

Wildcat strike over pay and conditions by thousands of Serbian postal workers continues to spread; strikes and protests continue in Iran over rising poverty; national strike in Nigeria in defiance of court order

## 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.*

### Wildcat pay strike by thousands of Serbian postal workers continues to spread

Postal workers across Serbia continue to join the nationwide wildcat strike begun three weeks ago in the city of Novi Sad. According to *Nova*, between 4,000 and 5,000 workers joined the walkouts, almost half of all employees of state-owned Pošta Srbije.

The workers are defying threats of mass dismissals, with many having already received written warnings. The acting director of Pošta Srbije said that victimising strikers is “not violence, but respect for the law, and if I don’t implement it, someone can punish me.”

Postal workers in two more cities stopped work this week, with those in Subotica telling *Maglista?* the government “destroyed our company so that not a single stone is left standing.”

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.

Workers in Novi Sad told *Nova* Pošta Srbije offered a pay rise of 10 percent in November and 10 percent in January, but reiterated that their demands are not negotiable, and they would not return to work until the government guaranteed they are met in full.

Despite workers’ insistence that they are not represented by the unions, the unions continued to meet with management to plot how to close down the strike. The Nezavisnost union repeatedly issued statements to the media attacking the strike as “illegal” and that to “save jobs and the company” workers should give up their demands.

### Finnish workers continue strikes against austerity and attacks on rights

Finnish workers continued strikes this week against labour reform and

budget cuts being introduced by the right-wing coalition government. Workers in the service sector, construction and energy companies joined the regional 24-hour strikes throughout this week, and around 4,000 members of the SEL union in the food industry stopped work.

The government plans sweeping cuts to housing benefits, unemployment support, migrants’ rights, and the introduction of unpaid sick leave. It will also restrict the right to strike, including sympathy and political strikes, to one day, with fines for both unions and individual workers if a court rules a strike “illegal.”

One MP from the Swedish People’s Party of Finland, a member of the coalition led by the National Coalition Party and far-right Finns Party, said, “Political strikes do not belong in a functioning democracy,” *YLE* reported, and that the government did not intend to be dissuaded from its planned austerity measures.

### Italy’s far-right government intervenes to restrict national one-day general strike over wages and industrial accidents

On Tuesday, Italy’s Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, Matteo Salvini from the right-wing Lega Nord and Deputy Prime Minister, signed a decree restricting a planned national general strike this Friday to a four-hour walkout. Workers in public transport and other services will strike throughout Italy.

Friday’s strike was called by the CGIL and UIL unions to oppose the budget presented by the government of Giorgia Meloni, of the fascist Fratelli d’Italia. The unions criticised the budget for cutting taxes but doing nothing to address the decline of real wages and high rate of industrial accidents.

Salvini reportedly requested that the unions voluntarily cut the strike from their planned eight hours to four, but they refused. Despite militant rhetoric, however, the unions did not call for any defiance of Salvini’s injunction once it was signed. The CGIL said it would have defied it if only the union was affected, but complied “because violations put workers at risk of punishment between economic sanctions rising to heavy criminal sanctions,” *ADN* reported.

## **Warning strikes over pay throughout the German public sector**

Public sector workers in Germany held warning strikes this week in a dispute over the collective agreement covering over a million workers.

According to the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, the United Services Union (Verdi) is calling for a pay rise of 10.5 percent, or 500 euros, whichever is higher. The result of collective bargaining for public sector employees is reportedly normally also applied to an additional 1.4 million civil servants who do not have the right to strike.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that thousands of road construction workers, educators and court workers stopped work in the cities of Magdeburg and Halle on Wednesday. Other public sector construction workers walked out in Hamburg on Tuesday, and around 3,000 daycare workers in Berlin held a warning strike on Thursday.

## **National train drivers' strike in Germany over pay and working hours**

German train drivers walked out from 10pm on Wednesday night until 6pm Thursday, having a massive impact throughout the country.

The German Train Drivers' Union members are calling for a reduction in working time from 38 to 35 hours with full compensation, and for monthly salaries to increase by 555 euros.

Deutsche Bahn made a provocative offer of an 11.5 percent pay rise spread over 32 months, an annual average of only 4.2 percent, and completely ruled out a reduction in working hours.

The strike had a major impact, with only 20 percent of planned long-distance services running, and some regions having no local services at all, according to *taz*.

## **French civil servants strike to denounce anti-immigrant law**

Civil servants from the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) stopped work on Tuesday to denounce the anti-immigrant law being voted in the Senate that day, which was subsequently approved. Dozens of strikers protested outside the Senate building, *Politis* reported.

The law, introduced by Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, a sympathiser of the far-right Action Française, makes it easier to deport migrants and increases the barriers to obtaining long-term permits. It introduces a one-year residence permit for jobs where there is a labour shortage, to create an insecure workforce in low-paid sectors such as hospitality, cleaning and construction.

Civil servants oppose many measures in the bill, including their placement in police stations, which could interfere with OFPRA's independence from the police and lead to intimidation of refugees who had experienced repression from officials. Several officials interviewed by *Politis* said the bill increased the pressure to resolve cases quickly. One recounted an incident where a refugee was refused asylum by a colleague who overlooked important details of the case.

## **More workers in Sweden join sympathy strikes in support of Tesla walkout**

Workers at Tesla maintenance workshops in Sweden have been on strike since October 27, when 130 members of the IF Metall union walked out. More joined last week, and around 500 workers at 17 workshops are now on strike to demand a collective agreement from the American electric car manufacturer.

Other workers throughout Sweden began sympathy strikes in support of the Tesla workers. Dockers refused to unload Tesla cars in Swedish ports, and postal workers in the Seko union will stop deliveries to Tesla from next week. *Reuters* reported that 50 workers at the Vetlanda plant of Hydro Extrusions, which produces aluminium parts, will stop work on any parts for Tesla cars from Friday. According to *IndustriAll Europe*, electricians and cleaning workers will also stop work for Tesla vehicles and workplaces from Friday.

## **Polish lorry drivers continue blockade of Ukrainian border over crossing delays**

Polish lorry drivers continue a blockade of three crossing points between Poland and Ukraine, begun at the start of last week. The drivers demand the reintroduction of permits for Ukrainian hauliers, and the introduction of a separate lane for empty lorries returning to Poland.

Ukrainian government sources said that by the weekend there was a queue of more than 2,500 lorries waiting to enter Ukraine, according to *Unian*. Businesses reported to *Strana* that the cost of transporting cargo from Gdansk to Kyiv had quadrupled due to the blockade. Protesting lorry drivers say they will continue until the new year if their demands are not met.

One protest organiser told *Ukrinform* that drivers often wait 10-12 days at the border before they can return home after delivering their cargo in Ukraine. The president of the Association of International Road Carriers, which represents Polish haulage firms and self-employed lorry drivers, told *Dziennik Wschodni* that Polish drivers suffered unfair competition since the European Union lifted the requirement for permits and many fees for Ukrainian hauliers.

Ukrainian officials refused to consider meeting the protesting drivers' demands. The Deputy Minister of Infrastructure wrote that "it is fundamental for us: the 'transport visa-free regime' should continue and be extended. At least until our victory comes."

## **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 latest round of talks brokered by the government mediation service Acas between Unite and Go North East on Tuesday broke down with no resolution. The Unite members walked out after rejecting a revised offer from the company, by an 81 percent majority on a 93 percent turnout.

The drivers 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, exempting school bus services.

In a separate dispute workers employed by Warrington's Own Buses, owned by Warrington Borough Council, voted by an 83 percent in a consultative ballot in favour of striking.

The Unite union members are protesting a bullying culture by management and its sacking of a driver/union representative on an alleged trumped-up charge. Unite's press release talks of formal action taking place in "the coming weeks."

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

Staff including school bus transport, administration, catering, cleaning and classroom assistants at Northern Ireland's Education Authority began a 48-hour strike on Tuesday.

The around 800 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 Thursday they were joined by Unison, GMB and NIPSA members at the authority.

### **Refuse workers in South Tyneside, UK walk out over bullying claims**

UK domestic refuse collection workers employed by South Tyneside Council at its South Shield base began a four-day walkout Tuesday.

The GMB members accuse the depot's management of bullying, and voted by a 100 percent majority for the stoppage. According to the GMB, 80 percent of the workforce are on or were recently on a formal warning. The dispute was sparked by management's disciplining of workers for assisting elderly and disabled residents.

### **Three-day strike by UK lecturers at eight colleges over pay and conditions**

A three-day of strike by lecturers at eight colleges began on Tuesday.

A ballot of University and College Union (UCU) members working in Further Education colleges earlier in the year at nearly 90 colleges showed a high percentage of members prepared to strike. However, the turnout at only 30 colleges was above the 50 percent needed under Tory anti-trade union laws for a strike to be legal.

Since the ballot result, 22 colleges have offered pay settlements of 6.5 percent or just above, leaving only eight colleges taking part in the stoppages. The current RPI inflation rate is 8.9 percent. Among the

colleges striking were Bolton College, Croydon College and Newcastle and Stafford College Group. A rally took place at Emmanuel Centre in London on Tuesday, addressed by MP John McDonnell.

### **College support staff in Huddersfield, England hold further strikes over pay**

UK support staff at Kirklees college were on strike November 7-9 in an ongoing dispute over pay.

The Unison union members want a 10 percent rise, with a minimum of £2,000 backdated to September 2022. The college management refused to negotiate and imposed a pay award for this year, saying it will not review pay until 2025.

They previously held four days of stoppages in September over the same issue. In that strike they were joined by lecturing staff belonging to the UCU, whose strike mandate has now expired.

### **Further strikes by mental health social workers at Barnet council in London over staff shortages**

Mental health workers at Barnet's north and south teams in London began a three-day stoppage on Tuesday over chronic staff shortages.

The Unison members already held stoppages on September 26, October 3-4, October 10-12 and November 7-9. They are also due to walk out December 4-8. Next year they will walk out January 15-19, February 5-9 and March 4-8.

In June, the Unison union branch reported nine workers 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 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.

### **UK packaging distribution workers at DS Smith Logistics to strike over pay**

UK packaging LGV distribution drivers at DS Smith Logistics are to walk out November 20-27 after rejecting a 5 percent pay offer. The pay rise is due from May, when the RPI inflation figure was over 11 percent.

The Unite union members are based at depots in Cornwall, Kent, Bristol and Nottinghamshire. The drivers supply cardboard packaging for companies such as Amazon, Cadbury and Haribo. Further stoppages could take place in December if the dispute is not resolved.

### **Maintenance oil and gas workers at two plants in Scotland to strike over pay**

Around 150 workers employed by contractor company Kaefer at the

Mossmorran liquid gas plant and St Fergus gas plant in Scotland are to strike over pay.

The Unite union members voted by a 75 percent majority to walk out for a week from November 27, and impose an overtime ban. They work as scaffolders, mechanical supervisors and general assistants among other roles. They are protesting Kaefer's refusal to make a cost-of-living increase for this year. Kaefer, under contract to Shell which would fund any subsequent deal, reported profits of around £32 billion for 2022, double the previous year.

### **Scottish educational qualification body staff vote to strike over pay**

Hundreds of staff working for the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) voted by over 70 percent to strike over pay.

The Unite members rejected the SQA pay offer of 5.75 percent for 2023 and 3.15 percent for 2024. The Unite press release announcing the stoppage notes 38 percent of SQA staff are at the top of their pay grade and so not eligible for pay progression increases. Unite has not yet announced any dates for stoppages.

### **Women's Aid workers in Glasgow, Scotland vote to strike after staff suspended for whistleblowing over bullying allegations**

Staff at Scotland's Glasgow East Women's Aid unit in Easterhouse voted by 100 percent to strike.

Thirteen Unite members were suspended after whistleblowing over bullying allegations at the unit. Five of the 13 were dismissed from their jobs during the balloting process.

The unit is closed temporarily due to the suspensions, and has now been closed for eight weeks. Women and children suffering domestic abuse in the deprived Easterhouse area of Glasgow face the temporary loss of a vital service.

### **Ongoing strikes and protests by construction and steel workers in Iran**

On November 6, around 150 construction workers at the Arme-No Petrochemical company in the city of Chabahar went on strike over five months' unpaid wages. They mounted picket lines, and turned back company engineers trying to enter the site.

On Sunday, National Steel Industrial Group workers in Ahvaz were on strike for the third day in a row. All sections of workers at the plant were involved. Their demands are for higher pay in line with the pay of other steel company workers. They were also demanding the reinstatement of workers fired by the company. Their chants of "This is just the beginning" showed the determination of their fight.

Iran has been convulsed by workers' strikes and pensioners' protests over the rising cost of living, as well as the suppression of democratic rights and state violence. Around 60 percent of the population live in poverty, partly due to US sanctions. Iran is in the firing line of US expanding wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

### **Despite court order, Nigerian workers begin indefinite national strike against state violence**

Nigerian workers began a nationwide strike on November 14, sparked by state violence to intimidate their fight over pay and conditions, despite a National Industrial Court attempt to prevent it.

At least 19 union members in the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) began the action on November 14, including rail, maritime and other transport workers, textile workers, postal and telecom workers, local government workers and judicial staff, academic and other education staff. Others involved include bank workers, public service and health workers. Electricity workers across Nigeria belonging to the National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) joined the action on November 14, shutting down the national grid and causing a national blackout.

Their demands include the arrest and prosecution of those involved in the state-organised beating of NLC president Joe Ajaero and other labour leaders in Imo State, the sacking of officials, including the Imo commissioner of police and area commissioner, as well as long-standing grievances like the lack of implementation of the minimum wage. Ajaero was assaulted in Imo State capital Owerri on November 4, when he led a march to demand payment of unpaid salaries, allowances, pensions and gratuities, as well as pay levels in line with the minimum wage.

In Kano State, all primary and secondary schools and tertiary education establishments were closed, as well as all banks and hospitals.

Prior to the national stoppage, workers in Abuja and Imo State brought airports to a standstill. Workers locked down the Nnamdi Azikiwe International, Abuja, and the Sam Mbakwe International Airport in Owerri.

A striker at the Abuja airport, Christopher Wilson said they began with a procession heading to the airport. They tried to enter the airport but were stopped by the military. He said they then blocked the airport's entry and exit routes, causing traffic gridlock for vehicles, flight delays, missed flights and disruption of all activities around the airport.

### **Gold One miners in South Africa strike over union recognition**

South African miners at the Gold One mine east of Johannesburg began a strike at the end of last week over union recognition.

They are demanding the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) is recognised as the majority union. Currently the company recognises only the National Union of Mineworkers. They are calling for a ballot of the gold miners to establish ACMU as the majority union.

Miners picketed the entrance to the mine to demand a date for recognition of the AMCU. On Monday, they clashed with police who used rubber bullets to disperse them. Police also confiscated cars belonging to the pickets. The dispersed miners later returned to the mine entrance to continue the picket.

Last month, around 500 of the miners held a three-day underground sit-in to push for recognition of the AMCU. Gold One claimed some of those involved in the sit-in were held against their will and suspended some miners, launching disciplinary action against them.

### **Teachers in South African province hold protest picket over pay and vacancies**

Teachers picketed schools in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal last week over pay, vacancy levels and lack of money to buy everyday essentials such as paper and ink. The South African Democratic Teachers' Union claimed some head teachers had to use their own money to buy the items. The action was expected to affect the holding of internal examinations for grades 9 to 11 pupils.

### **Workers in South African municipality end long-running strike over pay**

Municipal workers in the Tshwane Metropolitan municipality, which includes Pretoria, returned to work Monday after being out on strike for over three months.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members walked out after the municipality refused to implement a promised 5.4 percent pay rise. The strike impacted services including waste collection, water and electricity supply. During the bitter strike over 100 workers lost their jobs and 15 were arrested.

The workers returned to work with no resolution to their pay dispute. The SAMWU pushed a return to work after it and the municipality agreed to attend talks brokered by the government mediation body, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.



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