

School year begins with teachers' set to strike across Europe; Nurses and the disabled protest in Iran; South African municipal workers in City of Tshwane continue pay strike despite intimidation

## 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.*

### New school year begins across Europe with wave of teachers' strikes

As teachers across Europe face a new academic year under conditions of a cost of living and budget crisis for schools, and a still-raging pandemic, they are preparing a major wave of protests and strikes.

French-speaking schools in Belgium reopened this week, a week earlier than usual, with the teachers' unions filing a strike notice on the first day of term. Teachers are opposed to a new decree on assessment passed by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation parliament, which could see teachers fired if they do not demonstrate progress to the assessors, *L'Echo* reported.

No days for strike action have been announced yet, but the notice means they could be called at any time. As well as the repeal of the decree, the strike notice also called for reduced class sizes, higher staffing levels in psycho-medial-social centres to support children, and reforms to vocational education.

Teachers in Montenegro will hold an hour-long warning strike on September 4, called by the Education Union against the "alarming situation" in schools, *Aktuelno* reported. The union's president told the media they were calling for "depoliticisation" of schools, as well as improvements to salaries and safety, as "every fourth teacher has been subject to verbal or physical violence." The Education Union plans another strike in January if nothing is done about its demands.

On September 6, the first day of the school year in Catalonia, Spain, teachers will join a one-day strike called in June during collective bargaining negotiations. The Ustec union, the largest teachers' union in Catalonia, as well as the Intersindical and CGT, demanded the reversal of cuts made ten years ago and other improvements to working conditions, according to *El Periódico*.

In Lithuania, teachers are planning a warning strike on September 15, and an all-out strike to follow on September 29, *LRT* reported. The Lithuanian Education Employees' Trade Union is calling for smaller class sizes, and improved pay and working conditions.

At a secondary vocational catering school in the Serbian city of ?a?ak, teachers plan a strike from this Friday to demand the dismissal of the school's new director. They accuse local officials of the ruling Serbian

Progressive Party of pressuring teachers to vote for their candidate for director, and then imposing their choice of director anyway when most teachers voted for another candidate, according to *Novi Magazin*.

The Education Union of Serbia said, in comments to *Nova*, that its members nationally voted for a strike over the number of teachers and psychologists in schools, following the mass shooting in Belgrade in May. The Education Union and other teachers' unions insisted that they will not call a strike for the start of school year but may call one later if negotiations with the government are unsuccessful.

### Romanian finance ministry employees continue wildcat strikes against austerity

On Monday, civil servants in Romania's Ministry of Finance held new protests and wildcat strikes against the government's plan for austerity which will lead to job losses and pay cuts. As many as 15,000 joined the walkouts when they began two weeks ago.

In an attempt to control the movement, the trade unions including the Federation of Trade Unions from the Fiscal Administration "Solidarity" suggested they will call official strikes in September.

### Bus drivers plan strike for start of the school year in Bouches-du-Rhône, and Nancy, France

Bus drivers in the southern French department of Bouches-du-Rhône and the northern city of Nancy plan strikes next week, the start of the school year. In Bouches-du-Rhône, around 650 to 700 members of the Force Ouvrière (FO) union at Transdev are calling for a pay rise and measures to deal with a shortage of drivers, *France Bleu* reported.

Drivers in Nancy, employed by Kéolis, are also calling for pay increases among other improvements to working conditions. A representative of the General Confederation of Labour told *France Bleu* that bus drivers in Nancy earn only 20 percent more than the minimum wage, but "a couple of years ago, it was one and a half time the minimum wage." They are also calling for improvements to safety after several attacks on drivers across the network, and for toilets to be available at every station.

## **Indefinite strike at Metalships shipyard in Vigo, Spain**

### **Cleaning workers strike in Silivri municipality, Istanbul against pay agreed by union**

Around 100 cleaning and waste collection workers in the Silivri municipality of Istanbul began a stoppage on August 23, announcing they could not live on their current salaries.

A spokesman for the striking workers, quoted by *Cumhuriyet*, said “The rent is 10 thousand TL [Turkish lira]. No one should expect us to support a house with a salary of 12-13 thousand TL. In order for them to work peacefully at the wheel, these people need to earn at least 20 thousand liras.”

While the mayor of Silivri said it had “paid the wages and other social rights determined by the Collective Bargaining Agreements in full and on time as far as the budget possibilities allow,” workers said they did not approve the agreement signed by the union “representing” them.

Their spokesman said, “We are not aware of the contract the union made with Silivri Municipality. The union elected its own representative, appointed it, declared its own affairs, we only saw the payroll. ... Isn't it the right of these people to live like human beings? During the pandemic, we worked in this filth even when no one could go out. Most of us got sick, some fell out of the vehicle and died. There are people with cancer. No one saw these. Now we are not doing evil, we want our rights. We want to live like human beings.”

### **Workers at Gamzigrad rehabilitation hospital in Serbia continue six-week 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.

They also demanded the replacement of the hospital's management, and a review of its operation over the last five years, according to *Beta*. Although the director was replaced last week, *Beta* reported that the management and supervisory boards were not dismissed, nor were the wage arrears paid, so the strike continued.

### **Danish private charter airline fires pilots for joining strike**

The Danish airline North Flying, which runs private charter and air ambulance services, fired nine pilots this week in retaliation for the indefinite strike they began on August 16.

According to the aviation news site *Check-in.dk*, members of the Airline Personnel Union (FPU), around half of the twenty pilots at North Flying, walked out to demand a new collective agreement, as their previous one expired in July 2020.

North Flying announced that it intended to hire new pilots who “do not make unrealistic demands.” Although the FPU said it would “challenge this actor in every imaginable way,” it has so far just sought advice from the Danish Trade Union Confederation.

Workers at Metalships & Docks, a shipbuilding company in Vigo, Spain, began an indefinite strike on Monday, following seven layoffs two weeks ago.

The president of the works council called the Metalships CEO a “hitman” for having cut jobs and frozen hiring. They accused him of failing to bring a single contract in three years, while being paid 900,000 euros over that period, *Radio Vigo* reported.

### **Zoo workers begin strike in Hamburg, Germany while the management threatens legal action**

On Monday and Tuesday, workers at Hagenbeck Zoo in Hamburg, Germany's largest private zoo, were on strike to demand a collective agreement.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Hagenbeck is the only large zoo, which is privately owned, so unlike the publicly owned zoos is not covered by a sectoral agreement. Of the 80 members of the IG BAU union 87 percent, around half the workforce, voted in favour of indefinite strikes to enforce a collective agreement.

The zoo's director, Dirk Albrecht, repeatedly threatened to go to court to prevent the strike and claimed it would be a criminal offence if a certain level of care for the animals was not provided by the zoo's staff. IG BAU said it proposed a plan for emergency coverage, but the zoo did not respond before the deadline. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on Wednesday that most of the workers responsible for animal care did not join the strikes, and the zoo did not apply for an injunction.

### **Traffic wardens in London borough of Camden continue ongoing stoppage over poverty pay**

Around 100 traffic wardens employed by outsourcing company NSL providing parking services for Labour Party-controlled Camden council in London are striking for increased pay.

The Unison union members voted unanimously for pay to increase to £15.90 an hour. They have been on strike since July 24. The wardens who work 42.5 hours a week are currently on £12.70 an hour. On Saturday strikers held a march through Camden Town to publicise their dispute.

### **Support staff at special needs school in Leicester, UK resume strikes over pay as new term begins**

Around 90 UK support staff at the Ash Field Academy, Leicester, for children aged 4 to 19 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) walked out on Wednesday until the end of the week. They will also walk out from September 6 to 8.

The Unison members held 19 days of stoppages during the summer term including the last week of term. The staff at the government funded but privately run academy school include teaching assistants, administration workers and residential staff.

Their demands are for a £3,000 pay increase to bring them into line with

other SEND schools run by Leicester local authority, introduction of a pay scale to align them with workers performing comparable roles and a pay supplement for staff taking on additional medical responsibilities.

Unison held a consultative ballot over the summer on the academy's latest offer. On a 79 percent turnout, 84 percent voted to reject a one-off payment of £1,075 on top of the below inflation £1,925 paid through the local government settlement and 72 percent voted to strike.

### **Further Education college lecturers in England to ballot over pay**

A ballot of Further Education (FE) lecturers at 89 colleges across England begins on September 5 over pay.

The University and College Union's (UCU) ballot closes on October 10. The Department of Education announced a funding increase of £470 million over the next two years, equivalent to the 6.5 percent pay rise awarded to teachers, but the college employer's body, the Association of Colleges has not made a recommendation of pay for 2023/24.

The pay of college lecturers has fallen compared to the pay of school teachers with a pay gap of around £9,000. According to the UCU, college staff are doing two days extra work each week for no extra pay and pay has fallen 35 percent in real terms since 2011.

FE lecturers also face high workloads. The UCU put forward a 15.4 percent pay demand. The ballot is a disaggregated one, so for each college the turnout must exceed 50 percent for a strike vote to be valid.

### **Food production workers in Dumfriesshire, Scotland walk out over pay and conditions**

Around 180 workers at Browns meat production facility in Dumfriesshire in Scotland began a three-day stoppage Monday. It is to be followed by two further three-day walkouts, an overtime ban until September 18 is also in effect.

Browns produces fine quality cooked and sliced meat products for retail outlets and schools. The Unite union members are protesting a pay offer from the company of £10.90 an hour. This matches the "real living wage" figure regarded as just the minimum people need to earn to meet basic needs.

The Browns Food Group, owned and controlled by the Godfrey family recorded profits of £9.2 million in 2021 with £1.5 million paid out in dividends. Low pay and poor conditions have led to high staff turnover.

### **Four-day strike of rail engineering staff at Crewe, UK after rejecting pay offer**

Engineers, clerical staff and production operatives working for Unipart Rail in Crewe began a four-day strike Tuesday after rejecting a 4.75 percent pay offer.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) members represent around half the workforce at the facility. Unipart Rail supplies engineering services for rail infrastructure, rolling stock and signalling equipment.

### **First Bus workers in Greater Manchester, UK continue series of strikes**

UK bus drivers working for First Manchester based in Oldham, England are continuing their series of strikes with the latest stoppage lasting from August 25-28 until Monday, with a further one planned for September 4 to 8.

The 360 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. 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.

Stagecoach is due to take over the running of the First Manchester service, having won the franchise.

The proposed strike over pay by around 1,000 drivers working for Stagecoach Manchester has been called off by Unite. It had previously been suspended to allow the drivers to ballot on a new deal. The workers accepted the new pay offer. A press release Wednesday from Unite said the deal, "will see pay increases of approximately 16 per cent for both new and established drivers...The new pay deal also includes pay rises for weekend and bank holiday work..."

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.

### **Strike by housing maintenance workers at Chesterfield Borough Council, England first of stoppages at over 20 local authorities**

Around 100 housing maintenance staff working for Chesterfield Borough Council, England walked out Tuesday and Wednesday.

They are the first of around 3,000 Unite union members across 23 local authorities in England and Wales due to strike in the coming days. The other walkouts will take place in September. Among the local authorities included will be Coventry, Newham, Sefton, Warrington and Wigan in England and Cardiff and Wrexham in Wales.

The local government workers rejected a £1,925 pay offer from the local authorities' employers' body. The Unite union is re-balloting local authority workers in some areas.

Unison members, of which there are around a third of a million in local government in England and Wales, voted by around three quarters to strike over pay. Because the turnout was just 31 percent, below the 50 percent legal requirement, the pay increase will be imposed.

### **Charity advice workers around Hull, England continue strikes over pay**

Around 60 advice workers employed by Citizens Advice in the Hull and East Riding areas of England are continuing their strikes.

The Unite union members took action because Citizens Advice refuse to 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 is the first strike by this group of workers.

The workers, who have held four days of stoppages since the end of July, walked out on Tuesday and plan to walk out on Thursday. Further stoppages are set for Friday and then September 4 to 8. They plan to hold protests outside the Citizens Advice office in Bridlington on September 5 and outside the Goole office on September 6. On all other strike dates picket lines will be mounted outside the Hull office.

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

### **Long-running strike by UK homeless charity St Mungo workers ends but poverty wages continue**

On August 25, the Unite union announced the ending of the three-month long strike by around 550 workers at St Mungo's homeless charity after workers voted to accept a new pay deal, although over 40 percent of those who voted rejected the offer.

The workers based in London, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol and Oxford walked out on May 30 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 by Unite, following an ACAS-mediated meeting.

Under the new offer workers will, according to Unite, get 10.74 percent plus a one-off payment of £700. Unite touted the rise as inflation beating. The RPI inflation rate is 10.7 percent. St Mungo's state 90 percent of staff will get a rise of between 7-15 percent rise depending on salary. The deal offers no backpay. St Mungo's claim the deal will cost them just under £6 million.

After tax and other deductions, St Mungo's workers had been taking home less than £20,000 a year, and the rise only offers an extra £3,125. The charity has £16 million in cash as well as large reserves.

### **Unite ends strike of refuse collectors in Selby and accepts redundancies**

The series of four-day stoppages being held by 40 refuse collectors employed by contractor Urbaser in Selby was called off by Unite after pushing through a new pay offer. Urbaser is contracted to Conservative-controlled North Yorkshire unitary authority for refuse services in the Selby area.

Prior to the settlement bin loaders and ground workers were paid only £10.64 an hour and drivers, who must have HGV licences, were paid only £12.51 an hour.

A Unite press release announcing the deal implied redundancies will follow: "the deal, which will see pay increase by eight per cent backdated to April for all workers. Drivers will also see their bonus for this year consolidated into basic pay, meaning their wages will increase by 15.1 per cent...a single payment of £57.45 will be applied when *collection crews are reduced from three workers to two* [our emphasis]. These payments will be backdated for every instance of reduced crew working since April."

The dispute started after the workers originally rejected an eight percent pay offer.

### **Protests by nurses and disabled in Iran**

On Sunday, nurses at the Milad hospital in Tehran, Iran held a protest outside the hospital against salary delays, and poor living and working conditions.

The previous day health staff at Isfahan and Mashhad hospitals held protests against the government failure to implement promises made to health staff during the pandemic. Some medical and nursing staff recruited at the height of the pandemic have since been dismissed despite assurances they would be made permanent. They were also protesting low pay and heavy workloads.

Disabled people gathered in Tehran, Khuzestan and Kermanshah on Sunday. They were protesting their low standard of living and called for the government to implement Article 27 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The measure is supposed to guarantee disabled people a certain minimum standard of living, however the government has failed to enforce the measure over the last five years.

### **Proposed strike by Lebanese air traffic control staff over staff shortages and safety concerns**

Thirteen air traffic control staff at Lebanon's sole civilian airport, Rafik Hariri, announced they will begin a walkout on September 5.

They are protesting the severe understaffing of the air control service. According to the staff, the service should have a complement of 87 and the staff who are mostly over 50 are forced to work around 70 hours a week. A recent European Union Aviation Safety Agency and International Civil Aviation Organization inspection of the airport in the summer highlighted many safety concerns including the shortage of staff. The controllers accuse the Lebanese government of ignoring their concerns.

### **South African municipal workers continue wildcat pay strike in City of Tshwane despite intimidation**

The pay strike by municipal workers in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, continues in the face of intimidation.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) members walked out on July 28 after three years without a pay rise and are demanding a 5.4 percent increase. The city claims a R3 billion funding gap.

According to *EYE WITNESS NEWS*, Tshwane mayor Cilliers Brink declared the strike out of control, and is appealing for more police and involvement of the intelligence agencies. The courts declared the strike illegal and unprotected, 122 employees have been sacked, and Samwu told workers to end the action.

### **Protest planned against electricity tariff increases in Cape Town, South Africa**

Residents of Western Cape, South Africa plan to demonstrate on Saturday at Cape Town Civic Centre against high electricity prices.

The protest is organised by the Congress of South African Trade Unions

(COSATU) as part of the High Electricity Tariffs Must Fall Movement.

Cape Town increased electricity by 17.6 percent, above the increase of 15.1 percent set by the National Energy Regulator. According to *The Citizen*, however, COSATU does not oppose the increase but just wants it limited to 15.1 percent!

Other municipalities that are increasing tariffs above 15.1 percent are eThekweni, Msunduzi, Oudtshoorn, Swartland and Witzenberg.

### **Medical consultants in Abuja, Nigeria hold three-day strike to demand withdrawal of redundancies**

Medical consultants in the federal capital territory of Abuja, Nigeria began a three-day stoppage on August 30 to oppose the issuing of compulsory redundancy letters to a number of untenured doctors.

The Medical and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) members are demanding immediate withdrawal of the redundancies. MDCAN said the decision to strike was taken during an emergency meeting of its National Executive Committee, held online shortly before the walkout.



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