

Strikes and protests by teachers across Europe as new school term begins; high school teachers in Israel walk out over pay; pay strike by coal miners in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa

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.

Strikes at schools and universities across Europe

As students return to underfunded schools and universities across Europe for the new term, teachers and other workers are holding a series of strikes against increasingly difficult conditions.

Spain

Teachers across schools in the Spanish community of Castilla-La Mancha will hold a one-day strike on September 11, the second day of the new school year. The strike was called by three unions representing around 60 percent of teachers in Castilla-La Mancha, *Europa Press* reported.

They demand a reduction in class sizes and the burden of paperwork, as well as reduced teaching hours per teacher and contracts which continue to pay over the summer for short-term staff.

The Socialist Party-led regional government imposed a minimum service requirement of one teacher for every few classes to ensure “the right of parents of under-age students to carry out their work commitments,” *El Español* reported.

Another strike planned in the autonomous community of Asturias for September 10 was called off last week. *EFE* reported that the unions and Asturian government agreed to “study” the demand for teachers over 55 to have shorter hours and to negotiate reducing teaching hours from 25 to 23 hours by the academic year 2026/27.

France

On Thursday, extracurricular teachers in Paris, who run after-school activities, held an hour’s strike for an increase in bonuses to reflect their duties and expertise, and a bonus for those working at schools in the most deprived areas, *Le Figaro* reported.

In the northern French town of Quimperlé, teachers at the Roz Glas vocational high school walked out on strike on Monday to denounce a cut in resources. The striking teachers told *Ouest France* that the total allocation of hours, which determines the resources available to the school, was cut by more than 30 hours since last year, for the same number of students.

From Friday, teachers in primary schools throughout France will join a boycott called by three unions against student assessments. The SNUipp

union said the tests only create stress for students without any educational benefit, and restrict teachers’ freedom in how they teach, *Le Café Pédagogique* reported.

A national strike has also been called for September 10 against the assessments, to oppose the Macron government’s school reforms and to call for improved conditions in schools, particularly smaller class sizes. A union official told *France Bleu* they called for the government “to renounce its education reforms since it lost the legislative election.”

Greece

Greek teachers held a rally in Athens on Wednesday to oppose widespread mergers of schools, which led to the elimination of 1,000 classes, *ef.syn* reported. The restructuring was reportedly to bring class sizes to 27-28 students, which the protesting teachers said was “anti-pedagogical” and based on cost-cutting.

Another rally took place last week outside the Directorate of Secondary Education in Athens, according to *ef.syn*. Teachers called for newly appointed educators to be given permanent contracts and opposed the government’s threats against teachers boycotting school evaluations. The assessments are used to rank schools, which teachers warn could be used to establish a “two-tier” system of education.

Teachers and unions joining the boycott have been sacked and fined, and the minister of education called earlier this year for the president of one union branch to be jailed.

Serbia

Schools opened in Serbia on Monday while teachers announced a “white strike,” in which they continue to teach but give all students 5 out of 5 on every assessment as a form of protest.

The Independent Union of Educational Workers of Serbia (NSPRS) said that teachers are frequently verbally or physically abused by students or parents because of low grades, so would continue their protest until the government met demands over safety, *Danas* reported.

The NSPRS called for stronger legal penalties for violence against teachers, for teachers to be able to suspend students during a class and the abolition of anonymous complaints against teachers, which it said were “due to dissatisfaction with grades” in “99 percent of cases.”

A one-day work stoppage is also planned for September 16 if the Serbian government does not honour its promise to increase teachers’ pay. According to *NIN*, the government agreed last October that a teacher’s starting salary would be equal to the average national salary by January 2025, but recently announced that January’s pay rise will be only one and a half times the increase in the rest of the public sector, which is not enough to catch up to the average.

Italy

On Monday, workers at the University of Cagliari in Italy held a strike against a change in provider for the outsourced security service, as the contracts of 107 workers were transferred to involve a pay cut, ANSA reported. The unions also protest the flexible schedule and lack of guaranteed hours for part-time workers, which “inhibits their ability to plan their own personal lives.”

The Netherlands

Dutch higher education workers joined a rally in Utrecht on Monday against the far-right government’s funding cuts of more than 1 billion euros. The several hundred protestors at the rally chanted, “Strike, strike, strike,” the *Reformatisch Dagblad* reported.

The organisers of the protest threatened to call “the most disruptive strike in Dutch education ever” but have so far only called another rally for November 14.

Turkish metal workers continue major strikes

Metal workers in several factories in Turkey are continuing weeks-long strikes, fighting against low pay and unfair dismissals.

A strike at the Befesa Silver Metal Factory in Şkenderun began over six weeks ago when workers called for an 81 percent pay rise, *Evrensel* reported. A member of the Bırle?ik Metal-?? union said the strike was only possible because he and his colleagues came together and decided to leave their previous union, “that did whatever the boss said.”

Workers at the Yolbulan Metal factory in the port city of Dörtyol have also been on strike for more than two months, after rejecting a pay rise of 20 percent for the second half of 2024, a pay cut relative to the official inflation rate of 62 percent.

One striking Yolbulan worker told *Evrensel* their pay demand was for 30,000 lira, and they are currently paid around the price of one ton of iron, 22,000-23,000 lira. Pointing out that the factory produced 1,000 tonnes of iron every day, he said, “In other words, a worker’s monthly wage is paid by 1 tonne of iron.”

German dock workers strike against partial privatisation of the Port of Hamburg

Dock workers at the Port of Hamburg, Germany’s largest seaport, held a warning strike on Wednesday called by the United Services Union (Verdi) against the partial privatisation of the port’s logistics company HHLA, owned by the city.

According to press reports, Verdi did not demand cancellation of the sale, but a “social collective agreement” which would preserve working conditions.

The following day, the SPD-Green controlled Hamburg parliament approved the sale of 49.9 percent of HHLA’s shares to the Mediterranean Shipping Company, the world’s largest container shipping company, *taz* reported.

More stoppages by nurses at two London hospitals over increase in working hours

Around 100 nurses working as day surgery nurses at London’s Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospital Trust hospitals began a three-day walkout Tuesday, as part of an escalating dispute begun in June. Previous stoppages were held on June 27, July 2, 9 and 30-31.

The Unite union members are protesting the extension of their working shift to 9 p.m. and having to work Saturdays. Shifts have already been extended by an hour until 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.

As part of this week’s action, the nurses staged protests each strike day, including one outside Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s 10 Downing Street residence, on Thursday.

CCTV staff at London borough of Hounslow strike over pay

CCTV staff employed by outsourcing company NSL on behalf of the London borough of Hounslow began a three-week strike over pay on Monday.

The Unite union members had transferred employment from Serco to NSL in December 2023. A pay claim for 2023 tabled at the beginning of that year has still not been addressed.

Marson Holdings, NSL’s parent company, made nearly £32 million profit in 2023.

A strike by around 40 traffic wardens in the London borough of Ealing begun August 27 is continuing. The Unite union members are due to remain out until September 18.

They 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 wardens.

Further strike at UK’s Royal Fleet Auxiliary over pay and conditions

UK seafarers on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) went on strike Tuesday, their fifth stoppage this summer over pay and conditions.

The RMT union members, who work as far afield as Australia, refused all duties bar safety protocols. UK picket lines were mounted at Portland, Birkenhead and Portsmouth.

The RFA, owned by the Ministry of Defence, provides operational and logistical aid to the Royal Marines and Royal Navy, including in the Middle East to support Israel.

The RMT, with other unions, ignored an appeal for solidarity action in October 2023 by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions Gaza and 31 other unions and professional associations. They issued their global counterparts “An Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End All Complicity, Stop Arming Israel.”

Further stoppage by UK packaging workers at Jiffy in Winsford over pay and conditions

Around 50 UK workers employed by the Jiffy packaging company plant in Winsford, Cheshire, began a further week-long stoppage Monday.

They previously walked out for over five weeks and have implemented an overtime ban since July 1. One of the products produced is the Jiffy padded envelope.

The Unite union members rejected a 1.5 percent pay increase, backdated to April 1. This represents a cut in real terms, with RPI inflation at 4.3 percent. The workers are demanding an 8 percent pay rise and an increase in sick pay to 12 weeks from the current eight. They are also demanding a restoration of breaks and changes to bank holiday working arrangements.

The firm's latest profit figures were around £6 million.

Further strikes are scheduled.

Strike by bus refuelling and cleaning staff in Sheffield, England, over pay

UK bus refuelling and cleaning staff working at First Bus's South Yorkshire Olive Grove depot held the first of a series of stoppages on Wednesday.

The Unite union members are employed by contractor Bidvest Noonan to clean and refuel the buses. They were told their wages will not be raised above the legal minimum wage, currently £11.44 an hour. The Bidvest Group, of which Bidvest Noonan is part, made £278 million in profit for the half-year ending December 2023. First Group announced in April that it would voluntarily embrace the real living wage of at least £12 an hour.

Further strike dates are scheduled for September 12, 20, 24 and 30 and October 8-9, 16-17 and 24-25.

Striking refuse collectors in Sheffield, England, hold protest outside council over union recognition

UK refuse collection workers employed by contractor Veolia in Sheffield, who began an all-out indefinite stoppage August 20, protested outside Sheffield Town Hall on Wednesday.

The stoppage by around 100 Unite union members at the Lumley Street depot follows a week-long strike begun July 29. They 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. Veolia reaches this figure by including depots outside Sheffield in its count.

Announcing the stoppage, Unite noted, "Adding to the workers' anger is that Unite has a national bargaining agreement with Veolia across numerous depots throughout the UK."

Veolia are attempting to break the strike by using workers normally based in nearby Barnsley. The GMB union is not opposing this.

Following the protest at midday, the workers handed a petition to the council meeting asking for the council to intervene.

Unite union suspends planned stoppage by cleaning and maintenance workers at UK aircraft manufacturer after new pay offer

The Unite union has suspended a planned stoppage by around 140 UK

workers employed as cleaners and maintenance staff by facilities management contractor CBRE. They were set to strike September 6-7 and 9-10 over pay.

The workers are on CBRE contracts for aircraft manufacturer Airbus at its facilities at Broughton in Wales and Filton near Bristol. Many on the national minimum wage had rejected a derisory pay offer for 2023/24.

Unite suspended the walkout after CBRE came back with an improved offer. Workers are currently balloting on the offer.

CBRE made profits of around £36 million for the year ending December 2022.

Strike by Israeli teachers over pay and hire of non-union staff

High school teachers throughout Israel went on strike Sunday, the first day of the new school year.

Teachers are seeking higher pay, but the Ministry of Education has seen budget cuts driven by the cost of the war in Gaza. Israeli teachers have long suffered low pay. An average Israeli teacher's monthly salary is around NIS 7,583, compared to a national average of NIS 11,000.

Teachers also oppose Ministry of Finance plans to hire teachers on an individual contract basis rather than collectively through the union.

Schools in northern and southern Israel were exempt from the strike because of security concerns, but the strike affected around 2.4 million children.

Strike by Iranian train manufacturing workers over jobs enters sixth week

The strike by around 1,100 Iranian workers employed by the Pars Wagon company in Arak, part of the Mapna Group which manufactures trains and locomotives, has entered its sixth week.

It began July 25 with a sit-in strike inside the factory. On Monday, the strikers broke through security forces to march through the streets. Several workers were arrested.

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

They are also calling for the resignation of the factory's CEO. They accuse the company of cutting employee benefits and delays in paying wages while the company is winning lucrative contracts. They also accuse the company of doling out bonuses to managers' wives while workers experience worsening conditions.

Ongoing protests by Iranian nurses and health staff over pay and conditions enters second month

Protests by Iranian nurses and health workers begun August 2 have now entered their second month and cover more than 50 cities. The nurses and emergency medical technicians are protesting long hours, low wages, mandatory overtime and staff shortages.

The response by Iranian authorities includes arresting and summoning of the protestors. The government acknowledges a shortfall of over \$100

million owed to the country's nurses.

Deteriorating pay and conditions have led to around 20 percent of graduating student nurses wishing to emigrate to find employment. With only 1.5 nurses per 1,000 people, the ratio of nurses in Iran is only half the global average, further exacerbating the situation.

Protests and strikes against Iran's authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards are ongoing, fuelled by US sanctions. Iran is a major obstacle to NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, against Russia in Ukraine and, ultimately, China.

Protests by Iraqi health graduates over employment rights

Iraqi security forces used batons and water cannon to break up protests by health graduates in Baghdad on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Protests have been taking place over the summer against the failure of medical, nursing and health graduate students to gain automatic employment in state bodies, as stipulated under Iraqi legislation. Because of budget restrictions in 2024, however, the normal practice of automatic employment has not happened. The protesting graduates are demanding financial provision be made available to employ them in 2025.

Coal miners in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa strike over pay

Over 300 miners at the Zululand Anthracite Colliery in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, went on strike August 27 in a dispute over wages.

The National Union of Miners members were told to accept the offered long-term agreement, a consumer price index wage increase and bonus tied to production targets, or the colliery will be closed down and striking miners made redundant.

South African municipal workers in Makana, Eastern Cape work to rule in pay dispute

Municipal employees in Makana, South Africa, are conducting an overtime ban after a failure to pay them wages for extra hours worked.

The South African Municipal Workers Union members, including workers in electricity, water and sanitation, fire, traffic, cemeteries and caretakers, say they will not work outside their normal hours of 7.30am to 4.30pm.

Teachers at a school in Limpopo province, South Africa, strike over working conditions

Teachers at Tibamoshito Primary School in Limpopo, South Africa have refused to work because of unsanitary conditions, particularly the lack of water.

The South African Democratic Teachers Union members have presented their concerns over health and safety to the school committee and management team. The provincial education department has instructed the teachers to report for work at any other convenient school.

Kenyan union officials arrested during strike by teachers

Post-primary school teachers in Kenya who walked out on August 26 have refused to return to work unless the government meets their demands.

Their demands include restoration of teachers' allowances, permanent jobs for interns, promotion of those who qualify and the release of deductions taken from their salaries.

Three officials of the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education in Kakamega were arrested during a strike that was ruled illegal by the labour court. The three were accused of causing a disturbance at a primary school by trying to force teachers to join the strike.

The lawyer for the three, Ken Echesa, said the arrests and threats were part of a government plan to intimidate teachers into returning to work.

Egyptian textile workers arrested for striking over minimum wage

Ten textile workers at the Nahdet Samanoud Textiles Company in Egypt were arrested during a week-long strike to demand the minimum wage of 6,000LE.

On Sunday, security forces arrested the workers, including four women, taking them to the National Security Agency headquarters in Mahalla al-Kubra, Gharbiya. Their current location is unknown.

Samanoud has a record of ignoring its employees' demands and of using repressive measures, including pressuring employees to take early retirement.

The wife of one of the arrested workers explained that management pressured her husband into convincing others to abandon the strike. Security forces then arrived at their home and arrested her husband. She added that she is concerned for his health while he is in custody, since he "suffers from high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes, and did not receive his medication."

Nigerian doctors' union calls off stoppage over kidnapping of colleague

The national strike by resident doctors in Nigeria, begun on August 26 in response to the abduction and detention of a colleague, was "suspended" after the union held an extraordinary national executive council.

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

A communique following the meeting stated: "The National Executive Council agreed that work will resume at all centres nationwide by 8:00 am on Monday, September 2, 2024," before saying it will reconvene in three weeks to assess developments.

The Nigerian government had imposed a "no work, no pay" rule against those on strike.



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