *Lusa*, the deal increased monthly salaries by 52 euros plus one percent and included “flexibility” payments. STAL said the deal deregulates working hours, which could involve working up to nine hours a day and contained the possibility of giving up lunch hours. PSML denied these were in the agreement and refused to negotiate another agreement with STAL.

### **International lorry drivers continue strike in German service station**

A group of around 200 lorry drivers in two service stations in Germany continue their indefinite strike, demanding unpaid wages of thousands of euros in some cases.

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.

An incident reportedly took place in Poland at a petrol station near the headquarters of the Mazur group in which at least one Georgian lorry driver was attacked and wounded with a knife. The only source given for this by the media was an email and phone call from Mazur to the right-wing *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The paper uncritically reported the company’s attempts to insinuate the attack was made on behalf of striking drivers against others “who have decided not to continue their protests against the company.”

While trying to paint the striking drivers as “violent” and accusing them of “extortion,” Mazur has employed violence during the protests. In April, the owner ?ukasz Mazur hired the Rutkowski Patrol, a private detective agency founded by convicted criminal Krzysztof Rutkowski. They attacked striking lorry drivers, beating and hospitalising one, in an unsuccessful attempt to take control of their lorries. The attack was only stopped when the police arrived and arrested the private thugs.

## **Irish local authority water workers hold new three-day strike against transfer to state company**

Around 120 workers at water services in local authorities throughout Ireland held a three-day strike last week against plans to transfer them to Uisce Éireann (formerly Irish Water), the state-owned company which will soon take over water services nationally.

Unite union members rejected a “framework” for the transfer last year, and are demanding their working conditions are guaranteed after any transfer.

Water workers held a two-day walkout last month, and a one-day stoppage in June. The strike had a major impact, with almost 40,000 people left without running water on August 3 and boil water notices issued to 100,000 people, according to *The Irish Times*.

The Minister for Local Government, Darragh O’Brien of Fianna Fáil, claimed workers would be able to remain working for local authorities on the same terms and conditions, and that the striking Unite members were only a minority of the affected workers. A Unite official told *The Irish Times* that the other unions representing water workers did not ballot their members before accepting the transfer “framework,” and that they were seeking binding assurances from the local government employers.

## **Strikes by bus drivers at two bus companies in Manchester, UK over pay**

Around 1,000 UK bus drivers working for Stagecoach in Greater Manchester are set to walk out this week 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 RPI inflation rate is currently 10.7 percent. They will begin a four-day stoppage Friday. 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 continue. Unite is keeping both strikes limited and separate. Stagecoach is due to take over the running of the First Manchester service, having won the franchise.

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 in July and August. They walked out Monday, and are due to strike Thursday and Friday.

Unite surveyed around 180 of the Manchester First Bus strikers and reported around two thirds were verbally abused in the last two years while 16 percent had been physically attacked. A quarter of them were never able to access toilet facilities, while around half had occasional access problems.

The survey also showed that six out of 10 respondents had cut back on essentials such as food and heating, while four percent had to resort to foodbanks. Almost a third reported physical and mental health problems associated with working long hours, which also impacted their relationships and family life.

## **UK homeless charity workers on indefinite strike over pay to hold rally**

Around 550 workers employed by homeless charity St Mungo’s based in London, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol and Oxford will hold a solidarity protest rally outside St Mungo’s headquarters in London on Thursday.

The indefinite strike of Unite union members began June 27, following a previous four-week strike. St Mungo’s has been using agency staff to try to break the strike. However on Thursday, due to a recent legal ruling it will no longer be able to use agency staff. Rather than trying to resolve the dispute, the charity is to offer the agency staff short-term contracts to thwart the legal ruling.

The workers are continuing their walkout after rejecting a revised offer by a 62 percent majority. They originally walked out after rejecting a 2.25 percent offer. The revised offer was for three 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 £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.”

## **Striking refuse workers in Workington, UK continue all-out stoppage**

The all-out strike by refuse collection workers employed by Allerdale Waste Services (AWS) serving the Workington area of Cumbria, England, begun May 16, is continuing. AWS is wholly owned by Cumberland council and provides its waste collection services.

The GMB and Unite union members have held stoppages since April, beginning all-out strike action on May 16 in a bid for increased pay. The rates of pay for loaders of £10.90 an hour and £11.89 for drivers, who must hold HGV licences, are among the lowest in the country.

The strikers plan a demonstration Thursday outside Cumberland Council’s headquarters, Allerdale House in Workington. The date coincides with the date when, due to a court ruling, employers can no longer use agency staff to try and break strikes. As at St Mungo’s, the council is planning to directly employ the agency staff on short term contracts to circumvent the ruling.

## **Strike by refuse workers in Canterbury, UK over pay continues**

UK refuse workers employed by Canterbury City council’s waste collection service Canenco have been on strike since July. The current stoppage is due to last until September 10. The service is responsible for collecting domestic waste in Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable. Canenco is wholly owned by Canterbury City council.

The GMB members demand £15 an hour for HGV drivers and £12 an hour for loaders. They are seeking pay parity with refuse collection workers in neighbouring local authorities.

## **Strikes at London's Gatwick airport announced over pay**

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

Advice workers employed by Citizens Advice in the Hull and East Riding areas of England walked out Monday and Tuesday and are set to walk out Friday. It follows a stoppage on July 31.

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.

### **Scottish school support staff at 10 councils to strike in pay dispute**

School support staff in the Scottish councils of Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Western Isles, Dundee, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Fife, Glasgow, Inverclyde, and Orkney will walk out in targeted action in the new school term. which begins next week.

The Unite union members, who work as administration workers, caterers, classroom assistants, cleaners and janitors rejected a 5.5 percent pay offer from the employers' body the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla). Scottish school staff belonging to the GMB union voted last week to strike over the pay offer.

### **Airport cleaning staff at Luton airport, UK to strike over pay**

Around 30 cleaners at Luton airport will walk out on Friday. They are employed by outsourcing company Sasse Ltd to provide cleaning services.

The Unite members, currently on £10.90 an hour, rejected a five percent pay offer for day workers and seven percent for night workers. They will begin a 24-hour stoppage on Friday, with further 24-hour stoppage planned for August 30. Sasse recorded profits of £4 million in 2022.

### **Cleaners and maintenance workers at Norfolk, UK housing body to strike over pay**

Around 60 UK staff employed as cleaners and maintenance workers at Freebridge Community Housing are to walk out over pay. Freebridge provides social housing in the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk area.

The Unite members, paid just above the national minimum wage of £10.42 an hour, rejected a five percent pay rise plus a £500 non-consolidated payment. Freebridge recorded a surplus of £3.57 million for 2022 and increased its rents by seven percent. Dates set for stoppages are August 21, 29-31 and September 4-8.

Around 230 workers employed by ground handling company, Red Handling and passenger assistance company, Wilson James at Gatwick airport in the UK capital are to walk out after rejecting pay offers.

Unite members at Red Handling will hold a four-day walkout August 18-21 and again August 25-28. Those employed by Wilson James will strike August 18-20 and August 22-24.

Red Handling provides ground handling services for Norse Atlantic, Norwegian, Delta, TAP Air Portugal and Saudi airlines.

Proposed strike action at four other ground handling companies at Gatwick airport due to take place by Unite members was called off after the companies made improved pay offers.

### **Health care staff in Wiltshire, UK prepared to strike after being refused bonus paid to other staff**

Health care staff employed as community and bank (providing cover for absences at short notice) nurses in Wiltshire, England voted by an 87 percent majority in a consultative ballot as being prepared to strike. They work for a limited liability partnership, the Wiltshire Health and Care WHC operated by four local hospital trusts.

The Unison union members are aggrieved that an NHS Backlog Bonus paid to health care staff in the recent pay settlement only applies to staff employed under the Agenda for Change terms. The WHC staff are not covered by the Agenda for Change terms and are not being paid the bonus worth £1,250-£1,600. The WHC organised an online petition, with over 18,000 signatures protesting their treatment.

### **Refuse workers in Derbyshire, UK balloted over pay offer**

Around 50 refuse collectors and drivers working for outsourcing company Serco, which provides refuse collection services for the Derbyshire Dales council, England are balloting over strike action.

The GMB union members are asking for an eight percent pay increase for loaders and 12 percent for drivers. They want parity with other Derbyshire refuse collectors. The ballot closes August 15.

### **All-out pay strike by South Gloucestershire refuse workers in England called off after workers accept new pay 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 July 31.

This was to allow the workers to vote on a new pay offer from Suez. The offer reported as a 10.1 percent rise was accepted by the workforce and the strike declared over by Unite on August 2

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.

## **Further protests by UK rail union over ticket office closures**

Following ongoing anger at the closure of rail ticketing offices, the UK government has extended its bogus consultation process until September.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union announced additional “days of action”. This consists of RMT members and union bureaucrats handing out leaflets and postcards at rail stations. Around 25 stations, including Birmingham, Derby, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Nottingham were leafleted Wednesday, with the action to be repeated on August 16.

Both the RMT and train drivers’ union ASLEF refuse to mobilise 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.

## **Hamas militia try to suppress protests by youth in Gaza strip**

Thousands of youths in Gaza took to the streets on August 4 to protest their intolerable living conditions. Hamas tried to suppress their protest.

The youth, part of the “We Want to Live” popular movement, were protesting their lack of future. Around 70 percent are unemployed and live in extreme poverty. Israeli economic sanctions have been in place for 17 years. Electricity and gas supplies are limited. Electricity is supplied on a rota basis, eight hours on and eight hours off. In an extreme heat wave, this makes life unbearable.

Hamas militia forces were out in large numbers to attempt to foil the demonstrations. However, youth mounted limited protests in areas including the Jabalya refugee camp. However, Hamas succeeded in dispersing hundreds of youths in the city of Khan Yunis and in the northern part of the strip.

## **Ongoing cost of living protests by Iranian government retirees**

Tuesday saw more protests by Iranian government retirees against extreme poverty. Protests were reported in the cities of Hamedan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Karaj, Rasht, Sanandaj, Shiraz, Tabriz and Yazd.

Inflation and US sanctions have eroded economic conditions for workers and pensioners alike. By law, the government is supposed to maintain the rate of government pensions at 90 percent of working government employees, but this is not adhered to.

In Hamedan, retired teachers and education workers protested in front of the government retirement fund offices. Tuesday also saw a protest by disabled people in Tehran accusing the government of ignoring their basic needs. They also called on the government to reverse its privatisation of transport services to disabled people.

## **Israeli medical and university staff propose strike action in opposition to judicial reforms**

On Wednesday, Israeli academics at the University of Jerusalem, the Technion, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University and the Open University declared a labour dispute over the Israeli government’s limiting of the power of the Israeli judiciary, weakening judicial independence and

strengthening the dictatorial powers of the government.

This means possible strike action. The Weizmann Institute of Science, Ben-Gurion University and Bar-Ilan University are set to follow suit.

The White Coats organisation, representing physicians and medics, is calling on the Israeli Medical Association and the Histadrut trade union body to declare they will call for general strike action prior to any constitutional crisis resulting from the judicial reforms.

Separately, the Israeli Channel 12 television network reported on a survey carried out by the Medical Residents Organisation of Israel. The survey showed large numbers of medics intend to leave the country if the judicial reforms are not reversed. Those already studying abroad say they would not come back.

## **Workers strike across Nigeria to protest government fuel subsidy cuts**

Public sector workers in Nigeria went on strike on August 2 to protest cuts to fuel subsidies, which have led to the doubling of the price of fuel, food and other commodities.

Protesters holding placards marched in Lagos, the oil-producing state of Bayelsa and the northern cities of Kano and Kaduna. They broke down the gate to the National Assembly building in the capital, Abuja, after security forces locked it to keep demonstrators out.

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) asked the Federal Government to cushion the effects of removing fuel subsidies with an upward review of salaries or it would call a week-long nationwide strike. The union leaders met with President Tinubu in his office while the protests were in progress.

The *Daily Trust* reported July 31 that many Nigerians expected the NLC to back down before the strike was set to begin, as they have done so many times before. It cited five previous occasions when the NLC “suspended [a] planned nationwide strike over critical matters.”

The NLC called off the strike after one day, while the government withdrew its threat to sue the trade union leaders for “disobeying” a court order.

Demonstrator Usman Abdullahi Shagari, aged 45, said he has been struggling to provide for his family, including five children. “Feeding today is the most important thing,” said Shagari. “Everything has increased, so that has affected the feeding of my family and my salary cannot withstand it.”

Nigeria’s inflation was 22.7 percent in June, and is expected to rise still further.

## **Union set to end Nigerian doctors’ strike after back-room meeting with leading senators**

The Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) is set to call off a two-week old strike over pay and short staffing after a back-room meeting with senate leaders.

The doctors want payment of this year’s Medical Residency Training Fund, a review of the Consolidated Medical Salary Structure, and payment of all salary arrears accumulated since 2015. They also demand recruitment to increase clinical staff in their 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.

NARD president Emeka Orji previously claimed doctors were going to escalate the action after August 2, saying the health ministry failed to

resolve the issues behind the strike. The government directed managers of federal tertiary hospitals to enforce a “no work, no pay” policy against the strikers.

### **Municipal workers, wildcat strike enters third week in Tshwane, South Africa**

The unofficial strike of South African municipal workers in Tshwane (northern Gauteng Province) for a 5.4 percent pay increase is intensifying as it enters its third week.

Thirty-eight workers were sacked for unofficial action and handed dismissal letters by Mayor Cilliers Brink, who a week earlier informed strikers the union representatives were told the pay increase was not affordable.

The South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU) claimed to support the strike, whilst distancing themselves from the unofficial action.

According to *Pretoria News*, the District Attorney (DA) asked them to call off the stoppage and take action against the strikers. Jacqui Uys, the DA’s caucus chairperson, appealed to SAMWU to act as responsibly as the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union and end the strike.

Mayor Brink also threatened workers with contempt of court by asking them to come forward to claim they have been intimidated into walking out, and offering protection to those who speak out.

### **Metal workers in Northern Cape, South Africa on indefinite strike over wages**

Over 500 South African metal workers at Ekapa Diamond Mines, Northern Cape began indefinite strike action on Monday, to demand a 17 percent wage increase for those at entry-level over one year. They reject the company’s offer of 6.5 percent across all levels over three years.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members also demand increases in medical aid and housing allowance. They say workers are “risking their lives underground for R5,700 starvation wages.”

Ekapa, which took over the mine, was previously owned by the De Beers group.



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