

Doctors walk out in warning strike over pay in Germany; protests in Iran mark second anniversary of murder of Mahsa Amini by morality police; striking BMW workers in Pretoria South Africa face police rubber bullets

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 September 2024

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Doctors strike across Germany over pay

Doctors at municipal hospitals across Germany joined a one-day warning strike called by the Marburger Bund union on Monday, during collective bargaining negotiations over pay and shift-work regulations, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported. The contract with the Association of Municipal Employers' Associations (VKA) covers 60,000 doctors.

The Marburger Bund is calling for an 8.5 percent pay rise in one year, and said "doctors are being asked to forego salary increases" by the VKA "because otherwise they would worsen the economic situation of the clinics." Thousands of doctors joined rallies in cities throughout Germany.

Nurses at the Hanover Medical School university hospital also began a three-day strike on Monday to demand a collective agreement to relieve their high workloads. A previous three-day strike in August was banned by a court order sought by Lower Saxony's SPD-Green government.

Strikes at medical labs in France against funding cuts

Biologists in medical laboratories across France begin four days of strikes on Friday, against a drop in per test funding.

According to *Ouest France*, the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAM) allotted a fixed budget of around 3.8 billion euros for medical testing in 2024 but did not increase the funding when demand was higher than expected.

Medical biologists' unions say this has led to the funding they receive for each operation falling by as much as 10 percent. CNAM claimed to *Le Figaro* that the cut is only 3.1 percent, and that the cuts are "the strict application of the protocol signed with the biologists last year and therefore perfectly compatible with the good financial health of the biologists," despite the unforeseen growth in demand. Biologists warned that closures of local labs or withdrawal of some services were possible.

Health and social care workers at non-profit Uneba in Italy strike against pay offer

On Monday, health and social care workers in the Italian non-profit service network Uneba held a national strike, calling for a new collective agreement to replace the one which expired over four years ago.

According to *Roma Today*, Uneba offered a new contract with a pay increase of 3.58 percent. Unions said this is a fraction of the 16 percent price rises from 2020-2023.

They also said the increase was conditional on receiving extra public funding, which was a "shameful proposal that offends workers." More than 135,000 workers are covered by the national Uneba contract, *Rai* reported.

Serbian teachers strike over government's broken promises on pay

Teachers throughout Serbia joined a one-day strike on Monday and protested at noon, denouncing the government for ignoring its promise to increase pay for new teachers to the national average salary.

The Minister of Education claimed the government could not afford more than a 12 percent increase in January, reaching only 94 percent of the average salary, *Euronews* reported.

According to government figures, 37 percent of schools were closed by the strike. *Nova* reported that the vast majority had lessons suspended or shortened.

Transport workers strike over pay in Lisbon and Porto, Portugal

This week, transport workers in Portugal's two largest cities stopped work, rejecting substandard pay deals agreed by some unions.

On Tuesday, workers at the state-owned Lisbon bus and tram company Carris began a 24-hour strike, called by the Fectrans and STRUP unions. They are demanding a 100 euro increase to monthly salaries and an extra

15 euros in monthly meal allowances, *Lusa* reported. Three other unions signed a deal with Carris agreeing only a 60 euros salary increase and 13 euros for the meal allowance.

Carris sought a court order for 26 percent of its services to be exempted from the strike, but the court ruled that only transport for disabled passengers and medical transport should be covered by minimum service requirements.

Workers at the Porto Public Transport Company (STCP) also started a 50-hour strike on Monday. When that ended, they began partial strikes of 5 hours per shift for the next two months, according to the *Observador*.

The four other unions at STCP accused STRUN, which called the strike, of “partisan political actions” for refusing to sign the deal they had worked out with STCP. STRUN claimed it “does not negotiate, behind the scenes, without the workers knowing,” saying around 75 percent of workers joined the strikes.

Two-day wildcat strike against “aggressive management” at Charleroi Airport, Belgium

On Saturday and Sunday, workers at Charleroi Airport, Belgium’s second busiest, held a wildcat strike opposing high workloads and an “aggressive management style,” *De Standaard* reported. Following the strike, the director of human resources at the airport’s management company resigned or was removed, as workers demanded.

Union officials told *RTBF*, “Nearly 18 percent of [airport] staff are sick. Half of the HR department is burned out.” The airport’s doctor told the broadcaster he resigned in August as he was “no longer allowed to exercise my function with complete independence. I am sometimes forced to make decisions against the workers, then I am accused of being with them when my opinion is unfavourable to the employer.”

New strikes against job loss plan at hygiene product manufacturer in Belgium

Workers at the Ontex hygiene products factory in the Belgian town of Eeklo have been on strike since September 13.

They began a spontaneous walkout after the company announced its “social plan,” governing severance pay when it closes the site at the end of the year with the loss of 350 jobs. A few days into the strike the unions held a vote on the plan. It was rejected by 93 percent.

According to *RTL*, workers were offered only 1,200 euros severance pay per year worked. Ontex also plans to cut 150 jobs at its other factory in Buggenhout. The unions are not opposed to the closure and job losses, and the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions told *Nieuwsblad*, “We just ask for a strong social plan.”

Workers protest shutdown of zinc processing in Sardinia, Italy

Workers from the Portovesme metal processing plant in southern Sardinia protested Wednesday against the end of zinc production at the site. The plant, owned by the multinational mining and metals giant Glencore, is the only zinc producer in Italy.

The shutdown of zinc production threatens the loss of 350 direct jobs

and 400 indirectly dependent on the plant, *ANSA* reported. A 24-hour strike took place last week, with another planned for September 23.

Strike in Dutch pharmacies for new collective agreement

This week, workers at pharmacies in several regions of the Netherlands continued strikes for a new national collective agreement.

Since the beginning of a rolling wave of strikes last week, pharmacy workers walked out in Limburg, Gelderland and South Holland. On Friday, strikes will be called in two towns in Gelderland and Utrecht provinces.

An experienced pharmacy assistant told the *Algemeen Dagblad* that although they were responsible for patient safety and required high qualifications, “Take a look at the vacancies at an Albert Heijn [supermarket]. Even without a diploma, you can often earn more there than if you join us.”

An official from the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions told the paper pharmacies claimed they would increase wages if the government increased their funding, but pointed out that over the last decade wage increases were 20 to 23 percent lower than the increase in government funding.

Sacked miners arrested at protest against sackings in Ankara, Turkey

On Tuesday, 24 miners protesting outside the offices of Fernas Mining in the Turkish capital Ankara were arrested by police, *Evrensel* reported.

The arrests follow another police operation to detain workers protesting outside the luxury hotel the company’s owner was staying at in the coastal city of Bodrum.

Fernas is owned by Ferhat Nas?ro?lu, an MP from the ruling Justice and Development Party. The company reportedly fired members of the Independent Mine Workers Union, who have been protesting their dismissal for more than three weeks. *BirGün* reported another four workers were fired this week for refusing to work in unsafe conditions.

Catering and cleaning staff at Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office in Scotland strike over pay and conditions

Eleven catering and cleaning staff employed by outsourcing company OCS at the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office in East Kilbride, Scotland walked out Wednesday and Thursday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are seeking a pay increase, an increase in leave and the introduction of a company sick pay scheme. They voted unanimously to strike.

The Foreign Secretary, David Lammy postponed a planned visit to the office this week, after the stoppage was announced.

Further stoppages are planned for September 24-26 and eight days in October.

Tea packaging workers in Stockton, England to walk out over poverty pay

Around 150 workers, mainly women, employed at Tetley Tea's packaging factory in Eaglescliffe near Stockton will walk out Friday and again on September 23. Tetley Tea is owned by Tata Consumer Products.

The GMB members rejected a 4.4 percent pay offer this year following last year's 7 percent rise. Announcing the first ever strike at Tetley, the GMB noted, "This loyal, predominately female workforce has endured year after year of real terms pay cuts. Now they have had enough."

Welsh National Opera chorus members and musicians to protest over cuts in pay and hours and redundancy threat

Orchestra musicians and chorus members at the Welsh National Opera (WNO) will take action short of a strike on 21 September over pay cuts and compulsory redundancies.

The Musicians Union members will leaflet the audience at the opening night of *Rigoletto* and wear campaign t-shirts rather than concert dress.

They will be joined by the 30 chorus singers, who are members of Equity. The Equity members had voted by 93 percent for strike action on September 21 and 29, and October 11. The union scaled down the first two actions, following "productive discussions" with management.

Following funding cuts, WNO management proposed making the orchestra part-time, cutting performers' pay by 15 percent, a reduction in contracted chorus hours and compulsory redundancies.

UK train drivers' union pushes through substandard pay deal to end long-running dispute

UK train drivers working for 16 train operating companies (TOCs) voted by over 96 percent to accept a negotiated pay rise and end the long-running dispute begun June 2022.

Two days before the 450 drivers planned to walk out on the first of 22 stoppages between August and November, Aslef General Secretary Mick Whelan announced an agreement with the TOCs and Labour government.

The deal is for a little more than 14 percent over three years, a real-terms pay cut. The drivers, without a pay rise for five years, took 18 days of strike action over the course of the dispute.

In August, new Transport Secretary Louise Haigh said, "If accepted, this offer would finally bring an end to this long-running dispute and allow us to move forward by driving up performance for passengers with the biggest overhaul to our railways in a generation."

Protest by UK firefighters in South Yorkshire over maternity leave

UK firefighters in South Yorkshire, where 8 percent are women, protested outside the South Yorkshire Fire Authority on Monday.

The Fire Brigades Union members were calling on the authority to grant maternity leave on full pay for 52 weeks. Currently it is only paid for 26 weeks. Some fire authorities across the country pay maternity leave for 52 weeks.

Protests mark end of strike by traffic wardens in the London borough

of Ealing

Around 40 striking traffic wardens in Ealing, in west London held protests Wednesday to mark the end of their current strike, begun August 27.

The Unite union members protested outside a surgery of Labour MP for Ealing Southall, Deirdre Costigan and then outside Ealing council's monthly cabinet meeting.

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.

Unite said that Costigan had supported the workers when she was deputy council leader, but has withdrawn her backing since her recent election to parliament.

Unite stated, "Strike action will continue into the autumn and winter if the dispute is not resolved."

Strikes by merchants across Iran on second anniversary of death of Mahsa Amini

Merchants in several Iranian cities including Kermanshah, Marivan, Oshnavieh, Piranshahr, Sanandaj and Saqqez went on strike last week to mark the second anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini.

Mahsa Amini, 22, died on September 13, 2022, in the custody of the regime's morality police. They had accused her of wearing her hijab "improperly." Her murder sparked mass protests against Iran's authoritarian regime and reignited ongoing protests by pensioners and farmers and strikes by factory workers against regressive social conditions.

On the day of the anniversary, Iranian security forces blockaded access to Aychi cemetery in the city of Saqqez, where she is buried.

Continuing protests by workers across Iran over collapsing social conditions

Monday saw continuing protests by workers in Iran over deteriorating work and social conditions. Education sector retirees rallied outside the Programme and Budget Organisation offices in Tehran to protest the dwindling value of their pensions.

In Isfahan, families of children with autism protested outside the offices of the Welfare Organisation against lack of financial and medical support for autism.

Workers in Mahshahr employed in Petrochemical Terminals and Storage Facilities protested over several issues, including restoration of cuts to productivity bonuses.

Retired Telecommunications Company of Iran employees held protest rallies in Ahvaz, Tabriz and Urmia. They were protesting the government's refusal to maintain the value of their pensions.

Protests and strikes are ongoing against Iran's authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions. NATO military action grows more imminent against Iran, seen as an obstacle to its war against Russia in Ukraine. Tensions mount in the aftermath of the Israeli terror attack in Lebanon, targeting Iranian-backed Hezbollah, which killed

nine and injured 2,750.

Protest by government workers in Kurdish city in Iraq seeking permanent employment contracts

Hundreds of government workers employed for years on temporary contracts protested Monday in the Kurdish city of al-Sulaymaniyah, Iraq.

They were demanding to be made permanent employees, with implementation of a decree issued in May by the regional government for temporary contracts to be converted to permanent ones. A spokesperson for the contract workers told the press they had worked through COVID, war and financial crisis with no job security.

Academics at the Lebanese University to strike for improved employment status

A press release issued Monday stated that around 650 professors at the Lebanese University would begin an open-ended general strike at the beginning of the academic year this month.

The Lebanese University, with its main campus at Hadath, is the sole state-funded public university in Lebanon.

Currently employed as contract workers, they are demanding their employment status be upgraded to full-time temporary status, which would offer more security. The professors state they will continue their strike until the government agrees to the transition in their employment status.

South African police fire rubber bullets at BMW autoworkers on strike in Pretoria

Police used rubber bullets Monday to disperse 300 BMW workers striking over dismissal plans at the German car giant's factory in Pretoria, South Africa.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members say the company plans to sack 700 workers under the pretence of dealing with alleged fraudulent medical insurance claims.

Teachers protest in Cape Town, South Africa at massive education job losses due to government funding cuts

Teachers in Western Cape, South Africa picketed schools across the province September 13, protesting a proposed loss of 2,400 teaching posts due to government cuts in the education budget.

South African Democratic Teachers Union members, educational lobby groups, parents and pupils all joined demonstrations and a picket outside the provincial education offices in Cape Town.

E-hailing taxi drivers in Cape Town, South Africa demonstrate

against exploitative conditions imposed by Uber and Bolt

Scores of e-hailing taxi drivers in Western Cape, South Africa stopped work and marched to the provincial government offices in Cape Town Tuesday, to protest poor pay and working conditions.

The Western Cape E-Hailing Association members, employed by multinational companies such as Uber and Bolt, intend to take action every month until they get legislative protection from the government via increased regulation of the multibillion-dollar e-hailing industry.

The drivers want higher pay rates, increased safety, fairer hearings over complaints, lower company commission rates and better treatment from the provincial licensing authority.

Union sabotages strike by Kenyan airline staff against privatisation

Airport workers at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, Kenya began strike action September 11. They are opposing the award of a 30-year lease to India's Adani Group Holdings to take over operations at East Africa's largest airport.

"No plane is taking off and landing here since midnight. Just consider your trip cancelled. Go home instead of being in this cold," a policeman told a reporter expecting to board a morning flight.

After one day, however, the Kenya Aviation Workers Union ended the stoppage, accepting privatisation of the state-run company and the resultant speed-up. The union called for strike action three times before the latest action, only to postpone it at the last minute.

Emboldened by the sabotage of the workers' action, the Kenyan government recently confirmed that Adani Group Holdings will also be given contracts to construct power transmission lines.

Non-academic staff at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic in Nigeria walk out to demand retirement at 65

Non-academic workers at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic in Nigeria walked out September 12 to demand retirement at age 65.

Students and lecturers who arrived for morning lectures found all the gates to the campus barricaded or locked by the strikers. A placard on the main gate stated the workers' demand.

The Chief Security Officer later ordered the gates be opened. It was not reported whether any pickets were organised by the union. The strikers' demands are yet to be addressed as the strike enters its second week.

Workers at small businesses in Kano, Nigeria protest over fuel hikes

Workers at Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Kano, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, held a protest September 14 against the recent hike in electricity price, threatening their jobs.

Spokesperson for the protesters, Aisha Abdullahi, said, "We have nothing but this job... We are here managing the little earnings to keep body and soul alive. Unfortunately, we are going to be pushed out.

"For five days now, we haven't worked, and only god knows what will happen should the SME operators decide to shut down completely due to

the electricity tariff hike.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact