

Nurses in the Algarve in Portugal walk out over 12-hour shifts; oil workers protests continue in Iran joined by striking train manufacturing workers; teachers across Kenya on strike over pay and conditions

## 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.*

### Portuguese nurses in the Algarve strike against deteriorating work conditions

On August 22, nurses in the Algarve region of Portugal began a two-day strike against worsening work conditions.

The Portuguese Nurses' Union (SEP) members are demanding increased staffing levels and improved overtime pay. Reportedly, around 70 percent of nurses in the region stopped work.

The SEP said that "the imposition of 12-hour working hours" was illegal, and many nurses were still owed for overtime worked during the early years of the pandemic, *Lusa* reported. It blamed "the worsening of working conditions ... for the increase in requests for dismissal and absenteeism".

The Algarve Local Health Unit claimed to have no record of unpaid overtime but said its payments for working on public holidays or not taking leave were "being subject to legal analysis".

### Pilots and cabin crew strike against Verdi's collective agreement with Discover Airlines in Germany

On Tuesday, pilots and cabin crew at Discover Airlines in Germany began a four-day strike, opposing a collective agreement signed between the Lufthansa subsidiary and the Verdi union.

Cargo pilots at Lufthansa Cityline also joined the strike on Thursday. The Cockpit Association (VC) and Flight Attendants' Organisation (UFO), which called the strike, say Verdi represents "a small handful" of flight crew members, while they have far more members.

The Verdi-backed deal involves a pay rise of up to 38 percent for cabin crew and 16 percent for pilots, *Reuters* reported, but this is a total spread over three years. Discover said it "strongly condemns the strike," referring to it as "completely irresponsible" to stop work during the peak

tourism season when a strike is most effective.

### German court bans warning strike at Hanover Medical School over high workload

A three-day warning strike at the university hospital of the Hanover Medical School (MHH), Germany, due to begin last week, was banned by a court order sought by the Lower Saxony state government, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported.

Lower Saxony is governed by a coalition of Social Democrats and the Green Party.

Nurses at MHH had planned to walk out to demand a collective agreement to relieve their high workloads, *taz* reported. MHH and the state government claimed they were unable to negotiate a new collective agreement as it would require either agreeing it between all the federal states or changing the management structure of the hospital.

A Verdi representative told *taz*, "In the end, it's also a question of political will", but the court ruled the walkout was illegal as "[g]oals are being pursued that cannot be pursued with a strike."

### Metal workers continue two months long strike in Dörtyol, Turkey

Workers at Yolbulan Metal in the Turkish port city of Dörtyol have been on strike for over two months to demand a pay rise.

The Özgelik-?? union members rejected Yolbulan's offer of a 20 percent pay rise for the second half of 2024, a pay cut relative to inflation, which is officially at 62 percent and was even higher for most of the last year.

According to *Evrensel*, on Sunday morning the company attempted to remove materials from the factory for scab production elsewhere, but three lorries were turned away by picketing workers.

## **New strikes over pay by vehicle inspectors in Spain**

Vehicle inspectors at the ITV service in several Spanish autonomous communities are holding strikes over pay and collective agreements. They are responsible for legally mandated inspections of vehicles for safety and emissions.

In Galicia, workers are in a pay dispute with the private company that holds the contract for the ITV service and have stopped work on Saturdays since August 10. 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. Next week they will escalate the dispute by striking on Friday.

ITV workers in Andalusia will begin strikes in September, called by the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union (UGT) for a collective agreement. The CCOO told *Europa Press* that Veiasa, which operates the service, had only offered to sign a collective agreement "in exchange for worsening the conditions of the workforce."

## **Postal workers in Guadalajara, Spain, strike against understaffing**

Last week, workers at Correos—the Spanish state-owned postal company—began a series of strikes in the province of Guadalajara, northeast of Madrid, for two hours at the end of every day.

The four unions that called the strikes said that there are only nine delivery workers for a region with a population over 91,000, making an impossible workload, and they called for higher staffing levels.

## **French firefighters continue strike for protection against carcinogens**

Last week, *Libération* published a series of interviews with firefighters in the French Alpes-Maritimes department, who have been on strike for six months due to their risk of cancer.

A firefighter and representative of the "autonomous union of Alpes-Maritimes firefighters," who returned to work after bladder cancer, told the magazine, "When you do this job, you know the risks. You can die from a fire, from an explosion, from violence, from an accident. But we don't know that we can be poisoned by our job."

Strikers continue to respond to emergency calls, while raising awareness of the dangers they face. They are demanding "suitable equipment, a limit on our exposure over time, screening and monitoring" of the carcinogens they are exposed to.

## **Cabin crew strike over wages at SAS airline in Norway**

Norwegian cabin crew at SAS began a strike on August 23 after the unions and the Scandinavian airline did not reach a pay agreement.

Initially, 115 workers walked out, and hundreds more would have joined on Wednesday, but on Tuesday, the two unions representing cabin crew announced they had signed a deal and called off the strike.

Strikers demanded a pay rise to catch up with their colleagues at other airlines—according to *RTE*, wages at SAS were 15 to 30 percent lower than at Norwegian Air before the strike—as well as improvements to

schedules which only give them one weekend off each month. The announced deal, according to a report in the *Dagens Næringsliv*, includes a pay rise between 5.2 and 7.5 percent, which an official from the SAS Norway Cabin Association said did not "reduce the distance to the others" as it was the same percentage increase as at Norwegian Air.

The deal reportedly also increases the number of weekends off from 12 to 24, but these are not guaranteed, as workers can be made to work on half of them with a "significant [pay] compensation" if SAS chooses.

## **More workers join long-running strike at Tesla in Sweden for collective agreement**

Several dozen mechanics at maintenance workshops for Tesla in Sweden have been on strike since October 2023 to demand a collective agreement. Workers in various Swedish industries and dock workers in Denmark, Norway and Finland have joined boycotts of the US-based electric car manufacturer.

The IF Metall union, which called the strikes, told *Göteborgs-Posten* last week that more members had joined over the summer, with 50 workers now involved, so IF Metall now represents over half of Tesla workers in Sweden.

Tesla refused to sign a collective agreement for almost a year, and IF Metall accused it of bringing scabs from abroad. IF Metall and other unions throughout Scandinavia call for fascistic oligarch Elon Musk to recognise the benefits of working with the unions in suppressing the opposition to the mass job losses, which will accompany the transition to electric car production.

## **More stoppages by job centre security guards in England over pay**

Nearly 2,000 security guards at job centres in England walked out on Tuesday for a week-long stoppage.

The 1,500 GMB and 400 PSC union members are employed by outsourced company G4S. They are on the minimum wage of £11.44 an hour. They turned down an offer of an extra 23p an hour.

They are also striking to oppose being forced to do unpaid training in their own time. The GMB says the company is in breach of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which deems compulsory labour illegal.

GMB members have held over 30 days of action begun in May. PCS members have taken action since June.

Further week-long stoppages are planned from September 9 and 23. The walkouts by security guards has led to the closure of some job centres over safety concerns.

## **Maternity support workers at Grimsby Hospital in England strike over back pay**

UK maternity support workers employed by Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Trust at Grimsby hospital in England began a week-long stoppage Tuesday.

The Unison union members employed as healthcare assistants (HCAs) had been paid on band 2 on the NHS Agenda for Change pay scale. However, the trust accepted that because they perform duties such as

inserting cannulas, they should be on band 3. The dispute is over backdating the lift in pay. The maternity support workers say they are entitled to receive the higher pay band money for the last several years.

They held a 48-hour stoppage over the same issue at the end of July.

### **Social work support staff in Lancashire, UK, hold further stoppage in pay band dispute**

Around 200 social care support officers (SCSOs) working for Lancashire County Council in England began a three-day strike Wednesday.

It is the third round of stoppages held by the Unison union members who have been involved in a long-running dispute over pay grading. SCSOs provide support to social workers, but because of a shortage of social workers and increasing levels of social distress, they are often called on to perform roles and deal with complex situations normally encountered by social workers.

The SCSOs are paid on Grade 6 but Unison argues they should be on Grade 7, earning around £4,000 a year more. Unison accuses employers of using SCSOs as “Social Workers on the cheap.”

### **Aerospace workers in Fareham, England walk out over pay**

Around 150 UK aerospace workers employed by Eaton Ltd in Fareham, England, began a two-day stoppage Thursday.

The Unite union members are seeking an improved pay offer. They are employed as fitters, supervisors and technicians producing parts and products for the aerospace industry.

The top rate for skilled workers at Eaton is set at £32,500 while the UK average is £35,700. The Eaton workers are seeking a single-year pay deal to bring their wages up to the UK average. Instead, Eaton is offering a three-year deal of 4 percent this year, 3.5 percent next year followed by 3 percent in the third year.

Further stoppages are planned for September 16,

### **Traffic wardens walk out in London borough of Ealing over union recognition rights**

Around 40 traffic wardens in the London borough of Ealing walked out Tuesday and are due to remain out until September 18.

The Unite union members are employed by Greener Ealing Ltd, a council-owned company whose main remit is waste collection and recycling. The wardens were employed by outsourcing company Serco until earlier this year. Serco recognised the Unite union, but on transfer, Greener Ealing refused to grant Unite recognition to represent the traffic wardens.

### **Strike by refuse collectors in Armagh, Northern Ireland over “hostile environment” continues**

The strike of environmental services workers employed by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Borough Council in Northern Ireland begun July 17 is continuing.

The Unite union members based in Armagh are responsible for refuse collection in the borough. They accuse management of creating a “hostile environment,” which has seen the dismissal of a shop steward at the Armagh depot and restricted the access right of five union representatives.

What began as a two-week stoppage was extended to August 30 and extended again until September 13.

The workers are also opposed to an ongoing “harmonisation” process, part of a review of public administration, which is lowering employment terms and conditions. The long-running stoppage is impacting domestic waste collections across the ABC area.

### **Concrete product workers in Toome, Northern Ireland, strike over pay**

Around 30 workers employed by Acheson and Glover in the Northern Irish town of Toome began a four-day walkout Tuesday.

The GMB members, who make concrete paving products, rejected a below-inflation pay offer of 2.5 percent for 2024/25 at the same time as the company announced pre-tax profits of £3.4 million. According to the GMB, most workers earn less than the Real Living Wage figure of £12 an hour.

### **Train drivers working for UK company LNER to begin series of weekend strikes**

UK train drivers working for the LNER train operating company (TOC) are set to walk out on Saturday and Sunday and then each weekend until November 10.

The ASLEF union members accuse the state-owned operator of continually breaking agreements and employing bullying tactics, saying there is a complete breakdown in industrial relations. LNER runs the east coast mainline service between London and Edinburgh, serving major cities such as Leeds, Newcastle, and York.

ASLEF claims managers, already on salaries of between £82,000 and £96,000, were paid £500 a shift if it was a rest day or £175 if it was a normal working day to cover for drivers, including scabbing on striking drivers taking part in the long-running pay dispute.

ASLEF stated, “The bottom line is that LNER does not employ enough drivers to deliver the services it has promised passengers ... it has always relied on favours and goodwill and, when that evaporated, they started to try to bully our members, and then to break our agreements.”

Drivers in LNER along with drivers in the other TOCs are currently balloting on a pay offer of nearly 15 percent over three years to end an almost two-year running pay dispute.

### **Border Force staff at London’s Heathrow airport to strike over roster changes**

Around 650 Border Force staff working at terminals 2, 3, 4 and 5 at

Heathrow airport in the UK capital are to begin a four-day stoppage Saturday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members have been in dispute since April over imposed changes to their rosters, which have impacted their work life balance. To date they have taken seven days of stoppages in April, May and June.

According to the PCS, around 160 Border Force staff have left since the new rosters were imposed. Following the strike, they will begin a work-to-rule and overtime ban until September 22.

### **Ongoing protests by oil workers in Iran on permanent contracts over corruption and pay**

Protests by oil workers employed on permanent contracts (formal employees) in Iran, which began in October last year are continuing.

Their demands include the sacking of incompetent and corrupt managers, removal of caps on pay levels and the limiting of retirement pension payments. Tuesday saw protests by refinery workers at the South Pars Gas Complex. The previous day saw a protest march by Pars Oil and Gas Company employees in the city of Asaluyeh.

Workers employed by the Kangan Cement company, one of Iran's leading cement manufacturers, have now been on strike for a month. Among their demands are for workers on temporary contracts to be made permanent, implementation of a job classification scheme and additional holiday leave.

Iran is convulsed by ongoing protests and strikes against the authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions. Iran is a major obstacle to US imperialism's drive to dominate the Middle East as part of NATO's widening war against Russia in the Ukraine and, ultimately, China.

### **Strike by Iranian train manufacturing workers continues**

Monday saw the continuation of the strike by around one thousand Iranian workers employed by the Pars Wagon company in Arak, part of the Mapna Group, which manufactures trains and locomotives.

The workers are protesting layoffs and lack of job security. Their other demands include parity of conditions with other Mapna Group employees, the end of temporary contracts and reinstatement of previously fired workers.

### **Ongoing protests by Iranian nurses and health staff over pay and conditions**

The protests by Iranian nurses and health workers continue. Begun August 2, the protests spread to encompass 37 cities and more than 60 hospitals across Iran.

The response by Iranian authorities, which includes arrests and summoning of protesting nurses, has not lessened the determination of the health workers calling for higher pay and improved working conditions.

Last week saw protests by health workers in Babol, Isfahan, Khomeyni Shahr and Khorramabad.

### **Protests by Iraqi oil workers over privatisation fears**

Monday saw protests by thousands of oil workers in Basra, Iraq. The protests organised by the General Syndicate for Oil and Gas Workers in Iraq was in response to changes in the model of funding to the state-owned oil companies. Workers fear the move is a step toward privatisation.

Burjesia, Makina and North and South Rumaila were among the sites affected.

### **Strike of civil servants in Iraqi city of Sulaimani over wage arrears**

Around 350 civil servants employed by the General Directorate of Sulaimani in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) area of Iraq walked out for the day on Monday. They were protesting arrears of wages of almost two months. Strikes and protests over unpaid wages have become a regular feature of life in the KRG, especially in the city of Sulaimani.

### **Protests by Syrian workers in Libya over wage arrears, pay and working conditions**

Dozens of Syrian workers based in the Libyan city of Benghazi held protests over wage arrears and other issues at the end of last week.

The workers, employed by construction companies, went to work in Libya in response to adverts on social media. They were promised \$600 a month, good living conditions and decent food. The reality they report were wages of \$400 a month, poor living conditions and food unfit for consumption. In addition, the workers report the threat of fines and confiscation of passports of workers wanting to quit their jobs and return to Syria.

### **Kenyan teachers walk out on strike over pay and conditions, defying court order and union sabotage**

Teachers in Kenya began strike action on August 26 and are refusing to return to work unless the government meets their demands over pay, delayed promotions and working conditions.

A court order declaring the strike illegal had no effect on the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) members' resolve. Government ministers pronouncing on the importance of education and promising future improvements were also unable to prevent the stoppage.

KUPPET Secretary Akelo Misoru stated that the teachers will not back down. The other teachers' union, the Kenyan Union of Teachers (KNUT) decided not to call out its members, sabotaging the strike. KNUT entered talks with the Teachers Service Commission, saying 39 percent of the 130,000 teachers in want of promotion had now received it.

## **South African municipal workers barricade major Johannesburg roads in wage dispute**

Municipal workers, reportedly in their thousands, have been protesting over the last week in Johannesburg, South Africa by blocking major highways with barricades of stones, tyres and other debris.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members demand higher wages and the provision of “serviced stands”, plots of land on which workers can build their own homes.

## **Brewery workers at Heineken South Africa strike over pay and hours**

Over 100 workers for Dutch multinational brewing giant Heineken went on strike August 16 at the company’s plant in Gqeberha, South Africa.

The Food and Allied Workers Union members are protesting unilateral changes to their working week, shifts and overtime pay.

## **South African farm workers allied to the Women on Farms Project protest imports of deadly pesticides**

Over 150 women farm workers and their supporters marched to the German consulate in Cape Town, South Africa on Tuesday to demand an end to imports of 67 pesticides manufactured by the German pharmaceutical multinational Bayer AG. The pesticides are banned in the European Union.

The workers, part of the Women on Farms Project (WFP), are in an ongoing fight to change laws on harmful chemical use in the South African farming industry. After the government previously watered down proposed guidelines, the WFP marched to parliament to present their memorandum which said, “This move allows rich, resourced and powerful corporations to undermine the safety and well-being of our agricultural workers and communities.”

## **Protest in Cape Town district South Africa over electricity price hike**

More than 100 residents of Lavender Hill, Cape Town, South Africa protested August 22 against rising electricity prices by forming a human chain to block a main road.

The protestors say prices doubled when new prepayment meters replaced their original ones and higher tariffs were introduced at the same time.

## **South African bank workers strike for pay increase in Eswatini**

A pay strike by workers at Standard Bank in Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, an enclave in South Africa, has forced companies to use other

banks. The Swaziland Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers members are demanding a 7 percent salary increase.

Eswatini is ruled by an absolute monarchy while over a third of its 1.2 million people live below the international poverty line.

## **Nigerian resident doctors on nationwide strike over kidnapping**

Nigerian doctors launched a nationwide strike at midnight on Monday, August 26 in response to the kidnapping of their colleague, Dr Ganiyat Popoola, eight months ago and her continued confinement by her captors.

Dr Popoola, a registrar at the Department of Ophthalmology at the National Eye Centre, Kaduna was abducted on December 27, 2023, along with her husband and nephew. Her husband was released in March, while Popoola and her nephew remain in captivity.

Announcing the strike, the president of the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors, Dr Dele Abdullahi, stated, “The strike is total, and there will be no concessions or emergency care during this period.”

## **Suakin seaport in Sudan brought to a halt by strike**

Workers and small traders at the Osman Digna Port in Suakin, to the south of Port Sudan, brought the port’s operations to a halt from August 21. The strikers set up a huge tent in front of the port to prevent entry and exit.

The action was to demand the retraction of new conditions on the import of goods, enacted at the beginning of the month, forcing small traders to follow complex banking procedures.

Mahmoud Ali, leader of the Suakin Stevedoring Committee, said, “The closure paralysed the port completely, except for passengers. We decided to close the port as a last resort after meeting with all the parties that issued the decision, including members of the Sovereignty Council, ministers, the Customs Administration and the Ministry of Trade.”

Also in Sudan, workers at the Wadi Halfa Customs Clearance Department at the border crossing into Egypt downed tools on August 24. The strike was over new measures, including a weekly rise in the Customs Dollar rate, delays in procedures, and the levying of fees at border crossings by some government agencies.



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