

Healthcare workers across Italy strike over austerity budget; steelworkers in Isfahan, Iran walk out over pay and conditions; doctors and dentists begin stoppage in six counties in Kenya

## 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.*

### Italian healthcare workers hold 24-hour strike against austerity budget

On Tuesday, doctors, nurses, midwives and other healthcare workers throughout Italy began a 24-hour strike. The media reported widespread participation in the walkouts, with up to 1.5 million appointments, tests and other health services cancelled or postponed.

Healthcare workers oppose the far-right government's budget for 2024, which involves pension cuts and other austerity measures. They also denounced the lack of staff, as there is a shortage of 30,000 doctors and 65,000 nurses in hospitals, *Corriere Della Sera* reported. The CGIL union told *SkyTG24* that thanks to cuts in healthcare spending, "4 million Italians don't get treatment because they don't have the money."

### Public sector workers walk out across Flanders, Belgium against new statute on working conditions

Public sector workers in Flanders, Belgium stopped work to oppose a new reform of the statute governing working conditions in the sector. The unions say they have been negotiating for more than four years over this. They accuse the Flemish government of betraying agreements made over protection against unfair dismissal, job security and other matters, *De Standaard* reported.

The strike began as spontaneous walkouts by lock-keepers on Flanders' inland waterways on Monday, which stopped goods being moved from the North Sea ports. According to the North Sea Port company, 58 percent of freight transport from Belgian ports moves inland via waterways. Workers in other public services, such as mental health and vocational training, also reportedly stopped work.

The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, Belgium's largest union federation, quickly signed an agreement with the Flemish government on Tuesday night and called for its members to return to work. However, many workers on the waterways are members of other unions and so

remain on strike.

### Gig economy delivery workers on strike in France denounce "the new slavery"

French delivery workers joined a national strike on Saturday and Sunday against Uber Eats and other large platforms. The stoppage was called in response to an opaque new method of calculating payments introduced by Uber Eats, which many workers say resulted in a cut of up to 20 percent in their income, the Union Indépendant told *France Bleu*.

Uber Eats accepted its changes led to lower payments for some of its 65,000 workers, but claimed there was "a slight increase in average income per trip of 1.4 percent" in pilot studies, *AFP* reported. One delivery worker told *France Bleu* in 2018 he could earn 4,000 euros per month, but now for the same volume of deliveries he only earns 1,500 euros. Another said, "To get by, it's super complicated. We have to work from 9 in the morning until 1 in the morning," and concluded "It's the new slavery."

The trade unions declared a "victory" on Tuesday, after the large "gig economy" companies all agreed to begin negotiations on an agreement covering the whole sector. This commits them to nothing, however, and two unions walked out of a meeting called by the Social Relations Authority for Employment Platforms on Tuesday, accusing the companies of "postponing indefinitely" any discussions on pay, *Libération* reported.

### Danish and Norwegian workers join strikes by Swedish Tesla workers for collective agreement

On Tuesday, Danish port workers and lorry drivers began a sympathy strike in support of Swedish workers at Tesla maintenance workshops. The Swedish workers have been on strike for more than a month, demanding a collective agreement from the American electric car manufacturer.

Around 130 IF Metall union members walked out on October 27. They were joined by 370 colleagues and supported by sympathy strikes across multiple industries. Swedish dock workers refused to handle Tesla's

cargo, but the company continued to import vehicles overland after unloading them elsewhere. According to *Dagens Nyheter*, twice as many Tesla cars were registered in Sweden in November during the strike than in the previous month.

Swedish postal workers also refused to deliver licence plates to Tesla, preventing it from delivering cars to customers. However, a court ordered last week that the Swedish Transport Agency should ensure Tesla can collect its licence plates, or it would fine the agency a million kronor.

The sympathy strike by the United Federation of Danish Workers (3F) members means Tesla's cars should not be unloaded in Danish ports or transported by Danish lorries.

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions also announced it will take similar measures from December 20 if Tesla does not sign a collective agreement. The Swedish subsidiary of Tesla was reportedly ordered by Tesla's owner, the fascist billionaire and world's richest person Elon Musk, not to enter into any collective agreement.

### **Warning strikes throughout the public sector in Germany**

German public sector workers continue a wave of warning strikes in a collective bargaining dispute over the contract for more than a million workers. This week, tens of thousands of workers in hospitals, schools and universities, theatres, day care centres, and other institutions stopped work, joining protests across Germany.

The United Services Union is calling for a pay rise of 10.5 percent, or 500 euros, whichever is higher. However, according to *rbb24*, Verdi is asking for a contract length of two years, so its pay demand, even if accepted, will barely make up for inflation over the past two years. 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.

### **Greek taxi drivers begin rolling 48-hour strikes against new tax bill**

Taxi drivers in Greece began a series of rolling 48-hour strikes from Monday against a new tax bill targeting self-employed workers and freelancers introduced by the right-wing New Democracy government.

Taxi drivers in Thessaloniki stopped work Monday and Tuesday, followed by taxi drivers in Athens Tuesday and Wednesday, and other stoppages throughout the week.

The Attica Taxi Drivers' Union said the new law, which the government claims will tackle tax evasion, will cost some workers thousands of euros each year. *ef.syn* reported an opinion poll in which 70.8 percent of respondents did not believe the bill would reduce tax evasion, and 84.1 percent believed those with high incomes would be "relatively unaffected."

There have been weeks of protests by self-employed workers alongside the taxi drivers' strikes. On Tuesday, another large protest was held outside the parliament building in Athens.

### **Polish lorry drivers continue blockade of Ukrainian border against long delays and unfair competition**

Polish lorry drivers have been blockading the border between Poland and Ukraine for more than a month. The protestors, most of them self-employed or owners of small businesses, demand the end of a permit-free regime in which Ukrainian hauliers are exempted from needing to obtain permits and paying many fees.

The EU introduced this regime in June 2022 to facilitate the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia. Polish hauliers say this has led to unfair competition, making it difficult for them to earn a living. Protesting lorry drivers also demanded the introduction of a separate queue for empty lorries returning from Ukraine, as drivers can spend 10-12 days at the border waiting to return home.

Both Polish and Ukrainian governments indicated last week they were taking steps to meet the latter demand, but Ukraine and the EU refused to consider reintroducing permits for Ukrainian hauliers. The European Commissioner for Transport reiterated this Monday that the visa-free regime would continue despite the opposition of Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, *Ukrinform* reported.

Ukrainian officials repeatedly called on the Polish authorities to illegalise the protests and lift the blockade by force. Ukraine's ambassador to Poland reiterated this week that it expected the visa-free regime to continue until the end of the NATO war against Russia, and "there is no reason to continue protests."

The queues of lorries waiting to re-enter Ukraine from Poland have reduced this week, from around 3,500 to 2,500, as cargo is taken across the border through Slovakia and Hungary instead.

### **Georgian miners accuse Georgian Manganese of renegeing on agreement, resume strike**

Miners at Georgian Manganese, who stopped work and held a hunger strike in June to demand a reduction in working hours and a pay rise, walked out again December 1, accusing the company of renegeing on the agreement it made in June.

According to *Caucasian Knot*, around 800 miners began a strike near the village of Darkveti, joined the next day by colleagues from 13 mines in Chiatura.

The miners said Georgian Manganese had promised to limit shifts to 12 hours and increase pay. They told *Formula TV* they had been told they could have 12-hour shifts, but only if they accepted there would be no pay rise.

### **Workers at textile factory in Turkey oppose unfair sacking of colleague**

Workers at Özak Tekstil, a textiles company in the Turkish city of Urfa, have been on strike since one of their colleagues was fired on November 27.

Seher Gülel, employed by Özak Tekstil since May, told *Evrensel* she was fired under the pretext of a minor mistake at work after she spoke in a meeting of the B?RTEK-SEN union and said her manager particularly oppressed women in the workplace. She and other members of B?RTEK-SEN reported being threatened by both management and the recognised union Öz ?plik-??.

Other workers stopped work and have been protesting outside the factory. They demand Gülel's reinstatement and the right to leave the company-backed union Öz ?plik-?? and join B?RTEK-SEN.

*Evrensel* reported that at a meeting outside the factory, a worker read a letter from 450 colleagues who had “resigned of our own free will from the Öz ?plik-?? Union, which oppressed the workers by acting as employer representatives and did not represent the workers in any way.”

### **Strike by bus manufacturer workers in Falkirk, Scotland over pay**

Around 400 coach builders and paint sprayers working for coachbuilder Alexander Dennis Limited (ADL) in Falkirk, Scotland began a two-week strike Monday after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer.

The Unite members voted by over 81 percent to walk out. The offer represents a real-terms pay cut. ADL, the world’s largest double-decker bus manufacturer, has a full order book.

### **Further strikes at hospital in London, UK over pay and conditions**

Various groups of workers employed at the St Barts Hospital Trust at four main sites in London are striking this week over pay and conditions.

The Unite union members work as ancillary staff, lab technicians, nurses and security staff. The lab technicians are opposing imposition of new work rotas that will greatly impact their work/life balance. Most of the workers were out from Monday to Wednesday. Porters and domestic staff previously employed by outsourcer Serco are out until the weekend to protest not receiving the “COVID bonus” paid to other National Health Service (NHS) staff as part of the recent pay award.

### **UK healthcare staff at Dudley hospitals strike over COVID bonus payment**

Around 60 ancillary healthcare staff working at three hospitals in the Dudley Trust group in England held a 24-hour strike Monday. A further 24-hour stoppage is planned for Friday.

The Unite union members are employed by outsourcer Mitie at the hospitals in catering, patient food and administration. The walkouts are in opposition to Mitie not paying the “COVID bonus” paid to other health staff as part of a recent pay deal. It would mean the workers forgoing the lump sum of between £1,655 and £3,789.

Further 24-hour stoppages are planned for December 11, 15 and 18, January 5, 8, 12, 15, 19, 22, 26 and 29, and February 2, 5, 9, 12, 16, 19 and 23.

### **Logistics drivers at BMW Mini plant in Oxford, England continue series of strikes over proposed pay cut**

Around 40 UK lorry drivers working for Imperial Logistics at the BMW Mini car plant in Oxford are continuing their series of strikes. They walked out three days this week.

The Unite union members oppose plans by Imperial Logistics to cut their pay by 20 percent for around five months while BMW rejigs its production lines. Three days of stoppages are scheduled for next week as

part of a programme of 14 days of stoppages. They also began an overtime ban November 14.

Imperial Logistics was recently taken over by DP World, responsible in 2022 for sacking 800 P&O Ferry workers and replacing them with lower paid agency staff.

### **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 five-day stoppage Monday over chronic staff shortages, with reportedly 15 month waiting lists for referrals.

The Unison members have held 12 days of stoppages since September. They plan to continue the walkouts next year, with stoppages scheduled for 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 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.

### **Junior doctors in England to hold further stoppages in long-running dispute over pay**

Junior doctors in England have announced a further programme of stoppages in their long-running pay dispute.

The British Medical Association (BMA) members announced a three-day stoppage beginning December 20, followed by a six-day stoppage from January 3. Their original demand was for full restoration of pay lost since 2008. This would mean a 35 percent rise. Following five weeks of talks between the BMA and recently appointed Conservative Health Secretary, Victoria Atkins, no agreement was made.

The government increased its previously imposed 8.8 percent rise by a further 3 percent but spread across grades. The BMA junior doctors will be offering a Christmas Day level of cover throughout the strike period.

Previous strikes by junior doctors took place while other health staff, including nurses and ambulance workers, were in dispute. The unions representing these health workers pushed through below-inflation deals, leaving the junior doctors’ fight isolated.

In November, the BMA recommended a sellout deal for its around 59,000 members working as consultants for the NHS. The basic deal outlined in a BMA press release was “for 4.95 percent ‘investment in pay’—for this financial year—in addition to the 6 percent pay uplift already awarded for this year. If the offer is accepted, the changes will be applicable from January 2024, but will be paid retrospectively in April 2024.”

The same deal was put to consultants represented by the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association. Consultants in the unions are voting on the new offer.

### **Further strike planned by educational psychologists in England and**

## **Wales over pay**

Educational psychologists in England and Wales are to hold a further strike over pay on December 13, following one on November 15. They held rallies in London and Cardiff for the November stoppage.

The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) members voted by an 86 percent majority on a 70 percent turnout for the action. According to the AEP, their members' pay has been eroded by around 17 percent in real terms since 2011. This has led to educational psychologists leaving local authority employment to work in the private sector or quitting the profession altogether. There is a backlog of requests for their services in many local authorities.

The December 13 strike will affect around 135 local authorities across England and Wales.

## **Further strikes by public transport workers in Northern Ireland announced over pay**

Workers employed by the public transport body Translink in Northern Ireland, who held a 24-hour stoppage December 1, have announced further strikes.

They will hold 24-hour stoppages on December 15, 16, and 22. The previous stoppage led to severe disruption across the province. Translink is responsible for train and bus services in the province.

Unite, GMB and SIPTU members voted by majorities of over 90 percent to walk out, after Translink announced it would not be offering a pay rise this year and refused to set a date for negotiations.

The further strikes in the period of the run-up to the Christmas holiday period are expected to cause severe disruption.

## **Workers at major UK charity set to walk out over pay**

Around 500 workers employed by charity Oxfam GB in Oxford, England are set to begin a 17-day stoppage on Friday.

The Unite union members voted by an 83 percent majority for the stoppage, after rejecting a 6 percent pay offer. According to Unite, the workers have seen a real-terms cut in pay of 21 percent since 2018. The stoppage is expected to disrupt the work at Oxfam offices and 200 shops. It is the first strike in the organisation's 81-year history.

Unite accused Oxfam of planning to use unpaid volunteers to undermine the strike.

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

UK packaging LGV distribution drivers at DS Smith Logistics are to hold a further strike in their dispute over pay.

The Unite union members will walk out December 11-23. They have already been on strike 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. They are based at depots in Cornwall, Kent, Bristol and Nottinghamshire. The drivers supply cardboard packaging for companies

such as Amazon, Cadbury and Haribo.

DS Logistics is a wholly owned subsidiary of DS Smith PLC, which reported pre-tax profits for 2022/23 of £661 million, up by over 70 percent on the previous year.

## **Food logistics warehouse workers in Swindon, England to strike over pay**

Around 150 warehouse workers employed by GXO logistics contractor at their two cold storage warehouses in Swindon, England are to strike over pay.

The Unite union members, many on the minimum wage, rejected a two-year below-inflation offer by the company. They are set to strike December 14-18 and again December 27-30. The warehouses supply frozen foods to outlets of the retailer Iceland in southwest England, and the stoppages could lead to shortages in the busy Christmas holiday period.

## **Protest by housing repair workers at London council involved in programme of strikes over pay**

Housing repair workers employed by the London borough of Haringey held a protest on Tuesday outside a meeting of the council's cabinet.

Around 130 Unite union members have held stoppages on September 25, October 2, November 1-3 and November 15-17. A further stoppage is planned December 18-24.

They are demanding an increase on the nationally imposed flat rate increase of £1,925, a real-terms pay cut. The council is refusing to increase the London weighting allowance. A Haringey council director admits they are losing staff to neighbouring London councils offering higher rates of pay.

## **Strike by Iranian steelworkers in Isfahan for improved pay and conditions**

On Saturday, workers from all three shifts at the Isfahan Steel Company in Iran walked out.

More than three thousand Free Union of Iranian Workers members are demanding improved pay and working conditions, parity with other Iranian steel workers and implementation of a job classification scheme which would offer improved pay. Following a march within the factory premises, they assembled outside to protest and call out their demands.

The workers held a hunger strike on November 26, refusing the company-supplied food.

Around 60 percent of Iran's population lives in poverty due to the removal of food subsidies and US sanctions. Iran is in the firing line of US expanding wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

## **Strikes and impending strikes by doctors in six Kenyan counties over pay and conditions**

Doctors and dentists have begun or are about to begin strikes in six of Kenya's 47 counties.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) members are calling for a 40 percent salary increase. Other issues include the failure to honour Collective Bargaining Agreements, inadequate hospital equipment, shortage of drugs and delay in promotion. There are also specific issues in each of the counties.

The counties affected are Busia, Embu, Kajiado, Kilifi, Nakuru and Vihiga. The strike in Vihiga county began last week, the Kajiado strike will begin Thursday, and in Nakuru December 17-20, in Kilifi December 18 and in Embu by the end of the month. A planned strike in Kakamega county was called off after talks between the Kakamega governor and KMPDU officials on Monday.

### **Strike by medics at Khartoum hospital, Sudan in response to shooting attack on medical director**

Doctors at the Bashaier Hospital in the south of the Sudanese capital city Khartoum began an open-ended strike on Tuesday. They were protesting the shooting attack on the medical director and a doctor in the emergency room, with others being threatened.

The shootings were carried out by a Rapid Support Forces (RSF) member. The RSF has been engaged in a civil war with regular Sudanese armed forces since April of this year. The hospital, run by Médecins Sans Frontières, is the only medical provision still operating in the southern area of Khartoum.

### **Kenyan intern teachers protest, threaten to strike if not given permanent jobs**

Around 700 Junior Secondary School (JSS) interns working in Kwale junior schools in Kenya are threatening to walk out if they are not given permanent status and pension rights when their temporary contracts expire this month.

They will not renew their contracts or return to school unless they are given permanent status by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC). The interns are only paid Sh17,000 (\$180) a month and are expected to teach subjects outside their specialisations. They held a protest on Tuesday.

JSS teachers in the city of Kisumu also held protests on Monday. They are calling on the TSC to give them permanent employment rights when their intern contracts come to an end this month. JSS teachers in Nairobi were also planning protests over the same issue.

### **Strike by judiciary workers in Nigerian state of Osun continues**

Judiciary staff in the state of Osun, Nigeria are continuing their stoppage begun November 29. The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria members are protesting the high-handed attitude of the state Chief Justice, Adepele Ojo. They accuse her of indiscriminately suspending judiciary workers. They are also protesting the non-payment of wardrobe allowances.

### **Protest by students at Calabar University, Nigeria as fees are doubled**

Around 100 students at the University of Calabar in Nigeria held a protest on Monday, objecting to the announcement that the university was to double tuition fees. The protesters barricaded the road leading to the university, meaning university workers were unable to enter. The barricades also led to traffic jams.

### **Police teargas protesting students at Nigerian university campus**

Police teargassed protesting students at the Yelwa Campus of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in Bauchi, Nigeria on Monday. The students were protesting the death of a geology student, stabbed in a robbery incident on Saturday as he was returning to his lodgings.



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