Further teachers' strikes mark beginning of new school year across Europe; metal workers at Turkish factory demand resignation of union officials over sellout contract; workers in some Nigerian states take two-day strike over price rises

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.*

Teachers in Europe continue start-of-term strike wave

As schools across Europe begin a new academic year under conditions of acute crisis in school funding, cost of living and a still-raging pandemic, teachers have responded with a major wave of protests and strikes.

In Catalonia, Spain the term began on Wednesday with a teacher's strike. The Ustec, Intersindical and CGT unions are demanding the reversal of cuts made ten years ago, as well as other improvements to working conditions. After meeting with the Department of Education, the unions said the state councillor who met them "didn't say anything new nor raise any proposals," *el Publicó* reported.

The Catalan government played down the action, saying only one percent of the around 81,000 teachers in Catalonia joined the walkout, and around 500 joined a demonstration in Barcelona.

Teachers in Montenegro held a national warning strike on Monday, stopping work for the first hour of the school year. The Education Union called for improvements to salaries and safety, as "every fourth teacher has been subject to verbal or physical violence."

In Serbia and North Macedonia, teachers' unions announced plans for a strike after negotiations over pay and conditions with their respective governments, but without announcing any dates.

Teachers in Lithuania are planning a warning strike over class sizes as well as pay and working conditions on September 15, with an all-out strike to follow on September 29. The Education, Science and Sport Minister said he would seek advice from lawyers on the legality of the strike in order to ban any walkout, although the president opposed the ban and suggested he would "mediate" with the unions, according to reports from *LRT* and *BNN*.

Local strikes and protests also took place at schools across the continent. In Turkey, Education and Science Workers' Union members joined a protest and made a collective press statement outside the Provincial Directorate of National Education in the majority-Kurdish city of Diyarbak?r. The teachers denounced the forced transfer of teachers from Piri Reis Middle School to other schools after they reported bullying by the principal, *Yeni Demokrasi* reported.

Around three-quarters of the employees of the Les Gravouses Institute in Clermont-Ferrand, France, who care for deaf or hard-of-hearing children, held a two-day strike last week, against the institute's plan to make them work 200 hours more per year for no extra pay. According to *La Montagne*, the director of the institute announced that from the 2024-25 school year they would be working outside term time as well.

Responding to General Confederation of Labour (CGT) accusations that institute staff would be made to work more hours for no extra pay, he justified this on the grounds that "an educator or speech therapist at a university hospital earns the same salary as at my institute but works 200 hours more."

Metal workers at Turkish factory demand resignation of union officials over sellout contract

Metal workers at the Çolako?lu Metallurgy Factory in Dilovas?, Turkey, marched to the Türk Metal union offices in the factory on Tuesday, and chanted slogans demanding the resignation of the union officials for the contract they had just presented.

Türk Metal and several other unions signed a national contract with the Turkish Employers Association of Metal Industries which they presented as the "Republican agreement on the 100th anniversary of the Republic," *Evrensel* reported.

Workers also reportedly threatened to leave the union if they were not allowed to revise the contract. One worker told the newspaper the union replied contemptuously, telling workers, "If you don't like it, we will help you get your severance pay."

Miners hold hunger strike and mine occupation in Turkey over years of unpaid salary and compensation

Around 190 miners in a mine near the Turkish city of Eski?ehir continue

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a sit-in protest, demanding their unpaid salaries and compensation payments, some dating back to 2016, according to *Yeni Demokrasi*. The Turkish Mine Workers' Union, which represents some of the miners, said they were owed an average of 400,000 lira (nearly 14,000 euros).

On August 31, the miners began a hunger strike as they occupied the mine. This continued until Tuesday, with seven miners hospitalised. *Yeni Demokrasi* also reported that the Minister of Energy promised before the recent election that their problems would be addressed, but workers said the promises were forgotten after the election.

Italian rail workers strike over safety after five are killed working on the track

On September 1, most of the unions representing workers at the Italian rail infrastructure company RFI called a four-hour strike, and the USB union called a 24-hour walkout, after five workers at an RFI contractor were killed by a fast-moving train while working on the track on the night of August 30.

Construction workers in Piedmont, where the accident took place, also held an eight-hour strike on Monday in response to the accident, one of "a chain of massacres at work that cannot be stopped," according to a press release from the unions.

The CGIL union said the government should not "look for a scapegoat," and a cousin of one of the victims, who was only 22 years old, told *La Repubblica*, "I'm angry. I don't know who was wrong but five people run over is not an accident. It is clear that some mistake was made." According to *ANSA*, prosecutors have already opened investigations into two people: an RFI employee present during the maintenance works, and the foreman, who was nearly killed by the train but moved off the track just in time.

Hundreds of workers in Italy are killed in workplace accidents every year. After nearly every event which becomes publicly known, the unions call token strikes of a few hours to blow off steam but refuse to lead a struggle for lasting protections. After the four-hour stoppage last week, the unions helped RFI with a cheap publicity stunt by suggesting it donate the docked wages from the strike to the family of the victims.

Transport strikes across France

French transport workers are holding several strikes during the very busy period at the start of the school year and as France hosts the Rugby World Cup.

Station workers at the Parisian Autonomous Transport Administration (RATP) will stop work on Friday, the first match of the Rugby World Cup in Paris, to demand fairer bonuses for working during the tournament.

According to the Force Ouvrière (FO) union, tram and commuter rail drivers will receive a 330 euro bonus and several performance bonuses during the World Cup, but nine out of 10 station workers will receive nothing.

Transport workers at Tisséo, the transport network for the city of Toulouse, also plan to begin strikes on Friday, which may last until the end of the Rugby World Cup, according to *L'Opinion*. A spokesman from the CGT said any delay in arriving at a station was deducted from drivers' rest times, and pointed to a shortage of 150 drivers.

In Bouches-du-Rhône, around 650-700 bus drivers joined a strike on Monday called by FO for a pay rise and measures to deal with a shortage of drivers, according to *France Bleu*. Another strike at the start of the school year in the city of Nancy was called off by the CGT and Solidaires union after they agreed to a one percent pay rise and promises to improve working conditions.

France Bleu also reported that around 20 bus drivers for Kéolis in Strasbourg called in sick simultaneously on Monday. An FO representative told the media, "There has been deep unease among the drivers for a long time, we have alerted management… There are differences in salaries and working hours between the depots, particularly between Illkirch and Strasbourg. The drivers are exhausted."

Spanish Popular Party council in Guadalajara bans strike by municipal tow-truck workers

A two-week strike by workers of the tow-truck service in the Spanish city of Guadalajara, due to begin Monday, was called off by the General Workers' Union (UGT) after the city council imposed a 100 percent minimum service requirement, effectively forcing every employee to work through the strike.

The mayor of Guadalajara is from the right-wing Popular Party (PP), which leads the council in coalition with the neo-fascist Vox.

The UGT said the ban was "absolutely abusive and violates the right to strike," *Europa Press* reported, but its only response was to continue legal action it had already begun.

Strike committee ends walkout at Gamzigrad rehabilitation hospital in Serbia with almost no demands met

The committee in charge of an indefinite strike at the Gamzigrad hospital in Serbia, begun July 20, called it off on Monday, with none of the major demands of the strike met. The president of the strike committee told *Danas* that there was a majority vote to suspend the strike, which may be resumed if no progress is made on their demands in two months.

Workers at the hospital walked out to demand the payment of overdue wages, replacement of the entire management board, and a review of the hospital's operations over the last five years. The only demand met was for the replacement of the director. The strike committee president told *Danas* the new director was "trying hard" to improve conditions at the hospital.

Romanian civil servants protest government attack on their right to strike

Civil servants in the Romanian finance ministry protested on Tuesday against government attempts to prevent them striking by blocking the legal dispute procedure.

Around 15,000 civil servants took part in wildcat walkouts three weeks ago, after the government announced austerity measures which will lead to job losses and pay cuts.

To take control of the protests, which began outside of their control, the trade unions announced they would open an official labour dispute so they could call an all-out strike. However, the government responded this week by denying there was a valid reason for a collective dispute, effectively

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ensuring that the unions could not call a strike under the labour laws.

The union federation refused to defy this anti-democratic move, and instead said it will "contest the answer of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and will request the support of the international bodies to which it is affiliated," *Agerpres* reported.

Strikes by local authority workers in England and Wales in campaign over pay

Council staff at Wrexham and Cardiff local authorities walked out on strike on Monday until September 17. Council staff working for Gwynedd Council are set to strike September 11-17. The stoppages in Wales are expected to disrupt council services, particularly waste collection.

The strikes follow a two-day stoppage by around 100 housing maintenance staff working for Chesterfield Borough Council, England in late August.

These strikes are the first by around 3,000 Unite union members across 23 local authorities in England and Wales who are due to strike in the coming days. Other walkouts are planned in September. Among the local authorities included will be Coventry, Newham, Sefton, Warrington and Wigan.

The local government workers rejected a £1,925 pay offer from the local authorities' employers' body. The Unite union is reballoting 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. However, because the 31 percent turnout was below the 50 percent legal requirement, the pay increase will be imposed.

Unite organised a rally of local authority workers outside Local Government Association headquarters in London on Thursday over "a decade of pay cuts and mismanagement." Unite claims following the September stoppages it will escalate the action throughout the autumn with "coordinated action, longer periods of strikes and more members joining the dispute."

Street cleaners, park maintenance and refuse workers in Solihull, UK begin strike over pay

UK cleaning, park maintenance and refuse workers employed by contractors to provide services to Solihull council in the West Midlands began a week-long strike Monday.

Veolia provides refuse and street cleaning services to the council, while IDVerde maintains parks on their behalf. The GMB union members want improved pay.

Academic staff at Brighton University, UK continue stoppages over compulsory redundancies as new academic year begins

Academic staff at Brighton University in England, who began indefinite strike action in July over compulsory redundancies, are continuing their action as the new academic year begins.

The University and College Union (UCU) members resumed a picket line on Monday. They are protesting plans to slash around 130 posts. Up to 400 posts may be at risk. The university released the names of 25 staff slated for compulsory redundancy.

The lecturers were previously on strike after having their pay cut for taking part in the marking and assessment boycott (MAB) over pay, pensions and working conditions.

Further education workers at Edinburgh College, Scotland, strike over victimisation and cuts

Further education lecturers at Edinburgh College, Scotland have resumed an all-out strike over course cuts, job losses and victimisation of a trade union activist, Kevin Scally, who was sacked.

The Educational Institute for Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA) members have held strikes since February. The college caters for 29,000 students across four campuses. Voluntary redundancies resulted in cuts to jobs and courses, but many felt pressured to accept the redundancies. The *Edinburgh News* reported one of those who took voluntary redundancy saying, "The college made the £6m savings they needed last year through voluntary severance. But many said they felt they were bullied out of the building because their curriculum areas were targeted."

Further education lecturers at Glasgow College, Scotland resume strikes over working conditions and job losses

Lecturers at Scotland's largest college, City of Glasgow College (CoGC) walked out for four days this week, with a further four-day walkout planned for next week and stoppages throughout September. CoGC caters for around 27,000 students.

The action by EIS-FELA members follows five weeks of action last term. They are protesting cuts to teaching time and increased workloads. They want an end to fixed term contracts and compulsory redundancies. The college wants to cut around 100 posts.

Academic staff at UK universities to hold further walkouts in pay and working conditions dispute

Academic staff at UK universities are to walk out during the week September 25-29.

It is the next round of industrial action by UCU members in their national pay and working conditions dispute. Action short of striking. which includes working to contract, not covering for absences and not taking part in voluntary activities already in place will continue. The Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) begun April 20 was ended by the UCU Wednesday.

Around 140 institutions are to take part, including Bradford University, Cambridge University, Glasgow University, Huddersfield University, Leeds University, Liverpool University, The London School of Economics, Oxford University, Sheffield University and Ulster University.

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Commercial kitchen manufacturing workers in Lincoln, UK strike over inadequate pay offer

Around 100 workers employed by UK commercial kitchen manufacturer, Lincat, based in Lincoln began a week-long walkout Monday.

The Unite union members rejected a pay offer from the company comprising a 5.5 percent pay rise from January of this year to June and an eight percent rise from June to the end of the year. Higher-paid workers were offered below eight percent, in tiered pay rises. The RPI inflation rate is currently 10.7 percent. Although skilled, most of the workers earn only £12.03 an hour. Lincat recorded operating profits of £8.9 million for the last financial year.

Strike by UK pension regulator staff in Brighton over pay

Staff working for The Pensions Regulator (TPR) based in Brighton, England began a two-week strike Tuesday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are protesting the TPR's three percent pay offer. Other civil service employers gave a 4.5 percent rise with an additional 0.5 percent for low-paid staff. TPR staff are angry that TPR has a £1.5 million pension pot which is only paid out to its highest-paid staff. Picket lines are held each day of the walkout.

Health staff at four London, UK hospital trusts to strike over staff shortages and pay

Nearly 3,000 health staff including caterers, cleaners, nurses, pathologists and porters at four London hospital trusts are set to walk out next week.

Unite union members at Barts Health NHS Trust will strike September 13-14 and 16-22, those at East London Foundation Trust will strike September 13, and those at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Trust and Guys and St Thomas' Trust will stop work September 13-14.

The issues include staff shortages. A recent Unite union survey revealed nearly half the trusts reporting that staff shortages over the last year regularly reached levels to compromise patient safety. They are also protesting low pay. Unite members rejected this year's five percent pay offer accepted by staff in other unions. Additionally, around 1,000 staff at the Barts Trust did not receive the £1,655 lump sum payment made to health staff as a result of the 2022/23 NHS pay settlement. The affected staff were previously employed by outsourcer Seco and were only recently brought back into the NHS.

Health staff announce further walkout over pay grading in Wirral, UK

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 are to hold a 72-hour strike beginning September 11. It follows a 48-hour walkout begun August 31.

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 the 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 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.

Talks between workers' representatives and the employer on Monday were unresolved, so next week's action will go ahead.

Vote to strike by Scottish bus drivers at Glasgow First Bus

Bus drivers working for Glasgow First Bus company have voted overwhelmingly to strike over pay.

The Unite union members rejected a nine percent pay offer. Their last deal of 5.5 percent over two years was eroded by galloping inflation.

Unite union suspends strike of bus drivers in Greater Manchester, UK for ballot on new pay offer

A planned five-day strike of 360 bus drivers working for First Manchester based in Oldham, England, due to begin Monday, was suspended by the Unite union, which put a new offer from the company to a ballot. The ballot was due to take place Wednesday.

The drivers held a series of strikes, with the last one taking place from August 25-28. They had 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.

A proposed strike by around 1,000 drivers working for Stagecoach Manchester, members of the Unite union, was recently called off after a new pay offer. A Unite press release said the deal, "will see pay increases of approximately 16 percent for both new and established drivers… The new pay deal also includes pay rises for weekend and bank holiday work."

Unite also suspended the strike threat by drivers employed by Greater Manchester Accessible Transport Ltd (GMATL). GMATL provides a Ring and Ride service to around 7,000 disabled people in the Greater Manchester area. The drivers, who are paid only the minimum wage, threatened to strike after rejecting a 10 percent pay rise. GMATL came back with an improved pay offer which will be put to a ballot.

Proposed walkout by Stagecoach bus drivers in Warwickshire, UK suspended by Unite union as company makes new offer

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A proposed indefinite strike by around 300 UK bus drivers at Stagecoach, Warwickshire, due to have begun Tuesday, was suspended by the Unite union after the company made a new offer.

The drivers had rejected a 7.8 percent rise for this year, and 4.5 percent plus £100 for next year. The workers earn £14 an hour. Company profits increased to £36.4 million in the six months to October 2022.

According to the Unite press release announcing the suspension, should the new offer be rejected an indefinite walkout will begin September 12.

Unite union suspends strike of workers at UK snack manufacturer as company makes new offer

A week-long strike by around 130 workers employed by KP Snacks at their sole UK factory in Hellaby, Rotherham, due to begin Tuesday, was suspended by the Unite union after a new offer from the company. The suspension follows talks on Monday between Unite and the company.

The workers voted by an 83 percent majority after rejecting a below-inflation six percent pay offer plus a £1,000 one-off payment. KP Snacks profits increased by 275 percent since 2018, while the pay of workers fell by 14 percent over the same period.

The Unite union members are to ballot on the new offer.

Belfast, Northern Ireland, protests over union-busting by construction company

A protest took place outside the Department of Infrastructure and the offices of Mott McDonald in Belfast, Northern Ireland on Wednesday.

Unite union members protested over the sacking of four Unite union members including a union representative by construction company Murphy International. The four were sacked after organising a meeting of 15 employees on Murphy International site in the Irish Republic last year. The Department of Infrastructure was chosen as Murphy is on a department shortlist for a major project. Mott McDonald was selected as it is a strategic partner of Murphy International.

General strike across Israeli Arab towns and villages over government inaction over crime wave

A general strike took place on Tuesday across Israeli Arab towns and villages, leading to the closure of businesses, community centres and academic institutions.

The strike was in response to inaction by Israeli government authorities to a crime wave affecting Arab communities. The crime wave has seen around 170 Israeli Arabs killed so far this year, compared to 112 in 2022.

School bus drivers strike in Israeli Negev region over wage arrears

On September 1, school bus drivers in Neve Midbar Regional Council went on strike. It meant no school transport for around 6,500 Bedouin children in Israel's Negev region, including for special schools and kindergarten.

The drivers took the action over arrears of payments from the municipality. The stoppage continued on Sunday.

Nigerian workers hold further two-day strike to oppose escalating prices

Nigerian workers in several states joined a third national strike to protest the cut in fuel subsidy and rising prices.

Electricity workers kept their workplaces locked, causing power cuts in many homes and offices. Teachers at many schools joined the strike.

Most banks in the capital, Abuja remained shut on September 5 as bank workers joined the action alongside workers in ministries, departments and agencies of federal government.

Angese John, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) secretary in Bayelsa State said, "Today's action is to see how government can reverse its policy because every family is feeling the pain of harsh policies... which has resulted in the astronomical increase in transportation, food, goods and services."

The NLC accused the federal government of discontinuing negotiations, and announced the strike was preparation for an indefinite strike from September 21.

Nigerian doctors in Kogi State set to begin indefinite strike over pay and conditions

Doctors at the Kogi State Specialist Hospital in Lokoja are set to begin an indefinite strike after a 21-day ultimatum expired without any progress.

The Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) issued the ultimatum on August 9. It is a month since a previous strike was suspended.

In a statement issued September 2, the ARD said, "Having examined the inertia that has greeted our requests, also keeping in view of our previous failure to join the national directive to suspend service delivery because of our commitment to the client and state government which unfortunately has never been appreciated..." it would now hold a "congress meeting" to determine its next steps.

The ARD admitted that, rather than the authorities making improvements, "[u]nfortunately, the Hospital working environment, coupled with the unpalatable economic realities has further worsened the already sour situation."

Demands include upward review of the Consolidated Medical Salary Structure, approval of Medical Residency Training Fund, and upward review of the hazard allowance.

Miners plan pay strike at diamond mine in Limpopo, South Africa

Miners at the Venetia diamond mine in Limpopo, South Africa are planning to strike over wage increases.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is seeking certification and according to *Moneyweb* claims to be mobilising its "more than 1 500 members, preparing them for a protected indefinite strike."

There have been four months of wage negotiations, with the miners

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demanding a nine percent increase, as against owner De Beers' offer of six percent. The Venetia mine, worth $2.3 billion, was opened in July.

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