

Health workers' struggle against privatisation of mental health services and addiction centres in Greece continues; general strike in West Bank over assassination of Hamas leader in Iranian capital Tehran; electricity workers in Enugu State, Nigeria protest to demand release of arrested workers

## 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.*

### Health workers in Greece continue fight against privatisation of mental health and addiction treatment

Healthcare workers in Greece continue to oppose the right-wing New Democracy government's "psychiatric reform" bill, which will privatise the provision of mental health and addiction services.

On Monday, when the bill was voted on, doctors joined a one-day strike and protested outside parliament. Mental health service workers, doctors and workers at drug rehabilitation centres previously held stoppages across Greece and a rally near parliament in Syntagma Square, Athens on July 24.

The bill will close and centralise local treatment centres and open services to private operators. According to *ef.syn*, the bill will close two of the country's three remaining psychiatric hospitals, and 150 operators of mental health and addiction centres have warned that it will destroy their sectors.

The government just introduced a six-day working week after over a decade of austerity first implemented by Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left).

### Greek shipbuilders strike against deadly working conditions following fatal accident

Shipbuilding and repair workers in Greece held a 24-hour strike on July 25, after a fatal accident at a shipyard the previous day in Salamina, near Athens.

According to *ef.syn*, the vehicle ramp of a passenger ferry being repaired fell, killing 63-year-old Vassilis Gavalas and injuring another colleague.

The Metal Union, in a press release, said Gavalas was "the third colleague in the last year alone who does not come home from work so that the ships of the shipowners can get on the line quickly and not lose a single euro of the billions they make."

Workers accused the government of serving the interests of shipowners and employers and demanded improved safety measures.

### Cork manufacturing workers hold national strike in Portugal

Workers at Portuguese cork manufacturers held a nationwide strike on Wednesday, demanding a pay increase from the lucrative industry.

More than half of the world's cork is produced in Portugal, with exports totalling 1.23 billion euros in 2023.

The Portuguese Federation of Construction, Ceramics and Glass Unions said most workers in the industry "have a base [monthly] salary of 928 euros, increasingly close to the national minimum wage" and "face harsh working conditions with high temperatures and physical exertion that have a negative impact on their health," *Lusa* reported. The unions denounced the "intransigence" of employers who offered salary increases of only 36 euros in 2024 and 24 euros in 2025.

### Portuguese transport workers strike over wages and against "flexibility"

A strike by workers at Comboios de Portugal (CP), the state-owned rail company, cancelled 80 percent of all rail services on July 22, according to *Lusa*.

A court had imposed minimum service requirements of 20 percent, so the impact would have been even higher if more workers had not been prevented from walking out.

The Federation of Transport and Communications Unions (Fectrans) called the strike after rejecting an offer of a 1.5 percent pay rise and an

increase in the meal allowance. CP said these terms were accepted by the train drivers' and other unions, but Fectrans said the company's proposal also "increases the flexibility of roles and does not add value to the salary scale."

A further strike, planned for July 24, was called off after Fectrans accepted an offer. This had the same pay increase but included a promise of negotiations in September over "reviewing the salary scales" and stated that new roles combining the responsibilities of several previous roles would be "voluntary."

Workers at the Porto Public Transport Company (STCP) also began a 26-hour strike on July 22, calling for a pay rise of at least 8 percent. STCP reportedly offered only 4.7 percent in two stages. Around 75 percent of services in Portugal's second most populous city were cancelled.

On Saturday, workers at Carristur, a subsidiary of the state-owned Lisbon bus and tram company Carris, held a 24-hour strike to call for a pay rise and reduction in working hours, *Lusa* reported. From Sunday they also began partial strikes of three hours at the start and end of the working day. The Union of Road and Urban Transport Workers of Portugal also called for workers at Carristur and Carrisbus, which maintains the vehicle fleet, to be included in the main Carris contract.

### **Manufacturing workers in Prato, Italy, oppose cancellation of sectoral agreement**

On Monday, manufacturing workers in the Italian province of Prato held an eight-hour strike after the Confindustria Toscana Nord (CTN) employers' association unilaterally cancelled the collective agreement covering the whole sector in the province, which employs around 3,000 workers.

According to *Notizie di Prato*, CTN issued a statement denouncing the idea of equal pay scales throughout the province as "anachronistic and penalising for companies and for the workers themselves." From January, the wages and conditions of newly hired workers will be determined by individual companies.

### **Two-day nurses' strike at hospital in Italy against "collapse" of service**

Nurses at the ARNAS Brotzu hospital in Cagliari, Italy held a 48-hour stoppage July 25-26 against overwork, which the Nursing Up union says involves shifts of up to 17 hours. The union told ANSA the hospital was "collapsing" as a result of understaffing and the overwork of the remaining nurses.

### **Strike against dismissal of union members at Mersen factory in Turkey passes 100th day**

Saturday was the 100th day of a strike by members of the Birle?ik Metal-?? union at the Mersen factory in Kocaeli, Turkey. The strike began April 18, after four workers who joined Birle?ik Metal-?? were fired.

One striker told *BirGün* the French multinational owner "can last for a long time due to foreign capital, but we know that they are starting to have difficulties" and "[w]e will continue to resist in this tent and keep watch

24 hours a day until we get our rights."

### **Delivery drivers in Yekaterinburg, Russia walk out over working conditions and pay**

Delivery drivers for Ozon, one of the largest online retail companies in Russia, stopped work in Yekaterinburg on July 21. According to *EI.RU*, around 70 drivers, most of the workforce at the time, refused to deliver goods after complaining of late payment for overtime work and that they could end up working past midnight for long-distance routes.

Ozon denied making payments late but acknowledged that recently drivers "start and finish delivery later than usual" as there was a shortage of warehouse workers. *Lenta* reported comments by the Deputy Head of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, who said couriers' pay should be reduced because it was too close to engineers' salaries.

### **Further strike by job centre security staff in England over pay**

Around 1,500 staff employed by security firm G4S to provide security at Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre offices in England began a week-long walkout on Monday.

The GMB and Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are paid the minimum wage rate of £11.44 an hour. They are demanding a pay rise and an increase in pay grade differential rates. Currently, supervisors are paid only 1p an hour more.

GMB members held several previous stoppages in May, June and July. They were joined by around 200 PCS members, who also took part in joint action in June and July.

Picket lines were mounted at job centres in major cities including Bradford, Huddersfield, Hull, London, Newcastle and Sheffield.

Previous strikes of security staff led to the closure of some job centres over security fears.

### **More stoppages by UK hospital ancillary workers in Nottinghamshire over terms and conditions**

Around 300 hospital ancillary workers employed by contractor Medirest at Sherwood Forest Hospital Trust, England began a two-day strike Thursday.

The GMB union members based at Newark Community Hospital, King's Mill Hospital and Mansfield Community Hospital work as porters, cleaners, security staff, catering workers and in reception. They are seeking parity of terms and conditions with staff directly employed by the NHS at the three hospital sites.

The workers held eight days of stoppages this year over the same issue.

### **Further strikes by hospital ancillary workers at London hospital over pay and conditions set to take place**

Hundreds of ancillary workers employed by contractor Medirest at

Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow in the UK capital are to begin a 48-hour stoppage on Saturday.

The GMB members voted by a 97 percent majority for the stoppage. They work as caterers, cleaners, porters and ward hosts. They demand to be paid the £1,300 lump sum paid to directly employed National Health Service (NHS) staff as part of last year's pay settlement.

They also demand parity of conditions with directly employed NHS staff who carry out the same roles as the Medirest-employed staff. Medirest, an international company, recorded profits of £20 million last year.

#### **Refuse collectors in Sheffield, UK walk out over union recognition**

Around 100 UK refuse collection workers employed by contractor Veolia in Sheffield began a week-long strike Monday.

The Unite union members at the Lumley Street depot in Sheffield are protesting the company's refusal to recognise Unite for collective bargaining despite the union representing 80 percent of the workforce. Veolia, under contract to Sheffield City Council for refuse collection, recognises the GMB union. It disputes Unite's 80 percent figure, saying it is only 47 percent.

#### **Further strike by nurses at two London hospitals over enforced increase in working hours**

Around 50 day-surgery nurses at the Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Trust hospitals in London extended their strike by walking out Tuesday and Wednesday. They previously walked out on June 27, July 2 and 9.

The Unite union members are protesting the extension of their working shift to 9 p.m. and having to work Saturdays. Shifts were already extended by an hour to 8 p.m. The nurses say the extended shifts, introduced to clear backlogs in surgery lists, are leading to burnout.

The Guy's and St Thomas' Trust in central London is one of the UK's busiest, with 2.6 million patient throughputs a year. The newly elected Labour government is planning to use such practices to clear a nationally accumulated backlog of patients needing surgery.

#### **Strike by rail maintenance workers in Buckinghamshire, UK over pay and union rights**

Around 60 UK workers employed by Gemini Rail Services in the Wolverton area of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire began a five-day stoppage Tuesday.

The Unite union members, skilled engineers maintaining rail locomotives and rolling stock, have a long-running grievance over back pay owed to them. Gemini refuses to allow Unite to represent the workers over the grievance.

#### **Gelatine manufacturer workers in Pontypridd, Wales strike over pay**

Around 50 workers employed by PB Leiner gelatine manufacturer in Pontypridd, Wales walked out Wednesday and Thursday.

The GMB members are protesting the erosion of their pay with successive below-inflation pay awards. Pay was cut by 6 percent in real terms this year, after a 7 percent cut last year. Announcing the stoppage, the GMB warned of possible further action.

#### **Hundreds of healthcare assistants at several UK hospitals set to begin month-long strike over back pay**

Several hundred UK healthcare assistants (HCAs) working for hospital trusts in Kettering, Leicester and Northampton in the English Midlands are to begin a month-long strike August 5.

The Unison union members took previous action over their payment bandings. They successfully won their dispute to be paid on the band 3 level rather than the band 2 level they were on. HCAs on band 2 should provide personal care such as feeding and bathing only. Many were doing higher band tasks such as taking blood and inserting cannulas.

Although they won band 3 level pay, they are in dispute over back pay for the level. HCAs at other hospital trusts were able to win band 3 level pay backdated to 2018. The HCAs at Kettering, Leicester and Northampton are pushing for the same back pay date.

#### **Supermarket workers in Cambridgeshire, UK to walk out over working conditions**

Around 150 Asda supermarket workers at the Wisbech store in Cambridgeshire, England are set to walk out for one day on Friday.

The GMB members are protesting working conditions. The issues include cuts in hours, bullying by management, health and safety concerns and no agreement with the GMB for collective bargaining. The workers previously took action over the same issue in March.

They held several days of stoppages in July, and a further 48-hour strike is scheduled to begin August 8.

#### **Planned march to defend Scottish oil refinery**

There will be a march on Saturday aimed at keeping refinery facilities at the Petroineos oil refinery in Grangemouth, Scotland.

The march called by the Unite union will assemble at the Grangemouth Stadium at 11 a.m. to march to Zetland Park for a rally at 1 p.m. The refinery, the only one in Scotland, employs around 500 workers. It produces around 4 percent of the Scottish GDP and represents 8 percent of its industrial base.

Petroineos announced plans in November to close the refinery operations at the site and for it to become just an oil import and export facility.

#### **General strike across West Bank in response to assassination of Hamas leader**

In response to the assassination of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran by Israel, a general strike was called in the West Bank on Wednesday. The strike was observed in all towns and cities across the occupied West Bank. Haniyeh was in Tehran to attend the inauguration ceremony for new Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian.

### **Ongoing strikes and protests by Iranian oil workers**

Saturday saw protests by formal (permanently directly employed) workers of the Pars Oil and Gas Company in Asaluyeh. It was in support of an ongoing dispute covering several issues. The issues include demands for the sacking of corrupt and incompetent managers, a lifting of the cap on earnings and the limitation of retirement pensions.

Meanwhile the strike of around 24,000 oil workers employed through contractors at over 100 companies continues. Their demands include the elimination of contractors, higher pay and a 14-day working/14-day resting roster.

### **Continuing unrest and industrial action across Iran**

On Monday, customers of the state-owned Modiran Vehicle Manufacturing Company rallied outside the company's office in Tehran. They were protesting price rises imposed by the company.

Monday also saw protests by retirees of the Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI) in several cities including Isfahan, Sanandaj, Tehran and Urmia. They were protesting the declining value of their pensions.

Shadegan Steel workers recently made redundant rallied outside the company headquarters on Monday and Tuesday, protesting the loss of jobs and demanding increased compensation. The company CEO told state television that 700 workers were dismissed following the partial completion of a project and that the remaining 400 will lose their jobs when the project is completed.

Tuesday saw the fourth day of a strike by workers at the Chah Bahar desalination project. They were protesting several months arrears of wages.

The economy is collapsing, exacerbated by US sanctions, with an inflation rate of 35 percent. President Masoud Pezeshkian favours rapprochement with the US. None of the competing factions in the ruling elite can answer US war plans against Iran. As the assassination of Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran and the targeting of Iranian-aligned Hezbollah leader Mushin Shukr in Beirut show, NATO is intent on expanding war in the Middle East against Iran, Russia in Ukraine and ultimately China.

### **Nigerian electricity workers in Enugu State protest to demand release of workers arrested for demanding their rights**

Workers at Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) held a protest on July 30 over the indiscriminate arrest and intimidation of colleagues by police at the instigation of management. National Union of Electricity Employees members took to the streets across Enugu State, including in Awka, shutting down all EEDC offices.

The demonstrators demanded the release of all the workers held in police detention, arrested because of their opposition to management's violations of the conditions of service and the humiliating treatment of the workforce. The union reported a number of outstanding labour issues, including delays in paying salaries, wage arrears and the ending of the staff medicare scheme.

### **Police shoot two students at Ntungamo school in Uganda over discipline issue**

Two students at Ntungamo school in Uganda were shot and injured by police after they became "rowdy" and "started breaking windows" (in the words of the headteacher).

In events reminiscent of a scene from a Dickens novel, the students were angered after two of their peers were disciplined for "coupling" in violation of school rules.

### **Ugandan roadworkers hold protest to demand unpaid wages**

Ugandan roadworkers on the nine-kilometre Garuga-Gerenge Road held a protest in Wakiso District on July 30, demanding payment by the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) of unpaid wages dating back to January. Their protest was held close to where they were working on the road.

"We have been patient for too long," commented one protester, Joseph Katumba. "We haven't been paid since January, and our families are suffering. We've gone to different UNRA offices, but no one is helping us."

The demonstrators threatened to block the road in Katabai Town if their protest did not achieve their outstanding wages.



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