

Wildcat strikes by civil servants in Romania continue as union tries to take control; strikes and protests across Syria as government lifts fuel subsidies; South African municipal workers continue wildcat pay strike in City of Tshwane

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.

Civil servants' union attempts to seize control of wildcat strikes at Romanian Ministry of Finance

Wildcat strikes by civil servants in Romania against austerity are continuing. The Federation of Trade Unions from the Fiscal Administration 'Solidarity', representing civil servants in the Romanian Ministry of Finance, called a two-hour warning strike with an hour-long picket on Tuesday, in an attempt to take control of the wildcat strikes which broke out last week.

In response, more protests were organised by ministry employees on Thursday, outside the control of the unions, against the government's plans for austerity which will lead to job losses and pay cuts.

As many as 15,000 took part in last week's walkouts. The union president cautiously suggested that the union itself "will probably move towards" calling an all-out strike. However, it was clear they intended this to be more restricted than the wildcat strikes already occurring since he added "it is long-term, you have to sort out some procedures, we have to see if the Government is willing to talk with us and resolve the demands or not."

Turkish civil servants strike against below-inflation pay offer

Civil servants throughout Turkey joined a strike on August 18 called by the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Union (KESK), which has 163,000 members, against a below-inflation pay offer, *Duvar* reported.

While official inflation last month was 48 percent and has been much higher throughout most of the year, the government offered only a 14 percent pay rise in the first half of 2024 and nine percent in the second half, and two instalments of six and five percent in 2025. The KESK pointed out that the government's own inflation forecast for those years was higher than the pay offer.

The Memur-Sen union, which represents around a million of the 2.1 million unionised civil servants according to *Duvar*, also rejected the offer, but did not call strikes. The Kamu-Sen union, with around half a million members, accused the government of calling meetings where "hundreds of vital issues are not even brought to the agenda" and refused to attend the latest negotiations, *Evrensel* reported.

Construction workers near Istanbul, Turkey, strike over "insulting" pay rise

Construction workers employed on the new line of the Istanbul Metro in Turkey linking a city-centre station to the airport began a stoppage last week against a pay rise which they described as "like insults and blasphemy," according to *Haberler*. The pay rise in July reportedly averaged 26 percent, less than the 30 percent increase in the minimum wage, and far below the official inflation rate of 48 percent.

The statement announcing the strike demanded a 75 percent pay rise for all workers and warned "in the event that even one staff member is dismissed, our justified work stoppage will continue."

Service workers in Portuguese hospitals hold "one of the largest ever" strikes over collective bargaining

Workers at the Common Use Service of Hospitals (SUCH), a private non-profit organisation in Portugal, which provides food, laundry and other services to hospitals, held a one-day strike on Monday with widespread participation.

According to the Union of Workers of the Hotel Industry, Tourism, Restaurants and Similar, around 80 percent of the 3,250 employees of SUCH joined the strike, demanding improvements in wages and working conditions, staffing levels and hazard pay.

Lusa reported that at a meeting of union members in Coimbra, workers passed a motion opposing the "brutal increase in the cost of living," and pointing out that they were excluded from an increase in salaries and meal

subsidies for workers directly employed by the state.

Week-long strike at Portuguese EDP electricity company

Last week, workers at the Portuguese electricity company EDP held a six-day strike over pay, with protests in Lisbon on August 16, *The Portugal News* reported. Workers at EDP call centres also walked out for three days as part of the campaign called by the Fiequimetal union.

Teachers strike at start of the school year in French department of Mayotte

On Wednesday, the start of the school year in the French overseas department of Mayotte, teachers joined a one-day strike called by the National Union of Secondary Education (SNES) against the conditions of work and lack of resources for schools.

Mayotte, an island near Madagascar, is the poorest of France's regions, and most people live below the poverty line. Strikers demanded additional schools and teachers, as the number of pupils has been increasing, and that all schools in Mayotte be classified as "REP+", a designation for the most deprived areas which would give schools access to additional funding. They also said more resources were needed to teach French, which is the only official language but is spoken by most people in Mayotte only as a second language.

Gig economy couriers hold warning strike for collective agreement in Berlin, Germany

Gig economy delivery workers at Lieferando, the German subsidiary of the Just Eat Group, held a warning strike in Berlin on August 17 to demand a collective agreement, which Lieferando currently does not have.

The stoppage was called by the Food, Enjoyment and Restaurants Union (NGG), which called for a 15 euro guaranteed wage, as drivers are currently paid the minimum wage of 12 euros per hour plus performance bonuses, *taz* reported.

The NGG claims it is preparing to call an indefinite strike if the company does not negotiate an agreement.

Miners strike over unpaid wages in Stari Trg, Kosovo

Around 150 miners in the lead and zinc mine in Stari Trg, Kosovo, have been on strike since August 17 to demand their wages for June are paid. The mine in Stari Trg is operated by the state owned Trep?a Mines company and is Europe's largest lead-zinc mine.

The president of the union at Trep?a told *021* the strike would continue until miners received their June pay, and also demanded better ventilation in the mine and that debts owed to the pension fund are paid. An executive from Trep?a claimed initially that wages were paid on the 17th, but the strike continued.

Utilities workers hold warning strike in Podgorica, Montenegro

Workers at utilities companies in Podgorica held a work stoppage and protest in the Montenegrin capital on August 18.

According to *RTCG*, the Union of Housing and Communal Industry said they had reached a new collective agreement containing pay increases with the Ministry of Ecology and Spatial Planning, but the Department of Finance refused to release the funds.

The union said that if the government did not respond to their demands by September 15, they would call a national all-out strike.

Spanish unions call off strikes at Sóller Train in Mallorca over "legal complexity"

The Spanish trade unions in the strike committee at Sóller Train, an historic railway line and popular tourist attraction on the island of Mallorca, announced on Wednesday they would call off strikes planned for next week. They used the excuse of the "legal complexity" of their situation.

According to *Ultima Hora*, the company which operates the train line claims it cannot negotiate any collective agreement since a group of workers is making a separate demand.

The strike committee said in a statement that "the strike does not necessarily lead to the achievement of the proposed objectives and the economic sacrifice of the comrades would be useless and in vain."

Last week, the unions also called off a two-day strike planned for Tuesday, claiming that the 75 percent minimum service requirement "has not taken into account the safety requirements in the movement of trains established in the Traffic Regulations." They were suspending the walkout entirely "in a gesture of responsibility for the safety of train users and workers."

Union postpones taxi drivers' industrial action in Sweden

The Swedish Transport Workers' Union announced on Wednesday it was cancelling protests and an overtime ban due to begin Friday, after agreeing to mediation with the Car Traffic Employers' Association. The union had accused the employers of refusing to negotiate a new pay agreement.

The Transport Workers' Union announced protests for Friday and still says a strike will be called on September 4 at six taxi companies across Sweden if no deal is reached.

Strike by workers at ExxonMobil oil refinery in Scotland over safety

Around 200 workers at ExxonMobil's Mossmorran refinery in Fife, Scotland, walked out on August 15 over safety concerns. The Health and Safety Executive was alerted.

According to the Unite union, workers reported "health and safety

warning signals and procedures not being in full working operation across the plant.” For over a year workers said the company and contractors Altrad, Bilfinger and Karfer failed to inform them when the alarm system broke down—a legal requirement in case of leakages, explosions or exposure to hazardous materials. Various incidents have occurred concerning pollution and environmental damage.

Also pay was withheld, despite workers having the right to withhold their labour if a workplace is deemed unsafe.

UK: Train drivers and rail workers plan further stoppages over pay and conditions

Train drivers at 16 UK companies are set to walk out September 1, with an overtime ban planned the following day when the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers are due out. 20,000 RMT members at the train operating companies (TOCs) will walk out on August 26 and September 2.

At ScotRail, Aslef pushed through a below-inflation deal of five percent for 2023/24 backdated to April 1, 2023, with one percent increase from October 1. ScotRail’s service delivery director David Simpson said, “We are grateful to our trade union colleagues for their constructive approach to negotiations...”

Rail workers are in longstanding dispute with the rail companies and government over major restructuring involving pay, job losses and safety. 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 train operating companies. They were the first in what became a strike wave encompassing rail, postal, telecom and education workers, National Health Service staff and civil servants. Aslef called 11 one-day strikes over 15 months.

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. The RMT has called a demonstration over ticket office closures involving major job losses at 5pm August 31 outside the Department of Transport in London. Rather than mobilising their members in all-out strike action, the union is engaged in a futile consultation exercise to inform the public to supposedly pressurise the government.

The general secretary of drivers’ union Aslef, Mick Whelan, said, “Train drivers at these companies had not had a pay rise for four years... We haven’t heard a word from the employers. We haven’t had a meeting, a phone call, a text message, or an email since Wednesday 26 April. And we haven’t had any contact with the government since Friday 6 January.”

The main aim of the Aslef and RMT leaders is a corporatist partnership with the train operating companies and government to impose the cutbacks.

UK bus drivers at Stagecoach in Warwickshire plan all out stoppage over pay while First Manchester Oldham strike continues

Around 300 UK bus drivers at Stagecoach, Warwickshire, plan to walk out indefinitely from September 5.

The Unite members rejected a 7.8 percent rise for this year, and 4.5 percent plus £100 for next year. The RPI inflation rate is currently 10.7 percent. The workers earn £14 an hour, while company profits increased to £36.4 million in the six months to October 2022.

Keeping bus strikes separate, Unite suspended planned stoppages at Stagecoach in Greater Manchester by 1,000 drivers. North West regional officer Colin Hayden, said, “As an act of good faith we have suspended strike action while our members consider the new pay offer from Stagecoach.” The deal workers are balloting on has not been made public. As a shop steward, Hayden helped push through a sellout deal at Go North West in May 2021 after an 11-week stoppage.

Meanwhile, further stoppages are due at First Manchester based in Oldham, August 25-28 and September 4-8. Stagecoach is due to take over the running of the First Manchester service, having won the franchise.

The 360 Unite members in Oldham 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. The *Oldham Times* reported a new offer is being considered—of £15 an hour backdated to April, followed by £15.60 from October. Drivers complain about the lack of access to toilet facilities, which can affect health. They took several days of stoppages in July and earlier this month.

Around 1,300 Unite members at Go North East are currently balloting for strike action after rejecting a below inflation pay offer with attacks on conditions. The ballot closes September 12. Parent company, Go Ahead group reported profits of £85 million last year.

UK bus drivers of elderly and disabled in Manchester strike vote

Drivers who transport around 7,000 infirm, disabled or elderly passengers in Greater Manchester, England have voted to strike over pay. Strike dates have not been announced.

The Unite members are paid the minimum wage of £10.42 an hour. They are employed by Greater Manchester Accessible Transport, owned by the Labour party-run Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Scottish school staff in 10 councils to walk out over pay

Support workers and ancillary staff in schools and early years settings in 10 councils, or a third of the total in Scotland, plan to walk out over pay September 13 and 14.

The GMB members rejected a 5.5 percent offer from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. According to the union, workers in Scotland are paid £700 less than their counterparts in England and Wales.

Consultant doctors across England continue stoppages over pay

Consultants at the cash-starved National Health Service (NHS) are set to walk out across England on Thursday and Friday over attacks on pay. As with previous health strikes, an emergency service is provided.

In Scotland, a pay deal was agreed with junior doctors for 12.4 percent, far below the original BMA demand of 35 percent needed to reverse the decline in all doctors’ pay over the last decade and a half. In England, junior doctors are being offered six percent plus a one-off £1, 250 and consultants, six percent.

Other strikes in the NHS including by nurses and ambulance staff have already been sold out. Radiographers are in dispute over pay and have taken strike days.

Healthcare workers at hospital in England to strike over pay grade

More than 400 UK clinical support workers (CSWs), including healthcare assistants at Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, voted to strike for 48 hours at the end of the month.

The Unison members want an uplift from band 2, which covers workers administering personal care only, to band 3. The union said most CSWs perform clinical duties including taking blood, administering cardiograms and inserting cannulas. Workers want to be paid accordingly on band 3, including back pay to April 2018. An offer to up band with back pay to December 2022 was rejected.

The dispute is part of a national campaign by Unison. Several hospital trusts agreed to the grade changes, worth thousands of pounds to staff.

Unite trying to push through sellout deal at St Mungo's charity in London

The stoppage by around 550 workers at St Mungo's homeless charity, based in London, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol and Oxford, is in danger of being sold out by the Unite union.

Workers walked out 13 weeks ago after rejecting a 2.25 percent offer. A revised offer was rejected, for three percent plus extra leave days, put to the St Mungo's workers with Unite's agreement, following an ACAS-mediated meeting.

Workers were voting on a further deal this week. At first union representatives called for a "no" vote, until union officials intervened to call for acceptance. Using the argument that a top-up offer of £1,200 is the best workers can achieve, this is a well below inflation four percent increase plus no backdated pay.

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.

Strikes and protests across Syria as government lifts fuel subsidies

Syria was hit by a general strike on August 20 against the rising cost of living after the government lifted fuel subsidies. Hundreds demonstrated and shops shut. Strikes and demonstrations were reported across the Sweida province.

Suwayda24 reported that government offices closed, and protesters chanted anti-Assad (president) slogans. Roads blocked with burning tyres led to exams being postponed. Similar protests took place in Daraa province.

General strike by local authority workers demanding Israeli government releases funding for Arab communities

Local authority workers joined a general strike on August 21 to demand the Israeli government releases promised development funding for Arab

communities.

Organised by the Federation of Local Authorities, which joined the strike call by the National Committee of Heads of Arab Local Authorities, the action was in response to Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's (Religious Zionist Party) announcement the previous week of a freeze of NIS 200 million funding.

Palestinian teachers on West Bank begin school year with stoppages over pay

As the new school year begins on the West Bank, Palestinian teachers announced further stoppages to demand full payment of salaries and allowances, as previously agreed by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Other issues include temporary, part-time contracts.

Teachers will teach three out of eight daily classes until the end of August, with a general strike beginning September.

Protests have been organized since 2016 by the Independent Teachers' Movement, which teachers want recognized by the PA. The PA negotiates with the government-controlled union.

BBC World Service journalists in Egypt begin strike over pay parity

Journalists in Cairo, Egypt working for the BBC World Service walked out August 21 for a 10-day stoppage over pay. They are demanding parity with their colleagues in other parts of the Middle East.

The BBC is refusing to negotiate and has cut their pay on strike days. The British Association of Journalists expressed solidarity but said it is not recognised in Egypt.

Protests in Aden, Yemen over electricity outages

Residents of Aden, declared the temporary capital of Yemen in 2015 by President Hadi, protested against power cuts of up to eight hours a day and living conditions. Protesters blocked the highway to Aden International airport with burning tyres.

Yemen has been engulfed in civil war since 2014 between the Saudi-backed rump Hadi regime and Houthi militias.

South African municipal workers continue wildcat pay strike in City of Tshwane

The pay strike by municipal workers in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, continues. This is despite a court declaring it illegal and unprotected, sackings, and the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) telling workers to end the action.

The Samwu members walked out on July 28 after three years without a pay rise and are demanding a 5.4 percent increase. They protested outside the City's headquarters in Pretoria on August 18. Since the stoppage began a total of 100 workers have been sacked including seven shop stewards. Garbage is piling up in the streets.

Striking resident doctors at University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital defy union back to work order

Nigerian resident doctors at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu State, are continuing their stoppage despite the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) calling national action off.

NARD had met with Senate leaders and the government directed managers of federal tertiary hospitals to enforce a “no work, no pay” policy against the strikers.

The stoppage, begun July 25, was to demand 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. Another demand is increased clinical staff to reduce overwork and stress, and an immediate review of hazard allowances in both state-run hospitals and private tertiary institutions involved in training.

The hospital managers, through the Chief Medical Director, Prof. Obinna Onudugo, blamed the Federal Government for the non-payment but then paid one month of the three-month arrears. Over 160 doctors were recruited in 2011 and promised they would be promoted to become full resident doctors and join the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System after six months, a promise that was never kept.

Nigerian doctors in Benue strike after abduction of their colleague

Nigerian doctors in Benue State held a three-day strike to protest the abduction of colleague Dr Asema Msuega.

State chairman of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Dr. Ushakuma Anenga, explained that doctors are regularly kidnapped for ransom.

An NMA statement, “Until his kidnap, he was the only Medical Doctor at the General Hospital, Sankera, where he devoted his life to the service of the people for several years.” The statement also announced plans for “a massive protest on August 24 to ... demand the immediate release of Dr Asema.”

The union promised that “[p]rivate hospitals and clinics across the state are exempted from the strike and will remain open on compassionate and kind consideration of the plight of the general public”—those who can afford pay for private treatment.



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