

Postal workers in Serbia continue national wildcat strike, defying threats of dismissal; protests continue in Khuzestan province in Iran by oil contractors over pay and pensions; postal workers in Kenya walk out in defiance of court order over unpaid salaries

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Serbian postal workers continue wildcat strike, defying threats of dismissal

Thousands of postal workers in Serbia continue nationwide wildcat strikes begun two weeks ago in the city of Novi Sad.

Workers from the state-owned Pošti Srbije said they will not return to work until demands they say “are not negotiable” are met.

The strikers are calling for a 30 percent pay increase, as many earn less than half the national average salary, a share of profits, and an end to management bullying.

The government made a provocative proposal this week that strikers could make extra money if they did extra hours’ work for a subsidiary of Pošti Srbije. Postal workers told the media the company is threatening mass dismissals and to mobilise strikebreakers. Nova reported that 20 workers who walked out in the city of ?ak were suspended. Workers elsewhere also reported being threatened with the loss of their jobs.

A strike spokesperson told the media managers and temporary workers had been mobilised to distribute post. They said that while huge amounts of post was undelivered, the scab service was prioritising a letter from the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vu?i? to pensioners boasting that he had increased pensions, clearly aimed at winning votes in next month’s elections.

The acting director of Pošti Srbije said he discussed with three unions how to bring the strike to an end, according to Nova. Some unions bitterly attacked striking workers in the media, while others claimed to negotiate on their behalf, but workers insist they are not represented by these unions, which have betrayed them again and again. One worker reiterated this to TV N1, saying “the director doesn’t listen to us. He meets with the unions, and we persistently say that we are not affiliated with the unions.”

Port workers in Hamburg hold wildcat strike against privatisation

Port workers in Hamburg, Germany, held a 24-hour wildcat strike from Monday against the partial privatisation of HHLA, the company which operates the port.

According to Reuters, most of the shares in HHLA are currently owned by the city of Hamburg. The Swiss shipping giant MSC reportedly made an offer to buy a large part of HHLA, leaving the city barely in control with 50.1 percent of shares.

Junge Welt reported that around 100 workers, almost the entire shift at one terminal, walked out on Monday afternoon after HHLA’s board voted to approve the sale. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that work only began again on Tuesday evening.

The works council refused to call any strikes or demonstrations against the sale, citing the Works Constitution Act. HHLA, seeking reprisals, said the work stoppage was a breach of contract and that it had “initiated measures under labour law.”

Finnish workers resume strikes against labour “reform” and austerity

Finnish workers resumed strikes this week against a labour reform and series of cuts being introduced by the right-wing coalition government. The National Coalition Party and far-right Finns Party announced sweeping attacks on housing benefits, unemployment support, migrants’ rights, and the introduction of unpaid sick leave.

The government will also restrict the right to strike, including sympathy and political strikes to one day, and fines for both unions and individual workers if a court rules a strike “illegal.”

This week, the unions called 24-hour strikes in many workplaces across northern Finland, including shops, commercial and municipal kitchens and laundries, and numerous manufacturing industries. Strikes in other regions are planned in the coming weeks. In the three weeks of strikes in September and October, workers were mostly limited to walkouts of a few hours.

The unions sought to block a large-scale mobilisation against the attacks, because their main objection is merely that it upsets the “Finnish model” of corporatist union /employer relations. A senior official from the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions told YLE that if employers

want to impose new measures on workers, rather than lobbying the government for laws, “it would be sensible to implement [them] together through agreement and negotiation at the social partners’ tables.”

National rail strike in Belgium against new working arrangements due to staff shortages

Belgian rail workers held a 48-hour strike, beginning Tuesday evening, against new working arrangements planned by the state-owned National Railway Company of Belgium (SNCB). The strike had a major impact. Around half the long-distance inter-city trains were cancelled, and rush-hour services were almost all cancelled, BX1 reported.

According to RTBF, rail workers are particularly opposed to the halving of guards’ preparation times between trains from 20 to 10 minutes. The SNCB claims that this will be the equivalent of hiring 50 full-time staff.

A union official interviewed by RTBF said that despite a recruitment campaign which hired 2,400 people last year, 750 of these left by the end of their training period, and staffing levels were still too low. According to the unions, overtime is becoming more common and many workers cannot take their rest days.

Austrian metal workers hold nationwide warning strikes in collective bargaining dispute

On Monday, metal workers throughout Austria began a three-day campaign of rolling regional warning strikes at manufacturers nationwide.

The Metal Workers’ Union is calling for a pay rise of 11.6 percent for the 130,000 workers covered by the agreement, according to the *Kleine Zeitung*.

The employers reportedly offered only 10 percent and a one-off bonus of 1,500 euros, spread over two years.

Tesla workers in Sweden continue strike for collective agreement, with sympathy strikes from port and postal workers

Around 500 workers at 17 Tesla maintenance workshops in Sweden are on strike to demand a collective agreement from the American electric car manufacturer. The walkouts began when 130 members of the IF Metall union walked out on October 27, and more joined last week. IF Metall accused Tesla of bringing workers from outside Sweden to service cars during the strike.

Tesla imports the cars it sells in Sweden, and the port workers’ union Transport called on its members not to unload any Tesla car during the strike. A union official said he believed Tesla was unloading cars for Sweden in Norwegian and Danish ports, *Göteborgs-Posten* reported.

Other sympathy strikes in support of the Tesla workers were announced. Postal workers’ union Seko said it would call its members at state-owned Postnord and the private Citymail to refuse deliveries to Tesla from November 20.

On Monday, Polish lorry drivers began a blockade of several crossing checkpoints into Ukraine, demanding the reintroduction of permits for Ukrainian cargo and that empty lorries returning to Poland be exempt from queuing at the border. The drivers announced their plan to continue the blockade until the end of the year if their demands are not met.

One protest organiser told Ukrinform that drivers were often left waiting 10-12 days at the border to return home after delivering their cargo.

Unian reported Wednesday that over 1,000 lorries were waiting at the border, in a kilometres-long queue, as protestors were only letting through one lorry every hour.

Before the protest, the Ukrainian government requested that the Polish government intervene to prevent any blockade taking place. Once it began, the Ukrainian ambassador to Poland opposed meeting the protestors’ demands, saying that “all efforts are aimed at reaching certain compromises with the carriers and explaining to them that the vast majority of the requirements they set are not realistic to fulfil.”

Strike by bus drivers in north east England over pay continues

The strike by around 1,300 UK bus drivers employed by Go North East begun on October 28 is continuing.

The Unite union members walked out after rejecting a revised offer from the company by an 81 percent majority on a 93 percent turnout. Monday’s talks between the company and Unite, brokered by the government mediation service Acas, broke down with no resolution.

The Unite union members rejected a previous below-inflation pay offer and held stoppages from September 30 to October 6, and October 14-20. The depots involved are Consett, Gateshead, Hexham, Percy Main, Sunderland and Washington. Parent company the Go-Ahead Group reported profits of £85 million last year. According to Unite, Go North East drivers are among the lowest paid in the country, with the average driver on £12.83 an hour.

The offer rejected by the Go North East drivers would have meant pay rising to £14.15 an hour, which the company claims represents a 10.3 percent rise. The drivers, however, are determined to achieve pay parity with drivers at Go North West, part of the same parent company, who are currently paid £15.53 an hour.

Unite recently conducted a survey of its Go North East members. Of the roughly 1,000 who took part, 60 percent had to cut back on essentials such as food and energy. Around 20 percent resorted to missing a meal to make ends meet and some were forced to use food banks. The same survey showed around 75 percent reporting they have to work excessively long hours, putting themselves and their passengers at risk.

The company normally runs 700 buses a day, serving around 175,000 people. Due to the stoppage it has only been able to run around 80 buses a day.

In separate disputes of Unite members, around 1,200 bus drivers, working for First Glasgow (No1) and First Glasgow (No2) will strike from November 24 to December 1 over pay. Also, 150 engineers at First Glasgow (No1) and First Glasgow (No2) will walk out November 16-17 over pay.

Refuse collectors in Warrington, UK strike over pay deal

Refuse collectors working for Warrington Borough Council, England

Polish lorry drivers block Ukrainian border over crossing delays

walked out on Wednesday, in the third round of stoppages by the Unite union members.

Unite nationally rejected the offer of a £1,925 increase for 2023/24, which applies to local authority staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The GMB and Unison unions accepted the offer.

Unite called strikes in several local authorities. The Warrington refuse workers' strike is due to last until November 20. The workers' second round of stoppages, begun October 24, ended on Monday.

Strike of health care assistants at Warrington and Halton Hospital Trust, UK over pay banding

Hundreds of health care assistants (HCAs) working for Warrington and Halton Hospital Trust in England were on strike Monday and Tuesday.

The action by Unison union members follows a two-day strike at the end of last week. The HCAs are on band 2 of their pay scale, but argue the duties they perform means they should be on the higher band 3, paying around £2,000 a year more. It is the third tranche of action over this issue. They demand the lifting to band 3 be backdated to 2018 in line with seven other hospital trusts in the northwest, who have already put HCAs on the higher band.

Around 400 clinical support workers employed by the Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust at its Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge hospital were due to begin 10 days of stoppages from Monday over the same issue. They have taken 13 days of stoppage since August over this issue.

Unison suspended the action after the trust agreed to put workers on band 3 and reversed its decision not to backdate it to 2018.

Strike by staff at East London hospital over pay and conditions

Hospital staff working for Barts NHS Trust at The Royal London, St Bartholomew's, Whipps Cross and Newham hospitals in the UK capital were on strike this week over pay and conditions in an ongoing dispute.

The Unite union members began a three-day strike Monday over pay and staffing levels, which workers say is leading to unsafe conditions.

In addition, workers at the trust employed in catering, domestic, patient ambassador, portering, security, sewing room and ward host roles who walked out on Monday are scheduled to remain on strike until November 17. They had previously worked for contractor Serco but were subsequently transferred to the NHS and have not been paid the £1,655 lump sum paid to NHS workers as part of the 2022/23 pay settlement.

Mental health social workers at Barnet council, London strike over staff shortages

Mental health workers at Barnet's north and south teams in London were on strike Tuesday to Thursday this week over chronic staff shortages. Picket lines were mounted each day.

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

They have already held stoppages in September and October. In June,

the Unison union branch reported that nine workers of the 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 family services but only 2.5 percent to those in adult services, including mental health workers.

London bus workers to hold series of strikes over pay and conditions

Around 350 bus drivers and engineers working for the London Transit bus company will hold a series of stoppages beginning Friday.

The Unite union members rejected a 6.8 percent pay offer with effect from April this year, when inflation was nearly twice that figure. They are also protesting the company's withdrawal of the £500 meal break payment and changes in how bus workers take days in lieu owed them.

London Transit, serving west London from its Westbourne Park depot, is owned by the French based multinational RATP. Strikes are also scheduled for November 13 and December 1, 4, and 22-23.

Further strikes by Northern Irish glass manufacturing workers over pay and union recognition

Around 150 workers at the Vista Therm factory in Craigavon in Northern Ireland held a one-day stoppage on Monday. Vista Therm manufactures insulated glazed units.

The Unite union members voted for further action after being rebalotted. They walked out over 12 weeks in the summer over pay and union recognition. As a result, two young workers were sacked and two other workers, including a Unite representative, suspended.

A majority of the workforce are Ukrainian or Polish nationals. Vista Therm's parent company is Carey Glass, based in Nenagh in the Irish Republic, which recognises Unite.

Education Authority workers in Northern Ireland to strike over authority's refusal to negotiate over pay and regrading review

Staff working for Northern Ireland's Education Authority will hold a 48-hour strike from November 15. The staff work in roles such as school bus transport, administration, catering, cleaning and classroom assistants.

The Unite union members are currently working-to-rule over the authority's refusal to negotiate over pay and a regrading review. They voted by a 94 percent majority to walk out. On November 16, they will be joined by Unison members working for the authority. NIPSA union members will also be carrying out targeted strikes.

Strike by support staff at special school in Poole, UK over pay

Around 100 UK support staff at the special educational needs and

disabilities (SEND) Victoria School in Poole, Dorset held a one-day stoppage on November 2. The school is run by the disability charity, Livability.

The Unison union members voted by a 97 percent majority to walk out over low pay. Many of the support workers have not had a pay rise for two years and are only on £10.42 an hour. The workers have been calling for improved pay for over 18 months.

More workers to ballot after strike vote by construction engineers over pay

Around 3,000 construction engineers under the National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) voted to strike by an 86 percent majority after rejecting a pay offer.

The GMB and Unite union members who work at oil refineries and power stations, including 1,000 at Sellafield nuclear power station, turned down the pay offer of an 8.5 percent increase for 2024 and 3.5 percent for 2025.

No dates have been set for any stoppages. This week, Unite announced it is to ballot more workers at other sites across the country under the NAECI agreement.

Unison suspends strikes by Scottish ancillary school staff as employers' body makes new offer

Scottish Unison called off strikes planned for November 8 and November 15, after a new offer from employers' body, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla).

Around 20,000 school ancillary staff across Scotland voted by a near 90 percent majority to reject Costa's previous offer. The new offer, which Unison recommended, is to be voted on by the workers.

The Unison union members, who work as caterers, cleaners, janitors and support workers, were calling for minimum pay of £15 an hour. The new agreement includes an offer to raise the minimum to £15 an hour, but not until 2026. Workers held a previous three-day stoppage in September of this year.

GMB and Unite union members working as school ancillary workers were not due to be part of the proposed stoppages on November 8 and 15, as they had voted to accept the previous Cosla offer.

Further protests by Iranian oil contractors over pay and pensions in Khuzestan province

Oil workers employed by the Aghajari Oil and Gas Exploitation company in Khuzestan province in Iran held a further protest Saturday.

They have held protests for several weeks, demanding the elimination of the government-imposed salary cap and limitation of pension benefits to 30 years, whereby workers working longer than 30 years and paying more contributions do not get an increased pension and reimbursement of excess tax deductions.

Iran has been hit by strikes and pensioners' protests due to the rising cost of living, as well as the suppression of democratic rights and state violence. US sanctions have exacerbated the economic decline, 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.

Reuters journalists based in Cairo, Egypt in pay protest

Journalists working for the Reuters bureau in Cairo, Egypt stopped work for an hour over the weekend to demand improved pay.

The demand was supported by the government-controlled Egyptian Press Syndicate, which covers those working in print media. They plan to strike on November 23.

Kenyan postal workers walk out in defiance of court order over unpaid salaries

Postal workers in Kenya went ahead with their national strike from November 2, despite being issued a court order the day before.

Strikers converged on City Square postal premises where they protested the government's refusal to pay their salary arrears, which have accumulated to around KSH 600 million. The workers held up homemade placards reading "No salary, no work" and "We demand to be paid our salaries."

Communication Workers Union Secretary General Benson Okwaro said, "Workers are being paid net salary instead of gross." He said some workers were evicted from their homes due to rent arrears, while others resorted to part-time menial jobs to keep their heads above water.

National strike threat after Nigeria Labour Congress leader brutally beaten

A national strike across all sectors has been threatened after National President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) Joe Ajaero was reported brutally beaten by Imo State government agents, including police, in state capital Owerri.

The NLC warned of increased threats against its representatives in the weeks leading up to the November 4 attack.

Suspected state agents attacked Ajaero and other labour leaders, smashing their vehicles, inflicting injuries and taking their mobile handsets, money, bank cards and other valuables. Ajaero was then driven away to an unknown location, where he was subjected to a further beating.

The NLC President, and other national leaders of NLC and Trade Union Congress were at the NLC state Secretariat in Owerri to discuss workers' demands over unpaid salaries and allowances, pensions and gratuities, as well as pay levels below the minimum wage.

The Imo State government tried to deflect responsibility for the attack by claiming it was carried out by angry workers—using the undoubted restiveness in the NLC's ranks over repeated climbdowns by the union bureaucracy.

The initial response from the NLC to the attack was to call a strike in Imo State from November 8. They claimed this would be widened to a national strike on November 14 unless the national government complied with its demands, including an investigation of the attack and replacement of the Imo State police commissioner. The NLC appealed to the Nigerian government to prevent further attacks, despite the state government only

carrying out such an attack after first receiving a green light at national level.

Unions preparing for national action from November 14 are reported to include the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees, the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria, the National Union of Food Beverage and Tobacco Employees, aviation sector unions, and the National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria.

Unions covering airline workers called for all flights in and out of Imo State to be grounded in response to the attack on Ajaero.

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Gold One miners in South Africa face disciplinary action for sit-in over union recognition

Following a three-day sit-in over union recognition in late October at the Gold One Mine East Modder operation in South Africa, 34 miners were suspended. The company's legal head Ziyaad Hassam told SowetanLIVE they expect this figure to rise and they are working closely with the police.

Gold One claims that a number of those underground were held against their will, while Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) members state they were sitting in to demand AMCU recognition. Currently only the National Union of Mineworkers is recognised.

The company said the suspended workers will be interviewed individually. One worker told SowetanLIVE, "Remember when we met during the underground strike, I declined to give you my personal details. This is because I know that the company was going to victimise people for exercising their freedom of expression... It is nonsense that the company is disciplining workers for fighting for their rights. The suspensions are sending a message that we as workers do not have rights in this company."

Hundreds of South African PEP workers try to storm City Hall Durban over sackings

On November 1, hundreds of workers from the Presidential Employment Program (PEP) in Durban, South Africa held a protest and tried to enter Durban City Hall demanding their contracts be reinstated. They demanded Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda address them.

The PEP workers, who carry out several community projects, were taken on as part of a government programme in October 2022. According to GroundUp, the eThekweni municipality announced in early October they had run out of funds due to government cuts and sacked the workers on October 29.

Many of these workers are the sole source of income for their families. Princcel Govender told GroundUp she was told to stop work last month. "We started in August 2023 by cleaning the riverbanks which were in a very bad condition," she said. "We were paid very late in September, and some of us got paid half of the money that they were supposed to pay us."



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