

Wildcat strike by postal workers in Serbia spreads nationwide; General strike call in West Bank against Israeli army raids; South African bus drivers at state owned NTI strike over non-payment of wages

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 November 2023

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

A wildcat strike wave begun by postal workers in the Serbian city of Novi Sad last week has expanded nationwide, with participants telling the press that thousands stopped work. Workers at the state-owned Pošti Srbije in Novi Sad told the media they will not resume work until they receive binding promises from the government that their demands will be met.

The strikers are calling for a 30 percent pay increase, because many earn less than half the national average salary, a share of profits, and an end to management bullying. The media reported many postal workers saying they have been intimidated or threatened with dismissal since the walkouts began.

Dvenik.rs reported that about 200 post offices across Serbia stopped work, and that the workers released a press statement saying they would not negotiate with Pošti Srbije management or the government because “Our demands are not negotiable.”

Strikers told the media about the role played by the unions. One worker in Novi Sad told *Danas* that Serbia’s “Labour Law ... is criminal, and the collective agreement of workers in the Post Office is even more criminal, because it was signed by the unions in agreement with the management.”

The response of the trade union bureaucracy to the wildcat strike, which they had no role in organising, has ranged from attempts to negotiate a deal they can sell to furious postal workers, to outright pro-management attacks on strikers.

While the Sloga union claimed to support the strike, the Nezavisnost union’s president told *Tanjug*, “We from the trade union do not support these work stoppages and I personally think that there are politically colored activities here.” Speaking as a partner of management, he said, “We had thousands of problems at the Post Office, and for the past two years we have been trying to solve them on the fly. ... it is not easy, but we have a management that understands the problems of the company.”

Struggles against poor conditions and underfunding of schools continue across Europe

Teachers and other educators across Europe have been fighting against

deteriorating working conditions and resources in schools since the start of the school year in September. Despite the attempts by the trade union bureaucracies to shut them down, many protests and strikes continue.

Teachers in Piraeus, Greece, protested outside the local police station on Monday, where four of their colleagues were summoned for an investigation. According to *ef.syn*, the teachers were told they were under investigation for joining the industrial action called by the Union of Secondary School Staff during the PISA exams in May.

The PISA exams are an international scheme intended to benchmark countries’ education systems. Their results have no impact at all on the students who sit them, and missing the exams would not affect their education.

Teachers have also been boycotting an evaluation system which would rank schools in Greece, as they say it would create a tiered education system. They have faced many threats, the latest from New Democracy Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who said that the boycott “will henceforth constitute a special disciplinary offence with implications for the teacher’s career development, but also with the deprivation of a month’s salary,” *ef.syn* reported.

Hundreds of teachers protested in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, on October 25 against pay inequality in the public sector. According to *The Slovenia Times*, the government proposed talks to make pay across the public sector fairer, but the Union of Education, Science and Culture of Slovenia (SVIZ) said the government’s latest offer would exacerbate pay disparity.

The SVIZ pointed out that Slovenia spent only 4.6 percent of its GDP on education in 2020, less than the 5.1 percent OECD average, and that thousands of teaching vacancies were unfilled. The union threatened to call a strike in the near future if the government did not improve its offer.

Estonian teachers also protested in front of the parliament building in Tallinn on October 26, denouncing the low pay offer made by the government. The Union of Estonian Education Workers (EHL) says it will call a strike towards the end of November if negotiations at the national conciliator are not successful.

The EHL initially demanded the minimum salary for teachers be raised to the national average, around an 11 percent increase. After the Minister of Education Kristina Kallas said this was unaffordable since “we need the government to make cuts in the budget” and she would ask the coalition government for 8 percent, the EHL said it would accept this.

Kallas subsequently came back and claimed that the other coalition

parties demanded a pay freeze, and she convinced them to accept a pay rise, but only of 1.7 percent to base salaries, and a mere extra 0.3 percent for performance bonuses. She said larger pay increases would only be affordable if smaller secondary schools were shut down.

Teachers at the Belgrade Sixth Gymnasium, a school in the Serbian capital, continue the partial strikes they began at the end of May, shortening every class to 30 minutes. They are demanding the resignation of the school's director, whom they accuse of financial irregularities and threatening critical teachers with dismissal.

In Niš, a city in the south of Serbia, workers at the Children's Cultural Centre held a warning strike at noon on October 27, to oppose a merger with another institution named Divljana. According to *Južne Vesti*, Divljana has had financial difficulties including the freezing of its bank accounts for three years, so workers say the new institution may collapse, and warned of job losses.

They also said the new institution's statute will provide day care and "other education," but does not say it will offer cultural education.

Childcare workers have faced many of the same problems as teachers in schools. Early years professionals in Spain held a second national 24-hour strike on October 25, which the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) union estimates was joined by more than half of all staff.

The CCOO is calling for a national collective agreement to increase salaries for 80,000 workers and called two more 24-hour strikes on November 8 and 15, *Europa Press* reported.

Workers in Berlin kindergartens also held a warning strike on Thursday, during collective bargaining for the whole German childcare sector. The United Services Union (Verdi) is calling for a pay rise of 10.5 percent or 500 euros, whichever is higher.

Cypriot doctors hold national strike to demand binding collective agreement

Doctors in the State Health Services Organisation (OKYpY), which runs nine hospitals in Cyprus, held an eight-hour strike last week, demanding a collective agreement governing pay and working conditions.

OKYpY said it was unable to set public-sector pay scales, as this was prohibited by legislation. According to the Pan-Cypriot Union of State Doctors (PASYKI), the legislation governing OKYpY currently allows it to employ staff using either individual contracts or a collective agreement, *Politis* reported.

Strike by UK pension regulator workers continues over pay

Around 300 workers employed by The Pensions Regulator (TPR), the UK pension regulator body, based in Brighton on the south coast, are on strike this week over an imposed 3 percent pay offer.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members want a 4.5 percent pay rise with an additional 0.5 percent for the lowest paid. This is the deal accepted by the PCS for other civil service workers.

The TPR employees have already held stoppages October 11–12, 17–18 and 23–27. They mounted well-supported picket lines each strike day.

Pay strike by refuse workers in Cardiff, Wales continues

Refuse workers in Cardiff, Wales are continuing their strike in opposition to the national pay award to local authority workers of £1,925 and are seeking an increase.

The Unite union members have been on strike since September 4 and are due to stop out until November 26. This has led to the building up of waste in the streets. Unite accused Cardiff council of illegally using agency staff to break the strike and called for an investigation. The council denied this.

South Wales bottled gas workers in five-day stoppage over pay

Around 20 workers at the Flogas bottled gas company at Llandarcy near Neath in Wales began a five-day stoppage Monday.

The GMB members voted by an 80 percent majority to walk out after rejecting a below inflation offer. Following the announcement of the strike, Flogas announced redundancies.

Support staff at special needs school in Leicester, UK begin month-long strike over pay

Around 90 UK support staff at the Ash Field Academy, Leicester, for children aged 4 to 19 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), began a month-long strike on Wednesday. They will be out every working day up to December 1.

The Unison members have been in dispute with their employer since April 23, holding over 30 days of walkouts since then. 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.

The workers renewed their mandate for strike action in September. On a 67 percent turnout they voted by an 85 percent majority to continue strike action. The government mediation service Acas was brought in to try and resolve the dispute, but it continues.

Workers at UK Amazon centre to strike over pay

Around 1,000 workers at the Amazon fulfilment centre in Coventry, England will walk out November 7 to 9.

The GMB members want an improved pay offer after rejecting just £1 an hour increase. They have held nearly 30 days of stoppages for improved pay. Amazon recently announced a tripling of profits with a figure of £8.2 billion for the last quarter for its international operation.

Amazon workers in the UK plan to join in a strike with Amazon workers in over 30 countries on so-called Black Friday (sales day) on November 24.

Mental health social workers at Barnet council in London to hold further stoppages over staff shortages

Mental health workers at Barnet's north and south teams in London announced further walkouts over chronic staff shortages.

The Unison members will walk out from November 7-9, 14-16, and December 4-8. Next year they will walk out January 15-19, February 5-9 and March 4-8.

They already held stoppages on September 26, October 3-4 and October 10-12. In June, the Unison union branch reported nine workers out of a full complement of 22 had left this year. There is also a lack of experienced workers in the teams.

Unison is calling for a 20 percent pay supplement to help staff retention. The council offered £1,000 a year, representing an average 2.5 percent increase. The council has offered pay increases of between 7.5 percent and 25 percent to social workers in the family services but only 2.5 percent to those in the adult services including mental health workers.

Further Education college staff at 30 colleges in England to strike over pay and workloads

Further Education staff at 30 colleges across England are to strike from November 14 to 16 over pay and excessive workloads.

The University and College Union (UCU) members voted by a 90 percent majority for a pay increase in excess of current RPI inflation. They are also seeking a national agreement on workload levels. The UCU has already settled disputes at 15 colleges with offers of pay increases up to 8.5 percent.

A recent survey of lecturers by the UCU showed the financial impact of their loss of earning power. Almost all were struggling, with nearly 80 percent reporting it was impacting on their mental health, while many have to use foodbanks and ration heating.

Among the 30 colleges taking part in the walkouts are Bournemouth and Poole College, Calderdale College, Isle of Wight College, The City of Liverpool College and the Heart of Yorkshire Education Group, which has campuses at Castleford, Selby and Wakefield.

Distillery workers at Scottish firm ballot over pay

Workers at French-owned distillery Chivas Brothers in Scotland are balloting to strike after rejecting a 6.4 percent pay offer by a 97 percent majority.

The Unite union members' ballot opened on Monday until November 20. Chivas produces Chivas Regal whisky and other brands, employing around 1,600 workers at sites across Scotland, including the Kilmalid bottling plant in Dumbarton and the Strathclyde Grain Distillery. GMB (the majority union) members at Chivas are also balloting for strike action after overwhelmingly rejecting the pay offer.

Women's Aid workers in Glasgow, Scotland ballot after staff suspended for whistleblowing over bullying allegations

Staff at Scotland's Glasgow East Women's Aid unit in Easterhouse were suspended after whistleblowing over bullying allegations at the unit. The unit was closed temporarily as a result.

Thirteen Unite union members are balloting for industrial action The

ballot closes on November 13. The unit has been closed for six weeks due to the suspensions.

Middle East

General strike call in occupied West Bank as killing of Palestinians continues

A general strike call was made across the occupied West Bank including occupied Jerusalem, on Wednesday. It was in response to raids by Israeli forces in Jenin, which led to the death of three Palestinians and a further killing in Tulkarem.

Shops were shuttered in Ramallah in response to the strike call. Over 120 Palestinians have been killed in the Occupied West Bank since the Hamas uprising began on October 7.

Iranian oil workers in further protests over wage arrears and pensions

Contract oil workers at the Abadan petrochemical company in Iran demonstrated on Monday at the site's entrance. They were protesting the high salaries earned by managers and the arrears of their wages, calling for the resignation of the company's CEO.

On Sunday, formal oil workers (those with permanent employment) working for the Falat Ghareh Oil Company in the Siri region held protests. They demand the removal of the government-imposed salary cap and limitation of pension benefits to 30 years, after many workers had worked longer and paid in more contributions.

Iran has been hit by workers' strikes and protests by pensioners over the rising cost of living, as well as the suppression of democratic rights and state violence. Economic problems were exacerbated by US sanctions, plunging 60 percent of the population into poverty. The US is lining up Iran as its next possible target in its expanding wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Bus drivers employed by NTI in South Africa strike over non-payment of wages

Around 1,300 bus drivers working for state-owned bus company Northwest Transport Investments (NTI) in South Africa are on strike, having not been paid for several months.

NTI has depots in Hammanskraal, Temba and Mabopane. The dispute affected passengers in the Pretoria and Midrand areas. Some of the South African Workers Union (SAWU) members have not been paid for four months or have only received 50 percent of their wages.

NTI has suffered financial problems and is accused of mismanagement by SAWU. In 2022, NTI was put under a business rescue plan by the North West provincial government.

South African municipality workers in Welkom city protest wage

arrears

Thousands of South African workers of the Matjhabeng Municipality, which includes the city of Welkom, have been protesting after not being paid their salaries for October.

Protests began on October 25 outside the municipality office in Welkom. The municipality has seen its accounts frozen as it undergoes a financial crisis.

On October 26, the South African Municipal Workers Union members held a sit-down strike over the issue. The next day, they dumped piles of rubbish outside the municipality offices. The workers returned to work Tuesday morning after the municipality was able to access funds to pay the salaries.

March of grandmothers in Durban, South Africa to highlight health challenges

On October 26, around 120 grandmothers organised by the Grandmothers Movement in South Africa marched to the Addington Hospital in Durban city centre to highlight the challenges faced by older women especially around health.

The march followed a three-day conference discussing the issues. They handed in a petition at the eThekweni Municipal area mayoral office asking for more representation of elderly people on government bodies. Many grandmothers play a pivotal role in child care, especially in poor families, and played a leading role in HIV AIDS awareness.

Contract workers march in Durban, South Africa to demand jobs be brought in house

Around 300 South African workers employed as contractors providing security, meter reading and waste disposal for the eThekweni municipal area (including the city of Durban) marched to the eThekweni mayoral office on Tuesday demanding their jobs be brought in house.

The Municipal and Allied Trade Union of South Africa and South African Federation of Trade Unions members handed in a memorandum at the mayor's office outlining their demands. They wanted it to be accepted by the mayor himself but had to settle for his representative. The workers also want to be paid in line with municipal workers in cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Planned strike at South African port over privatisation plans

Workers at the port in Richards Bay city, South Africa are to walk out on Friday. The strike by South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union members is in opposition to plans to privatise the state-owned Transet logistics body.

Transnet, which owns ports and lorry fleets, is the country's largest logistics organisation, responsible for moving freight around the whole of South Africa. The strike is predicted to lead to a backlog of queues of trucks in the Richards Bay area.

Gold miners at South African mine locked out following three-day sit-in strike

The Gold One Mine East Modder operation has locked out miners following a three-day underground sit-in from October 22 to 25 over union recognition.

The around 540 Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members demand the company recognise the right of AMCU to represent miners at the site. Since 2012, Gold One has recognised only the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Around 20 workers, alleged to be leaders of the sit in strike, were sent letters suspending them. The company is also working with police and the NUM to try to concoct a kidnapping charge against AMCU members by claiming some of the miners in the sit-in were held against their will.

Kenyan postal workers strike over unpaid salaries

Kenyan postal workers walked out on November 2 over unpaid salaries. More than 2,500 employees of Posta Kenya have not been paid for the past five months.

Communication Workers Union National Treasurer Joseph Rwanjau said all workers will down tools and post offices would remain closed until the workers are paid monies owed.

Kenyan teachers at secondary school start "sleep-in" to protest non-payment

Teachers at Marereni Secondary School in Kilifi County, Kenya began a sleep-in at the school on October 27 to protest the delays getting their salaries paid. One of the participants said they were demanding three months' salary arrears. The decision to start the protest was made after Principal Amin Mohamed Karanja told them there was no money to pay them.

Nigerian Nigeria Labour Congress threatens new strike in Imo State from November 1

Having sabotaged a national strike against the withdrawal of fuel subsidies, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) declared a strike in Imo State to begin on November 1. Workers in Imo are suffering due to non-payment of their salaries.

NLC President Joe Ajaero, while noting that union representatives were threatened with violence, complained that despite the NLC's repeated efforts to engage in dialogue and made agreements with the Imo State Government, it had continually broken them. He also accused the state of denying some of its workers 20 months of salaries by falsely labelling them "ghost workers." Around 10,000 former workers were similarly denied their pensions.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact