

One-day national stoppage by public sector workers in Greece against anti-labour law; teachers in Portugal hold week-long strike over pay and conditions; protests and strikes in Iran mark anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of morality police; teachers in Plateau State Nigeria plan walkout over salary arrears

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

21 September 2023

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

National public-sector strike in Greece against new labour law attacking the right to strike

On Thursday, workers throughout the Greek public sector held a one-day strike to protest the conservative New Democracy government's labour law. The law would attack working conditions and severely undermine the right to strike.

The bill would legalise working days of up to 13 hours and a six-day week and legalise working a part-time job on top of full-time employment. It also criminalises picketing, with a six-month jail sentence and fines of at least 5,000 euros for using "physical or psychological violence" to prevent strikebreaking.

Thursday's strike was called by the Civil Servants' Confederation, which has around 500,000 members, according to *Kathimerini*. Large protests were called across the country, and several thousand workers protested in front of the parliament in Athens.

Teachers, dock workers, healthcare workers, public transport workers and other sectors all stopped work. Air traffic controllers were banned by a court ruling from taking part in the walkouts, *ef.syn* reported, as were bus drivers in the Attica region. One union representing Athens Metro workers reported being sued for "declaring an illegal strike," despite not calling its members to join the national strike.

Portuguese teachers hold week-long strike over pay and conditions

Teachers in Portugal began a five-day strike on Monday, part of a long-

running dispute in schools. The teachers are calling for the repayment of six and a half years' seniority benefits which were frozen, as well as more secure contracts and more teaching assistants, *Lusa* reported.

The strike was called by the Union of All Education Professionals, and the other teaching unions called an overtime ban from last week. A demonstration is planned in Lisbon on Friday, of teachers and other school staff. Previous teachers' protests drew tens of thousands of participants.

Hospital in Portugal reacts to doctors' refusal to work overtime by assigning them to weekend emergency shifts

The *Lusa* news agency reported last week a letter from the clinical director of a hospital in Alto Minho, Portugal, which was moving doctors onto emergency shifts. This was reportedly in response to the mass refusal of doctors to work additional overtime beyond the legally mandated 150 hours.

According to the National Federation of Doctors, more than 100 doctors in the north of Portugal are refusing overtime, and more than a thousand signed an open letter to the Ministry of Health threatening not to work any more overtime unless an agreement between the ministry and unions was reached.

National public transport strike in Italy over pay and conditions

Public transport workers throughout Italy joined a national strike on Monday, calling for a 300 euro increase to monthly salaries, and a reduction of working hours to 35 per week.

The strike was called by several "grassroots" unions, which criticise the

traditional trade unions for their close collaboration with the government and business.

There was widespread participation in the strike, with three metro stops closed in Rome and cancellations across the country. The peak commute times in the morning and afternoon were excluded from the strike.

Auto workers strike to demand production guarantees at Stellantis in Melfi, Italy

Auto workers throughout the Italian province of Potenza stopped work for eight hours on Monday. The strike was called by unions following a meeting with multinational auto giant Stellantis over future production at its plant in Melfi, in the north of the province.

According to the *Corriere Della Sera*, the unions called for guarantees over future production and employment at the plant, and criticised Stellantis for not working with them on issues of safety and workload.

Bulgarian farmers hold national protests against lifting of ban on Ukrainian grain imports

Farmers across Bulgaria began a series of protests on Monday, three days after the expiry of a ban on imports of grain and other food from Ukraine, which the National Assembly voted not to renew last week.

According to reports by *Novinite*, more than 300 farmers protested in the region of Stara Zagora, and other protests of hundreds or dozens of farmers took place across the country.

The ban was initially imposed by the European Commission following complaints from countries neighbouring Ukraine that cheap imports had driven down the prices local farmers received for their goods. Unlike Bulgaria, the ban was extended past September 15 in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, *Ukrinform* reported, and Kyiv responded by threatening to sue those countries through the World Trade Organisation.

The Bulgarian farming industry groups which called the protests ended them on Wednesday, signing a memorandum with the government. *Novinite* wrote that the government “reached agreements with the protesters without making any concessions.” Imports of sunflower, used to produce oil, were only delayed, and the government offered to agree quotas for imports from Ukraine with the farmers.

Teachers continue to demand removal of school director in Belgrade, Serbia

Teachers at the Sixth Belgrade Gymnasium have been on strike since May demanding the removal of the director of the school, *NI* reported, and a number began a hunger strike this week.

One teacher told *NI* there had been no response from the Serbian government to their requests, despite multiple reports of financial irregularities and threats to critical teachers.

According to *Vreme*, the director did not review the contract of the head of the union branch at the school, and a history teacher said another teacher who had joined the union lost her job. Other teachers, psychologists and administrative staff have left because of the atmosphere at the school. The news site also reported that the head accountant at the

school quit at the start of September, saying she “will not go to jail because of the director.”

National strike to denounce overcrowding in Belgian prisons and new sentencing regime

On Sunday, prison staff in Belgium will begin a 48-hour national strike to denounce overcrowding in prisons. The strike has been called by all the major unions, which say problems with workload and violence have been made much worse by prison populations in excess of the national capacity.

Nationally there are 1,000 more prisoners than the official capacity of prisons, with prisoners having to share cells designed for a single person.

The strike notice denounced the policy of the Minister of Justice, of the right-wing Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats, who decreed at the start of September that even those given short sentences must serve them in prison. Previously, this was not the case for sentences of less than two years.

Strikes continue against franchising plan at Delhaize supermarkets in Belgium

Supermarket workers at the Delhaize chain in Belgium continue strikes against a plan to convert all of its 128 directly operated stores into franchises.

Most Delhaize shops are already franchised, and pay and working conditions there are worse than in the remaining directly operated shops. Workers have opposed the franchise plan with protests and strikes since March.

According to *L'Echo*, workers picketed thirteen shops and the company’s warehouse in Zellik on Friday, stopping many deliveries. As it has throughout the dispute, Delhaize sent police and bailiffs to enforce a court order banning pickets. *The Brussels Times* reported that Delhaize allocated 40 million euros to pay out lump sums and early retirement to the 9,000 workers affected by the franchising plan in an attempt to end the strikes, which have had a major impact on the profits of its parent company Ahold Delhaize.

L'Echo also reported a letter sent by the Union of Self-Employed Entrepreneurs, which said that 100 of the shop owners already operating Delhaize franchises were opposed to the new contract the multinational wanted them to sign. The new terms would reportedly force them to buy stock directly from Delhaize or its preferred suppliers, as well as classing strikes and IT problems as *force majeure*, not requiring compensation from Delhaize.

Thousands of dock workers strike after port death in Vigo, Spain

Dock workers in the Spanish port city of Vigo stopped work and protested on Thursday, following the death Wednesday of a worker at a subcontractor for the shipbuilding company Armon Shipyards.

The 41-year-old worker was killed after being trapped by a crane, *vigoe.es* reported. Another worker was killed last November at a different company in the Vigo shipyard in a similar accident.

The three main unions representing Vigo dock workers said “nothing has been done” since November’s fatal accident, and they will not wait “for another colleague to die.” Despite the militant rhetoric, they said they would call off a threatened strike next month if the local government convened a meeting of the naval sector to discuss safety.

Eight-hour strike at Leag power company in Germany over pay

On Wednesday, workers at the German power company Leag, one of the leading producers of lignite coal, held an eight-hour strike as part of pay dispute with the company.

The IG BCE is calling for a pay rise of 12 percent, or at least 400 euros monthly for the 7,200 workers at the company. According to *rbb24*, Leag offered a one-off payment of 10,000 euros, but IG BCE rejected this, saying “A one-off payment—no matter how high it is—quickly evaporates given the high inflation.”

Scottish Further Education lecturers continue rolling strike action over pay

Further Education (FE) lecturers at colleges across Scotland are continuing their strikes over pay. The employers’ body said any pay increase above two percent must be financed by compulsory redundancies.

The Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association (ELS-Fela) members are taking part in a rolling programme of strikes. This week, EIS-Fela members at two different colleges each day are taking action. The first week in October will see walkouts at colleges in Scottish government ministers’ constituencies.

Lecturers at City of Glasgow College (CoGC) and Edinburgh College are on indefinite strike. CoGC is threatening to make 100 lecturers compulsorily redundant, and at Edinburgh College representative Kevin Scally has been sacked.

UK university staff to walk out over pay and conditions

Academic staff at around 140 universities across the UK are to walk out September 25-29.

The University and College Union (UCU) members oppose the imposed five percent pay rise for most members for 2023/24. They are also fighting against the increasing use of temporary contracts and high workloads.

UCU members are also working to rule and not covering for absences. They are shortly to reballot for industrial action, as the current mandate ends in October. The UCU recently ended a marking and assessment boycott (Mab), which impacted the awarding of degrees to graduating students.

To sabotage the forthcoming action, the UCU leadership agreed local university branches could pull out of the proposed action. A UCU press release dated September 15 stated, “the HEC (Higher Education Committee) agreed to give individual branches the option of calling off the forthcoming five days of action. It is expected that all branches will immediately engage members on this issue, and HEC has agreed that branches can request an exemption from strike action, via a request to the

HE officers.”

UCU members at five Scottish universities have been taking action this week over the same dispute. Those at Aberdeen are out from Monday to Thursday, at Stirling from Monday to Friday, and at Dundee from Wednesday to Friday. Those at Glasgow and Strathclyde universities were out Monday and Tuesday.

Meanwhile university support staff at four Scottish universities are striking in support of an improved pay offer, after overwhelmingly rejecting an offer worth between five and eight percent for 2023/24. The Unison union members at Dundee University are out all this week, while those at Glasgow Caledonian are out from Monday to Thursday. At Glasgow University they are out Tuesday and Wednesday this week, and September 26-28 next week. At Glasgow School of Art, they walked out Wednesday and are scheduled to walk out September 27-28 next week.

On Tuesday, university and college staff belonging to the Unite, Unison, UCU and EIS-Fela unions held a rally at the Buchanan Steps in Glasgow against the five-six percent below-inflation pay rise imposed on them.

Unison members at 17 universities in England, including Leeds and Manchester Metropolitan, will walk out October 2-3 after rejecting an offer of five to eight percent. At some universities, Unison members will also be striking on additional dates. In total around 6,000 Unison members at universities will be involved in stoppages.

Work to rule by teachers in one union in England to highlight excessive workloads

Thousands of teachers across England began a work to rule campaign on Monday.

Measures taken the NASUWT union members will include refusing to carry out extracurricular activities and supervise pupils at midday, refusing to work during the lunch break and to cover for absences. According to government figures, teachers are working a near 52-hour week on average.

At the end of July, NASUWT along with the larger National Education Union and other unions wound up the long-running dispute over teachers’ pay after members voted to accept well below-inflation 6.5 percent offer.

School ancillary staff across Scotland to walk out over pay

Over 20,000 school ancillary staff across Scotland will walk out September 26-28 over pay. They include caterers, cleaners, janitors and support workers.

The Unison members reject the five percent offer from the employers’ body, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The stoppages will impact 2,000 schools across 24 local authority areas, around three quarters of all Scottish schools. Unite and GMB members at 10 local authorities will also walk out. In total, 26 of the 32 Scottish local authorities will be affected, including Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Strike by journalists at UK newspaper publisher over pay

Around 300 journalists working for publisher National World were on strike Monday. National World publishes over 100 local papers including

the Belfast Newsletter, Lancashire Post, Sheffield Star and Yorkshire Post.

The National Union of Journalist (NUJ) members voted by a 78 percent majority to strike after the company imposed a 4.5 percent pay rise. Picket lines were mounted in various cities including Belfast, Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield and Sunderland. The NUJ members began a work to rule on Tuesday, and further strikes are planned for Friday and September 25.

Train drivers in England set to walk out over pay

Train drivers at 16 train operating companies (TOCs) across England are to walk out on Saturday September 30 and Wednesday October 4.

The Aslef members are continuing their long-running campaign for a pay rise, which they have not had since 2019. The strike days coincide with the beginning and end of the Tory party conference being held over that weekend in Manchester. The stoppages are likely to impact delegates travelling to and from the conference. The Aslef members will also impose an overtime ban on September 29 and October 2-6.

Further strikes by London Underground rail staff over job cuts and safety

Workers on the London Underground Rail system (the Tube) are to strike on October 4 and 6.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport members are walking out in their long running dispute over Transport for London's (TfL) plans to cut around 600 jobs on the underground rail system. Workers oppose the job losses and have fears over safety as the cuts would lead to higher workloads, lone working and understaffed stations. The October 4 walkout will coincide with a national stoppage by train drivers in the Aslef union.

Bus drivers in north-east England to strike over pay

Around 1,300 UK bus drivers employed by the Go North East bus company have announced dates for stoppages.

The Unite union members who rejected a below-inflation pay offer are to walk out September 30 to October 6, and again October 14-20. The depots set to take part are at Consett, Gateshead, Hexham, Percy Main, Sunderland and Washington. Parent company the Go-Ahead Group reported profits of £85 million last year.

Health staff in Wirral, UK to hold further stoppages 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 will walk out on September 25, 27 and 29. It follows a 72-hour strike last week and a 48-hour stoppage at the end of August.

The Unison 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.

Engineers at Bradford, UK factory walk out over pay

Around 150 skilled engineers working for Denso Marston at their factory in Shipley near Bradford walked out Tuesday and Wednesday over pay. Denso Marston manufactures air conditioning units for auto vehicles.

The GMB members demand a 12 percent pay rise. The company offered an eight percent increase, reduced to four for the lowest paid. The strikers are supported in the local community, with a petition gathering over 4,000 signatures.

Northern Ireland health workers and civil servants to strike over pay

Health workers in Northern Ireland are to begin a 48-hour strike Thursday. Among those walking out will be paramedics, pharmacists and health visitors.

Members of Unison, GMB, Unite, the Royal College of Midwives, Society of Radiographers and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy will take part. The health workers have not been offered a pay rise for the year 2023/24 and have not received a pay award for 2022/23.

On Friday, civil servants working for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) will join the strike of their health colleagues. Public and Commercial Services and the Northern Ireland Public Services Alliance members oppose the miserly £552 across the board pay increase. For civil servants it represents at most a 2.1 percent increase. With inflation in double figures it is a real terms pay cut.

A rally of the striking workers and supporters is to take place on Friday outside Belfast City Hall at 12.30pm.

Offshore oil workers employed by Petrofac to strike over pay

Around 85 workers employed by Petrofac, an energy services company, are to strike October 1-7.

The Unite members provide services to oil and gas company Ithaca Energy's offshore facilities off Scotland. The dispute centres on the 14 days "clawback" policy imposed by Ithaca. Petrofac offered to reduce it to 12 days, but the industry norm is seven days. Unite says the higher number of clawback days equates to a loss of around £6,000 a year.

Petrofac workers include electrical and mechanical technicians, deck crew and scaffolders.

Scottish Water workers to ballot over pay and new grading system

Around 500 Scottish Water workers are to ballot over pay and a new grading system.

The ballot of Unite union members will open on Friday and close October 16.

Protests and strikes mark anniversary of death of Mahsa Amini at hands of Iranian morality police

The anniversary of the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022 by the morality police, arrested for improperly wearing the hijab, was marked by further protests in Iran and internationally.

The protests included a general strike of businesses and traders in Kurdish cities. Cities involved included Baneh, Divandareh and Sanandaj. Amini's family live in Saqqez in Iran's Kurdish region and according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network her father was detained for a short time.

The Iranian parliament responded to the year-long mass demonstrations, which coalesced with protests against the rising cost of living, by passing a bill that sentences women who dress inappropriately with up to 10 years in jail.

About half Iran's population live in poverty due to US economic sanctions and the authoritarian regime's removal of price subsidies.

Continuing protests in Syrian city of Sweida (Suwayda) sparked by increasing poverty

Protests over the last month continued September 15 in the President Assad-controlled Syrian city of Sweida. The city is the centre of Syria's Druze religious minority. Youth have been taking a lead in the renewed protests.

The protests were sparked by the government cutting fuel subsidies in August, which led to a 250 percent rise in gasoline prices. Assad's attempts to mitigate the rise by doubling public sector wages and pensions failed because of their already low level. Syria's economy is deteriorating mainly as a result of international sanctions.

The protests, with the blessing of local Druze religious leaders, are developing a more anti-Assad emphasis. According to a *CBSNEWS* article of September 20, three protestors were wounded by shooters reported to be plain-clothes security forces. The shots took place as protestors tried to close the local office of the ruling Ba'ath party.

Teachers in Plateau State, Nigeria to walk out over salary arrears

Primary school teachers in many local government areas in Plateau State plan industrial action over outstanding salary arrears. The areas include Bassa, Jos South, Bokokos, Pankshin, Mikkang, Langtang North and Langtang South. No time frame has yet been reported for the upcoming strike.

The state government hopes to avoid a strike by blaming their predecessors for the suffering of the teachers. Sunday Amuna, Executive Chairman of the Education Board, said, "I want to appeal to teachers planning to embark on strike to shelve such plans for the sake of our children."

Trade union umbrella bodies in Nigeria threaten further action to defuse workers' anger over fuel subsidies

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has issued the federal government another one-week ultimatum to address its demands or risk industrial action. The Nigerian Labour Congress also issued a similar ultimatum.

While talking tough in public, the unions are involved in backroom discussions with government ministers on how best to contain the mounting anger of Nigerian workers four months after the removal of the fuel subsidy.

"I had the privilege of meeting with the leadership of the Trade Union Congress once again, marking the second time in as many weeks. My purpose was to personally update them on the efforts that the Federal Government has been making to address their concerns since our last meeting," said minister of labour and employment, Simon Lalong on September 19. He added that he "implored the TUC to exercise patience."

Permanent interdict served against striking municipality workers in Tshwane, South Africa

South African municipal workers in Tshwane, on strike for eight weeks for a pay increase of 5.4 percent granted in 2021, have had a permanent interdict served against them by the Labour Court against strike action.

Last week the South African Local Government Bargaining Council ordered the municipality to pay the increase.

Throughout the strike, repeated court interdicts were handed out to stop strike action and make them unlawful. The strikes went ahead despite the opposition of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu), which played a duplicitous role by claiming to support the strike while distancing itself from the unofficial action.

To date over 123 workers have been sacked for taking unofficial action, and the municipality said they are continuing to look for further dismissals.

According to *IOL news*, Municipality spokesperson Lindela Mashigo said, "this permanent interdict confirms that strikers are restrained from performing any acts of destruction of any private or public property or performing any acts of intimidation towards any of the city's employees."

South African Emergency Medical Services paramedics in Cape Town call for protection against attacks

Emergency Medical Services paramedics whose work covers the Cape town areas of Philippi and Nyanga marched to the Philippi Browns Farm sports field to hand over a petition calling for the government to protect paramedics.

According to *IOL news*, paramedics throughout South Africa have seen an increase of attacks in the last decade. The most recent was in July when two paramedics attended a distress call in Nellmapius near Mamelodi after midnight and were hijacked, assaulted, tied up, and robbed.

They are demanding armed security to protect them. According to the Western Cape Health Department, if paramedics enter a Red Zone area,

they are escorted by police.

South African taxi drivers in Umhlanga near Durban strike against their taxi rank being moved

Taxi drivers in Umhlanga, near Durban in South Africa took strike action on Tuesday against their taxi rank being moved following the construction of a new shopping mall.

Dozens of drivers blockaded the entrance to the Oceans Mall, which was built on the site of their old taxi rank and the place where they subsequently set up was blocked. The blockade included the M4 road. The drivers were demanding a meeting with the owner of the mall.

SABC news reported that Deputy Chairperson of the South African National Taxi Council (Santaco) in KwaZulu-Natal, Sakhile Dlodla, said they will not move until the matter is resolved.

[subhead]Doctors in Nyamira, Kenya prepare to walk out over staff shortages, pay and conditions[subhead]

Doctors in Nyamira County, Kenya have issued a 21-day strike notice to demand the recruitment of more doctors with better pay and conditions.

Three days earlier, doctors held a demonstration at the Ministry of Health's offices to highlight their grievances. In Nyamira, there are only 30 doctors providing services to a population of over 650,000.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPD) accused the county administration of failing to obey court orders. KMPD secretary general Davji Atellah said, "The Nyamira County Government has failed to honour the RTWF [Return To Work Formula] and a court order dating back to 2021. This has left our dedicated doctors in a state of limbo, with prolonged probation periods, no promotions for consultants and doctors for over eight years, and even demotions."



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact