

Social workers and educators strike against hundreds of job cuts at French Judicial Protection of Youth service; nurses strike in Iran over dire work conditions; South African confectionary workers at Johannesburg factory walk out over pay

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.

Strike against hundreds of job cuts at French Judicial Protection of Youth service

Social workers and educators in France's Judicial Protection of Youth (PJJ) service held a one-day strike on August 14, after plans were announced for budget cuts leading to the loss of 500-600 jobs, *Ouest France* reported.

The PJJ intends to reduce its budget by around 1.6 to 1.8 million euros by not renewing the contracts of precariously employed workers.

Each PJJ educator is responsible for around 25 young people who have been in trouble with the law, meaning the cuts will affect thousands of vulnerable youth. An official from one of the unions which called the strike told AFP, "sometimes all it takes is a helping hand for these young people to find their way back to school, for them to integrate" but with the cuts "we are going to leave them wandering, we are going to leave families in their difficulties."

Hospital service workers in Portugal strike over collective agreement

On August 16, workers at the Common Use Service of Hospitals (SUCH), a private non-profit organisation which provides food, laundry and other services to hospitals, held a one-day strike in the Central region of Portugal.

The Union of Workers in the Hospitality, Tourism, Restaurants and Similar Industries, which represents most workers at SUCH, told *Lusa* the organisation signed a new contract with two other unions, which removed Sunday as a rest day and worsened working conditions in other ways. Striking workers are also protesting the fact that they do not have the same 35-hour working week as those employed directly by the hospitals.

Minimum service requirements prevented 30 percent of workers joining the strike, but the union reported that 60 percent of all workers did walk

out.

Striking journalists at Avgi in Greece denounce "disparaging attitude" of SYRIZA

Journalists and other workers at *Avgi*, a newspaper politically affiliated to the Greek pseudo-left Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), held a 24-hour strike on Thursday, the latest in a series of walkouts begun in June.

The paper's board of directors announced then that "in consultation with the main shareholder [SYRIZA]" it had decided to "suspend the publication of the daily sheet... in order to upgrade the Sunday edition and the 'avgι.gr' website."

The paper refused to guarantee jobs would be protected, and workers report they were not paid in July their salaries for the month, with some owed ten months' pay.

Last week a mass meeting of workers at *Avgi* passed a resolution declaring, "We denounce the main shareholder, SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance, for the disparaging attitude towards the employees of the newspaper."

Vehicle inspectors in Galicia, Spain, continue strikes over pay

Workers at the SYC ITV service in Galicia, Spain, which carries out legally mandated inspections of vehicles for safety and emissions, began a series of strikes every Saturday from August 10.

The ITV workers are in a pay dispute with the private company which holds the contract in the autonomous community of Galicia. They are demanding improvements in pay, working hours and days off, as well as shift bonuses to be made the same for all job categories, *Europa Press* reported. The unions said while salaries have been frozen for years, parent company SyC Applus made profits of 222 million euros for 2023.

More than 95 percent of workers reportedly joined the strikes, but the unions only called them for Saturdays, when the ITV service is only open

in the morning anyway. They also emphasised they had already “lowered their demands to try to bring positions closer together and facilitate the negotiation process.”

Indefinite strike over unpaid salaries at refinery in Spain

On August 26, outsourced maintenance workers at the Repsol oil refinery in the Spanish city of A Coruña will begin an indefinite strike to demand their unpaid salaries.

The 55 workers affected are employed by the Navec Group, which has entered pre-bankruptcy proceedings (negotiations with its creditors) according to *El Español*.

Repsol, a major Spanish multinational, stated it would not intervene in the dispute, claiming that “the labour conflict has to be dealt with within the contracting company itself.”

Warning strike over pay in the confectionary industry in Berlin, Germany

Around 400 workers in Berlin joined a one-day warning strike on Monday during pay negotiations between the Food, Beverage and Hospitality Union (NGG) and big confectionary companies including Storck, manufacturer of the Werther’s Original, and Bahlsen who make the Pick Up bar, *ND* reported.

The companies offered a total pay rise of 5.8 percent spread over 28 months—the equivalent of 2.4 percent per year, barely above current 2.3 percent inflation. The NGG called for a 9.9 percent pay rise in one year, citing “record profits” last year, and told *ND* the employers’ offer was slightly above inflation “[b]ut no one knows how inflation will develop in the coming years.”

Gig economy couriers strike against pricing policy in Krasnodar, Russia

Delivery drivers working for the Yandex GO gig-economy platform in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar held a stoppage on Wednesday against the pricing policy of Russia’s largest tech company.

In a video circulated on Telegram, a driver said the company took too large a fee and that it was not profitable to work. Around 30 workers joined the strike and called for a meeting with Yandex to discuss their demands, *Kommersant* reported.

Utilities workers strike after attack on colleague in Gornji Milanovac, Serbia

Workers at the Public Utility Company (JKP) in the Serbian town of Gornji Milanovac stopped work Monday morning after one of their colleagues was assaulted while driving a water tanker.

In a press release, JKP workers said they frequently suffered “derogatory names, threats, curses” since the recent introduction of water

restrictions, *Danas* reported.

Former workers from bankrupt factory protest over unpaid wages in Montenegro

Workers from the former Košuta shoe factory in Cetinje, Montenegro, protested on the road between Podgorica and Cetinje last week, blocking the road for half an hour to demand wages they should have been paid during the bankruptcy in 2001.

A lawyer for the 700 surviving workers said almost half of the 1,200 workers employed at the time died while waiting for what they are owed, *Radio Television Nikši?* reported.

The workers are owed a total of nearly 3 million euros in unpaid wages, according to *Vijesti*. They have still not been paid and called for the government to intervene but received no response, telling the news site that the prime minister “did not show even the smallest amount of empathy towards his people.”

Warehouse workers oppose dismissal of union members in Istanbul, Turkey

Warehouse workers in the Turkish town of Esenyurt, in Istanbul province, have been protesting for two weeks to oppose the dismissal of six workers who joined the Warehouse, Port, Shipyard and Maritime Workers Union. They demanded a pay rise from a subcontractor at a warehouse for CarrefourSA supermarkets.

At a protest on Tuesday, workers spoke about unbearable conditions and punitive deductions from their pay, saying they could not shop in CarrefourSA stores on their wages, *Evrensel* reported. They said their protests would continue until they were reinstated and had the right to join a union of their choice.

Hundreds of UK hospital ancillary staff at Colchester hospital trust walk out over privatisation plans

Hundreds of ancillary staff at the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust (ESNEFT) began a five-day strike Monday.

The Unison union members who work as caterers, cleaners, housekeepers and porters at Colchester Hospital and Aldeburgh Community Hospital in Suffolk are protesting plans by ESNEFT to privatise the ancillary services provided by the workers. A final decision on the privatisation plans is due November.

Ancillary staff working for ESNEFT at its Ipswich Hospital are already employed by private contractor OCS and have inferior conditions. They have less annual leave and lower sick pay compared to directly employed NHS staff.

Veterinary workers in Wales to extend strike over pay

Around 100 veterinary staff working for Valley Pets in South Wales are

to extend their current pay strike.

They initially walked out on July 16 until July 30. Following the employer's refusal to hold talks the current action began August 6, scheduled to last until August 23 but will now be extended until August 30. Valley Vets is part of the VetPartners group.

The British Veterinary Union (BVU) members rejected a derisory pay deal, effective from April 2024. The BVU is a branch of the Unite union. They are employed as veterinary surgeons, nurses, animal care assistants and receptionists.

The stoppage is the first by veterinary workers employed in private practice. The strikers are providing emergency cover throughout the stoppage.

Announcing the strike, Unite noted, "Valley Vets has offered its lowest paid staff a derisory pay rise that takes them to slightly above the minimum wage. This is despite 80 percent reporting that they regularly borrow money to meet basic living costs and five percent reporting having to use food banks.

"Meanwhile, higher paid workers have been offered increases of between one and 1.5 percent from April 2024. The offer is real terms pay cut as the RPI rate of inflation was 3.3 percent when the deal was due to be implemented."

Unite said VetPartners made gross profits of over £550 million in 2023, an increase of over £100 million on the previous year. VetPartners acquired around 100 practices in the last financial year. It is owned by private equity company BC Partners, which has a North American and European-wide portfolio worth £138 billion.

With the increasing gobbling up of small and independent vet practices by big corporate entities, the BVU has become the fastest growing Unite union branch.

Refuse collectors in Sheffield, England hold further stoppage over union recognition

Around 100 UK refuse collection workers employed by contractor Veolia in Sheffield began an all-out indefinite stoppage Tuesday. It follows a week-long strike which began July 29.

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.

A Unite press release of August 19 announcing the stoppage noted, "Adding to the workers' anger is that Unite has a national bargaining agreement with Veolia across numerous depots throughout the UK."

EIS-FELA union suspends strike by Scottish college lecturers after pay talks but no new offer

The Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA) has suspended strikes by its members due to take place at colleges across Scotland from Tuesday to Thursday, in order to wind down the dispute.

The college lecturers have been involved in a long-running dispute over pay since 2022. The suspension comes after talks on Monday between EIS-FELA officials and college employer representatives, and with the

Scottish government further and higher education minister, Graeme Day, present.

No new offer was made at the talks, however. An EIS-FELA press release of August 19 explained, "Significant progress was made at this meeting, with the result that EIS-FELA and the EIS have decided to suspend three days of strike action, scheduled for this week. This is intended as an act of good faith and in the interests of supporting students and is on the understanding that an improved offer will be made formally by College Employers Scotland in the coming days."

Any new offer will be put to a ballot of EIS-FELA members and in the meantime Action Short of Strike (ASOS) such as not marking assessments will continue.

Protest by Asda supermarket workers in Bedminster, UK over cut in hours

Asda workers held a protest outside an Asda supermarket in Bedminster, near Bristol, UK on Tuesday.

The GMB members were protesting cuts in working hours at the store which has led to health and safety issues and a decline in standards. According to the GMB, hours at the store were cut by around 6 percent over the last two years. Current and past women workers in Asda are owed billions of pounds in equal pay claims, which at the Bedminster store amounts to £2.2 million.

The protesters held a full-size cardboard cut-out of Asda boss Manjit Dale. Dale was a founding partner of TDR capital, now the majority owner of Asda. Workers accuse the TDR of asset stripping, leading to cuts in hours and deteriorating working conditions.

GMB members at the Asda supermarket in Skelton, near Middlesbrough, are currently balloting for strike action over equal pay claims not honoured, cuts in hours and deteriorating working conditions. There have been strikes at several Asda supermarkets over the same issues recently.

Continuing strikes by nurses in Iran over dire work conditions

Nationwide strikes by nurses in Iran have continued into a second week.

The stoppages were sparked by the death of a 32-year-old nurse, Parvaneh Mandani, on August 2 at a hospital in Fars Province. Her death was attributed to Karoshi Syndrome. Karoshi is a Japanese term referring to death from overwork and excessive occupational stress.

According to an *Intellinews* website article of August 20, around a quarter of a million nurses are employed across Iran. This number would need to triple to bring the nurse-patient ratio to agreed standards. The same article notes low wages, with a typical nurse earning around \$200 a month, driving nurses to emigrate. Around 3,000 emigrated in the last year. Overwork has been held responsible for some nurses committing suicide.

This week, nurses in the northeast city of Mashhad, working in the major hospitals such as Akbar, Hasheminejad and Imam Reza, walked out over work conditions. Strikes and protests also took place at hospitals in Jahrom and Yasuji.

Iran is convulsed by ongoing protests and strikes against the authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions. Iran is seen as a major obstacle to US imperialism's drive to

dominate the Middle East as part of NATO's widening war front against Russia in the Ukraine and ultimately China.

Graduates protest in Kurdistan capital over non-recognition of degrees

Tuesday saw a protest by graduates in the Kurdistan capital Erbil. They protested outside the Ministry of Higher Education building against the refusal of the Iraqi government to recognise their degrees.

Baghdad refuses to recognise degrees from nine universities in Kurdistan including the University of Kurdistan, Soran University and the University of Zakho. Thousands of students in the self-governed Kurdistan region are impacted.

The federal government set up three committees in 2019 to evaluate and recognise the degrees from the nine Kurdistan universities but have so far failed to reach agreement.

In August 2023 the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research based in Bagdad announced it would not recognise the Kurdistan university degrees unless the government in Erbil recognised private universities in Iraq.

Israeli trade union federation announces dispute involving crane operators

Two weeks ago, the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut announced an official dispute involving around 2,000 crane operators. Their union has been trying for over a year to engage in talks with the Israeli Builders Association representing employers--over pay, safety and working conditions. Histadrut will escalate the dispute if the builder's association still refuses to negotiate.

Confectionary workers in Johannesburg, South Africa strike for higher pay

Over 600 workers began an indefinite strike Monday at the Johannesburg Mister Sweet confectionary factory after they were offered a 7 percent pay rise by the owners, major South African food manufacturer, Premier.

The Simunye Workers Forum trade union members are demanding R19,500 basic monthly salary and R15 an hour extra for those already on that amount. Currently, most workers earn between R6,000 and R9,000 a month.

South African security guards stop work in protest over pay

Almost 100 armed security guards with Fidelity ADT in Cape Town, South Africa have been on strike since the beginning of August.

The Democratised Transport Logistics and Allied Workers Union members who became employed when Fidelity Services took over security company ADT, are protesting that their salaries are 50 percent

less than the original ADT employees who do the same job. Many of those ADT workers have also come out in solidarity.

Electricity workers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria on strike

Workers employed by the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHED) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria began strike action over "unresolved" disputes with management, although no details of the disputes were reported.

PHED announced an electrical fault on August 14, two days after senior staff members embarked on their strike.

The Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Workers Companies advised its members, other than those required to manage regional supplies, to stay away from their workplace.

University workers in Cross River State, Nigeria hold three-day strike

Non-academic workers at the University of Cross River (also known as UNICROSS) went on strike for three days from August 19.

The unions involved—the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT)—called the action a "warning" strike.

A statement jointly signed by the union leaders said, "The key issues in dispute include poor funding to the university and non-implementation of the 25 and 35 percent consequential salary adjustment." It also complained about the lack of capital projects and the encroaching of local people's activities onto university land.

Liberian health workers at Mahathi company hold protest to demand better working conditions

Health workers at Mahathi Software company in Buchanan, Liberia walked out after they found there was a dead cat in a water drum from which staff members drink. The staff also criticised having to eat in an "unsanitary" area, which poses a health risk.

As well as improved conditions at work, the strikers are demanding a written contract to monitor conditions.



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