

Civil servants in Romania in wildcat strike against austerity cuts; protests continue across Iran against cost-of-living crisis; South African metal workers on indefinite strike attacked and arrested while picketing Ekapa Diamond Mine

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.

Romanian civil servants walk out in spontaneous protests against austerity measures

As many as 15,000 employees of the Romanian finance ministry began a wildcat strike on August 10, against austerity measures which will lead to job cuts and will cost each worker around 700 lei per month.

The president of the National Union of Public Finance (SindFisc) told *Agerpres*, “It is a spontaneous protest that is not controllable by the unions... We, as union leaders, stand with the people. We have not identified a plan for a general strike.”

Finance minister Marcel Boloş justified the cuts, saying finance ministry workers receive “various additional benefits, which the common man can’t even hope for.” He said the austerity package represented “an act of courage and patriotism at the national level.” The pay cuts, affecting around 22,000 civil servants, amount to about 185 million lei per year, a tiny fraction of the 25.9 billion lei military budget approved by parliament at the start of 2022.

Doctors strike in Portugal over “years of disinvestment” in healthcare

National Health Service (SNS) doctors in the Central Region of Portugal began a two-day strike on August 9, following a previous stoppage in July.

The Independent Doctors’ Union (SIM) said conditions in hospitals and doctors’ pay are harming the SNS, which has suffered “years of disinvestment.” The SIM also called an overtime ban between July 24 and August 22, according to *Lusa*.

An open letter signed by more than two hundred doctors last week denounced the government’s “arrogance” for offering only a 1.6 percent pay rise and demanded “negotiation in good faith.” As well as calling to “rebuild the SNS,” the letter said “it is urgent to democratise the

organisation and operation of health services... implementing measures aimed at the election of clinical directors.”

It demanded the trade unions “regardless of the specificities of their legal competences... be responsible and respect the interests of Portuguese doctors, establishing permanent bridges of understanding and convergence, not opening gaps that make it easier for political and economic powers to strike our professional class.”

Emergency medical phone line operators on strike throughout France

Phone operators for the French national Urgent Medical Aid Service (SAMU) service have been on an indefinite strike since July 3, demanding a monthly hardship bonus of 100 euros and a solution to the shortfall of 800 staff, *Le Monde* reported.

The French Association of Medical Regulation Assistants, representing the striking operators, said that although the strike covered three-quarters of France, it had very little impact on the SAMU service because workers were directly ordered to return to work at their posts by the administration.

One striker told *AFP* he and his colleagues were “tired, exhausted, and some are clearly at the limit.” Health minister Aurélien Rousseau said he considered “some” of their demands legitimate and intended to “work on them in the next few weeks.”

Cleaners at stations in Marseille, France, on strike over unpaid salaries

Cleaning workers employed by Laser Propreté, responsible for cleaning transport stations in the French city of Marseille, are on an indefinite strike, begun at the start of August, because they received no wages for July.

Workers in National Society of the French Railways (SNCF) rail stations walked out August 1, and were joined last week by their colleagues in tram stations and at the Marseille-Fos Port, which is France’s busiest.

Laser claims all wages were paid at the end of July, but one union representative accused the company, where there were several strikes earlier this year, of “carrying out a disguised social and economic plan.”

Waste piled up in stations throughout Marseille during the strike. Although hiring strikebreakers is illegal in France, this is usually circumvented by using external companies, which Laser has done during this strike. According to *France Bleu*, the Minister of Transport, mayor of Marseille and the SNCF mandated a third-party company to clean one station under cover of night with a police escort on August 10, claiming there was a “health and safety emergency generated by the accumulation of waste in public spaces.”

Auto workers strike over unsafe work in Tarragona, Spain

The General Workers’ Union (UGT) called a strike on August 21 of 1,800 workers at the auto manufacturer Idaia At in Tarragona, Spain, *Europa Press* reported.

The UGT says there have been “different accidents at work, some of them very serious,” because of a lack of safety measures. It also said that the company “retaliates against workers who dare to report these deficiencies.”

Cleaners resume protests in Córdoba, Spain

Cleaning workers in the Spanish city of Córdoba protested outside the headquarters of their employer, Limpiezas Córdoba, on August 11, after not receiving the payment they were promised.

They had protested several times in July over unpaid wages. The Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) union suspended protests at the start of August when the company promised to pay all that was owed. By last week this had still not happened, according to *Información*.

Limpiezas Córdoba operates throughout Spain, employing around 1,000 workers. The CCOO threatened more protests and an indefinite nationwide strike from October if workers were not paid.

Journalists at Sputnik Turkey begin strike, opposing layoffs

Journalists at the Turkish branch of Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik began a walkout on Thursday. The Turkish Journalists’ Union (TGS) initially filed a strike notice during pay negotiations, but after the notice was filed, Sputnik fired 24 journalists, supposedly for economic reasons.

The TGS said this was an illegal retaliation and, “This struggle will continue until we re-employ our members, whom you have illegally dismissed, and sign the collective bargaining agreement.”

Textile workers end strike after employer agrees to their demands in Gaziantep, Turkey

Textile workers at three factories in the Turkish city of Gaziantep ended

a week-long strike on Tuesday. Their employer agreed to meet their pay demands, reinstate workers dismissed during the strike, and pay wages for three of the six strike days, *Haberler* reported.

Around 2,000 workers walked out in opposition to a below-inflation pay rise, most of whom were reportedly told by text message during the strike they would be dismissed.

Representatives of both the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) addressed the striking workers in an attempt to stifle a growing militant movement. The Gaziantep mayor, from the AKP, openly praised the owner of the factories, saying, “There is no problem as long as the worker and employer are father-son.” The CHP deputy called for strikers to “make sacrifices.”

Clerical workers hold wildcat strikes in port of Larnaca, Cyprus

Clerical workers at Larnaca, the second-largest port in Cyprus, stopped work for two hours on August 8, and reportedly held another stoppage the next day, in a wildcat strike against their employer Kition Ocean Port.

The Pancypriot Labour Federation, while distancing itself from the stoppages, said that after workers voted for an agreement with Kition “despite strong reservations about the content,” the company demanded additional concessions, triggering the strikes, according to *Politis*.

The Employers and Industrialists Federation reacted to the wildcat strikes, which affected the unloading of several ships, by demanding restrictions on the right to strike. The Federation told the *Cyprus Mail* it wanted “a regulatory framework for the resolution of labour disputes in essential services,” to prevent strikes outside the Industrial Relations Code enforced by employers and the unions.

Firefighters protest during weeks-long strike in Zadar, Croatia

Last week, 26 firefighters protested in the city centre of Zadar, Croatia, *novo.hr* reported, as part of a strike begun July 24.

The firefighters are demanding their pay reflect the hardship and danger of their job, as they currently receive the same pay as any other utility workers. During the strike, they have only been responding to emergencies.

Union suspends Irish firefighters’ strike again to ballot on new offer

Shortly before a further escalation of the strike by retained firefighters in Ireland, the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) announced it had received a new offer at the Workplace Relations Commission and was suspending the action.

Firefighters resumed a rolling strike in July, closing half of the country’s stations at a time after rejecting a previous offer from the Labour Court. If SIPTU had not suspended the strike, more stations would have been closed from Sunday.

Retained firefighters are currently 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. SIPTU says the new offer would increase the “guaranteed minimum earnings” for new starters

to “over €18,000,” and firefighters with more than eight years’ service would earn over 21,500 euros, although it is not clear that this is only from the retainer. In addition, the required on-call time would be reduced from 48 to 24 weeks, with more weeks “on a voluntary basis.”

Last week, before the new talks, SIPTU accused the government of attempting to break the strike by withdrawing social protection payments from striking firefighters. According to the union, around one third of retained firefighters receive social protection payments as they struggle to find work while required to remain on call and within 2.5km of their local station.

Support staff at Leeds university, England strike over pay

Support staff at Leeds University, England began a seven-day strike on Saturday. They work as cleaners, IT technicians and administrative workers at the Russell group university.

The Unison union members rejected a pay offer of between five and eight percent, with lower-paid staff being offered the higher percentage. According to Unison, the value of pay has fallen by around 30 percent in real terms since 2010. Unite union members are also striking over the same issue, beginning a five-day stoppage Monday.

The week-long walkout by Unison members coincides with the A-level clearing process. The strike is expected to impact the university’s offer of places to school students getting their A-level exam results this week. Leeds is the only UK university involved in industrial action during the clearing process for A-level result students.

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

Around 1,000 UK bus drivers working for Stagecoach in Greater Manchester, who ended a four-day strike on Monday, will begin a further four-day stoppage Friday. Stagecoach reportedly used scab drivers from London to drive some buses.

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. Stagecoach almost doubled its pre-tax profits for the six months to October 2022 to £36.4 million.

Meanwhile, around 360 bus drivers at First Manchester based in Oldham held further strikes Tuesday and Wednesday this week. Unite is keeping these strikes limited and separate. Stagecoach is due to take over the running of the First Manchester service, having won the franchise.

The Unite members at First Manchester 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. Another issue is lack of access to toilet facilities, which is detrimental to health. The workers have already held several days of stoppages in July and this month.

A Unite survey showed that six in 10 respondents had cut back on food and heating, while four percent had resorted to foodbanks. Almost a third reported physical and mental health problems associated with working long hours, impacting family life.

Further stoppages are planned by drivers at both companies, some of which will overlap. First Manchester drivers are due to strike August 18, 21, 23 and 25-28 and again September 4-8. Stagecoach drivers plan to walk out August 25-28 and September 4-8. These dates cover some high-profile events in Manchester, including the Noel Gallagher’s High Flying

Birds concert at Wythenshawe Park and a Manchester United home game at Old Trafford, as well as the Bank Holiday Weekend August 26-28.

Strike by package manufacturing workers in Darlington, UK over pay

Around 90 UK workers employed at the Darlington factory of package manufacturer Cepac began a four-week strike on Monday. The Unite union members rejected an eight percent pay offer with strings including longer hours, lower overtime rates and shift pattern changes.

Cepac makes corrugated packaging for major companies such as Carlsberg, Costa Coffee, Greggs, Mars, Pret a Manger and Subway. With just-in-time measures used by many food and drink retailers, the strike is expected to have an early impact.

Further stoppage by refuse collection workers in Selby, UK in pay dispute

Around 40 UK workers employed by contractor Urbaser, in Selby, began a four-day stoppage Tuesday. 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 £10.64 an hour, while drivers, who must have HGV licences, are paid £12.51 an hour. Unite says the workers are among the lowest paid in the country. They began a series of one-day stoppages at the end of June, but have now escalated the action with four-day stoppages. The first four-day walkout began August 1, and further four-day strikes are planned from August 29, September 12 and 26.

The strikes have hit bin collection and street cleaning services in Selby.

Rail workers in England to stage further walkouts in dispute over pay, conditions and jobs

Following their latest three days of stoppage on July 20, 22 and 29, around 20,000 rail workers at 14 train operating companies (TOCs) in England are to walk out on August 26 and September 2.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) members are in a long-running dispute over restructuring involving pay, working conditions and job losses. The dispute began in June 2022, with a series of 24-hour stoppages organised by the RMT against rail infrastructure group Network Rail and 14 TOCs. They were part of a strike wave encompassing rail, postal, telecom and education workers, National Health Service staff and civil servants. In March this year, the RMT sold out its 20,000 strong Network Rail members when it recommended a massively below-inflation deal spread over two years.

Bus drivers at First South in southern England to strike over low pay

Around 185 bus drivers employed by First South bus company operating

in England are to begin a four-day stoppage Friday August 25, a public holiday weekend.

The Unite union members are angry at the company's refusal to negotiate a pay rise when drivers are on £12 an hour, with some on £11.03 an hour. The bus company serves the Solent area, including the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton as well as other conurbations. First South is part of First Bus, whose latest profit returns were £226.8 million, up £6 million on the previous year.

Health staff in Wirral UK vote to walk out over pay grading

Around 400 UK clinical support workers (CSWs) employed by the Wirral University Teaching Hospital (WUTH) NHS Foundation Trust at its Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge hospital sites have voted to strike.

The Unison union members voted by a 99 percent majority to walk out. CSWs work on wards alongside nursing staff helping to feed and care for patients. Most are paid at the lower end of band 2 pay scale. However, they routinely carry out tasks such as blood monitoring and inserting cannulas which count as band 3 pay scale work, for which they should be earning around £2,000 a year more.

Despite a collective agreement signed by over 400 staff, WUTH has refused to consider their request. Seven other health trusts in the northwest of England agreed to put CSWs on the band 3 pay scale and backdated pay to April 2018. Unison has not yet announced any strike dates, appealing to the Trust to make the payment.

Unite calls off strike of aircraft refuelling workers in Birmingham, UK as workers accept new pay offer

UK workers responsible for refuelling aircraft employed by aviation services company, John Menzies Ltd at Birmingham airport were due to begin an indefinite stoppage on Tuesday after rejecting a nine percent pay offer. However, on Monday, Menzies put forward a new offer which was accepted by the workforce in a ballot.

The new offer is for a nine percent increase, a £750 one-off payment, for temporary staff to be made permanent and for communications technology to be upgraded.

The Unite union members 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.

Unite suspends one strike at London's Gatwick airport while another is scheduled to go ahead

Unite has suspended a scheduled strike by workers employed by passenger assistance company, Wilson James at Gatwick airport in the UK capital, due to begin Friday. The company made an improved pay offer, which is currently being balloted on. The result will be announced Thursday.

However, strikes of Unite members employed by ground handling company, Red Handling are still scheduled to go ahead. Workers are due to begin a four-day walkout Friday, with a further four-day stoppage

August 25-28.

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

Strike action planned by Unite members at four other ground handling companies at Gatwick airport was called off after the companies made improved pay offers.

Ongoing protests in Iran against worsening living conditions

On Monday, retired Iranian telecom workers held their regular weekly protests against deteriorating living conditions. The rallies took place in several cities, including Tehran, Ahvaz, Rasht, Shiraz and Isfahan.

Retirees demand the regime implement a 2010 law requiring the state-run telecom company to raise pensions in line with increasing costs to satisfy basic needs.

Tehran Metro workers held a separate protest Monday against detrimental changes to their pensions. Protests took place in Shabestar and Urmia over the drying up of Lake Urmia. The protestors blamed the regime's economic and environmental policies.

In Tabriz, contract teachers protested. Despite having passed the Education Ministry exams entitling them to be employed, they have been denied employment and are living in poverty.

Protest and general strike call by Arab local authority heads to demand Israeli government releases funding

On Sunday, around 300 protestors set up a tent near the Israeli Prime Minister's office and the Finance Ministry in Jerusalem. Organised by the National Committee of Heads of Arab Local Authorities, the protest was called to demand far-right Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, release the \$55 million promised previously to boost development in Arab communities.

In support of its call, the committee of Arab local authorities called for a general strike in the Arab communities on August 21, coinciding with a rally in Jerusalem. The committee said that without the promised funding the school term would not be able to begin on September 1.

Lebanese TV station goes off-air amid ongoing strike by staff

Staff at Lebanon's state broadcaster Tele Liban have been on strike for two weeks since August 11 over unpaid wages and benefits. The 200 staff at the TV station have not been paid for nearly two years.

Workers blame Ziad Makari, the caretaker information minister, for ordering the close-down. For his part, Makari said talks with the workers' union were ongoing.

Striking South African metal workers picketing Ekapa Diamond Mine attacked and arrested

Forty-three metal workers on strike at the Ekapa diamond mine,

Kimberley, South Africa were arrested August 10 whilst picketing. According to news sources, police deployed water cannons and fired tear gas to break up the picket.

Over 700 workers began indefinite strike action on August 7, to demand a 17 percent wage increase for those at entry-level over one year. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members reject the company's offer of 6.5 percent across all levels over three years. They also demand increases in medical aid and housing allowance, saying workers are "risking their lives underground for R5,700 starvation wages."

Ekapa is trying to get an interim interdiction to stop the strike, to be heard in court on September 11.

Workers sacked in municipal wildcat strike in Tshwane, South Africa

In the ongoing strike of municipal workers in Tshwane, Gauteng, South Africa for a 5.4 percent pay increase, a further 62 workers have been sacked in the past week for taking unofficial action. The stoppage began in late July.

Fifty-five workers were sacked last Friday, plus a further seven who the authority claim are union leaders. Currently 100 have now been sacked in total.

The metro council, desperate to end the stoppage with rubbish piling up throughout the city, sought a further court interdict against the strike, which was refused. Sacked workers are being identified and proceedings are under way to charge some with arson. *SA Labour News* reported that the council opened an arson case against striking employees they accused of damaging and setting alight waste bins at the Waste Management Depot in Centurion.

According to *The Citizen*, the authority is determined to sack more workers to intimidate the workforce. Selby Bokaba, City of Tshwane spokesperson, said "Tshwane leadership has vowed to continue to clamp down on those that are hellbent on destabilising the institution."

Nigerian Shell oil workers' three-day strike over high prices and low pay

Nigerian oil workers and service providers of Shell Petroleum Development Company in Port Harcourt, Rivers state started a three-day warning strike against high prices and low pay on August 15. The strikers say the removal of fuel subsidies has caused them hardship.

Workers protested at the Shell branch with banners provided by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria.

A spokesperson said, "You cannot believe that some people working at Shell go home with less than the minimum wage, now it is happening in Nigeria where inflation has eaten deep into our total wage where people who work for Shell are not able to provide basic food for their families." Inflation rose to 24 percent in July.

Nigerian aviation and logistics workers walk out over low pay

Airport security and logistics walked out on August 15 to demand a pay increase. Security at all Nigerian airports is likely to be affected.

A letter signed by National Union of Air Transport Employees General Secretary, Ocheme Aba, said "the union has done everything possible to resolve the lingering crisis of extreme impoverishment of employees of AVSEC [Aviation Security] and logistics sub-sector of the aviation industry in Nigeria, but to no avail."

Turkish construction workers in Tanzania strike over unpaid wages

Turkish construction workers in Tanzania employed by Yapi Merkezi walked out on August 5, demanding payment of four months' unpaid wages. Yapi Merkezi is a transnational construction company based in Turkey, contracted to build a Standard Gauge Railway in Tanzania.

"I've been working at this company since 2016," said Ömer Tanrıverdi, one of the strikers. "We waited for seven months... We are in a very difficult situation. We can't support our families. We want our wages for four months: February, March, April, and May. We also demand a promise of regular payments for the future."

In January 2023, Yapi Merkezi started construction of the fourth phase of the 42-month railway project, the Tabora-Isaka section. The company has not paid its workers regularly since the start of the pandemic.

General President of Dev Yapi union, Özgür Karabulut, said, "Around 600 workers couldn't bear the situation and left their jobs by signing conciliation agreements [returning to Turkey]. The company has not fulfilled its promise to compensate these workers when due. Starting Tuesday, we will protest for these colleagues in front of the company's headquarters."



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