

National 24-hour stoppage by Greek rail workers to demand more staff and improved safety; protests continue in Iran by workers and pensioners over decline in living standards; teachers around Abuja in Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria on indefinite pay strike

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 September 2024

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

### Greek rail workers hold nationwide strike for safety measures

Rail workers in Greece held a 24-hour strike Thursday. They called for increased staffing levels, the replacement of old rolling stock, and for safety to be improved across the network.

Workers at Hellenic Rail, privatised under the pseudo-left SYRIZA government in 2017, called attention to the disaster at Tempe in February 2023, where 57 people were killed in a train crash.

*ef.syn* reported that a similar disaster was narrowly averted two weeks ago. The driver of a commuter train noticed another train on the same line, heading for a head-on collision, but promptly contacted the other driver and stopped both trains. The deputy minister of transport of the right-wing New Democracy government reportedly denied the incident happened and attacked drivers for citing the danger of another deadly crash.

### French government sends riot police against cost-of-living protests in Martinique

Workers in Martinique, a French overseas department in the Caribbean, have been holding protests against the high cost of living since the start of September.

This week, lorry drivers stopped work on Tuesday and drove slowly in a "snail operation" in protest, *Le Figaro* reported. Health workers begin a strike tomorrow.

According to *Reuters*, workers at state-owned energy company EDF in neighbouring Guadeloupe stopped work last week in linked protests. Also last week, the Martinique authorities imposed curfews and a ban on protests, citing violence, including gunfire injuring several police officers.

This week, the French government dispatched CRS riot police to Martinique, after protestors defied the ban on demonstrations. According to *Euronews*, the Martinican government requested the deployment of the

CRS, banned in Martinique since 1959 when its agents killed three young Martinicans in a brutal intervention.

### Strikes at schools in Navarre and Madrid, Spain over pay and class sizes

Teachers in Navarre, Spain, held a stoppage Thursday, demanding reduction of class sizes and real terms pay increases.

The unions representing teachers walked out of a negotiation meeting with the PSOE Minister of Education Carlos Gimeno on Tuesday. They accused the Navarrese government of calling the meeting to "take a photo and put out a press release saying it had negotiated."

Gimeno refused to meet teachers' demands, claiming "the quantification of their cost makes their realisation impossible" and that reducing class sizes would cost 131 million euros. This is around 0.6 percent of Navarre's GDP.

On Wednesday, teachers in Madrid schools joined a pair of two-hour partial strikes, calling for a reduction in teaching hours. The right-wing People's Party government imposed a high minimum service requirement, requiring one teacher for every 50 pupils in primary schools and one teacher for every 90 secondary school pupils, according to *Europa Press*.

### Vehicle inspectors' strike in Andalusia, Spain

Workers at the ITV vehicle inspection service in the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia have been holding strikes since September 19 for a new collective agreement. The Workers Commissions and General Workers Union said 98 percent of workers who could join the strike did so on its first day. The strikes last a total of eight days in September.

The Andalusian government imposed a minimum service requirement that 15 percent of inspectors and 45 percent of administrative staff work during the strike, *Europa Press* reported.

## Private fire safety workers in Italy strike for new collective agreement

On September 16, workers at Gruppo Servizi Associati (GSA), a company providing fire safety services to hospitals, motorways, ports and many other areas, began a four-hour strike to call for a new collective agreement.

A press release by the CGIL union said workers at GSA “find themselves bound to a collective labour agreement that offers an hourly wage of 6 euros,” and can work 20 consecutive days with no day off.

CGIL accused GSA of signing the current contract with a “trade union of convenience,” i.e., one chosen by the company rather than the workers. According to *Firenze Today*, the unions are calling for GSA to apply the same contract governing conditions for firefighters in ports, in which the monthly pay is 500 euros higher.

GSA claimed the strike is “illegitimate” in law, as it is for demands “totally dissociated from the logic and functioning of the public and private procurement market in the sector and would even put at risk the existence of the business,” ADN reported. GSA threatened that any workers who joined the strike could face “possible consequences on a disciplinary level and beyond.”

## Disability assistants in Norway strike for equal pay

Around 10 in-home care workers in Norway, who provide care and assistance to disabled people, have been on strike since September 12. They will be joined by 19 more colleagues from Friday.

According to *FriFagbevegelse*, personal care assistants employed by the NHO Geneo association do not have a collective agreement with the unions, while the Virke association does.

The Fagforbundet union, which has 271 members in NHO Geneo companies, said “we could do nothing but go on strike when NHO Geneo refused to give our members equal pay for equal work.”

Tine, a user of the service, and her mother joined a rally to support the care workers, telling *Fagbladet*, “They ensure that users get a quality of life that others do not come close to... We want the assistants who work for Tine to be paid as well as those who work for companies organised in Virke.”

## Further strikes by UK’s Royal Fleet Auxiliary workers over pay and conditions

UK seafarers on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) took further strike action from Monday over low pay and conditions.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members already held five days of stoppages. The RMT divided the current action on a sectional basis. On Monday, all deck department seafarers walked out, on Tuesday it was catering and supply staff, while Wednesday involved engine room and communication information workers.

On Sunday, the RMT staged a protest outside the UK Labour Party conference in Liverpool, calling for pay justice for RFA seafarers. The rally was addressed by RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch. The union refuses to link attacks on living standards with the Gaza genocide and escalating wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, financed by NATO, including the UK Labour government.

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 supporting Israel.

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

## Rail workers on UK Heathrow Express service hold 48-hour stoppage over pay

On Monday, rail workers on the UK Heathrow Express between central London and Heathrow airport began a 48-hour stoppage.

The RMT union members overwhelmingly rejected a pay offer and voted to strike for improved pay and conditions.

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

Around 600 security guards at job centres in England began a week-long strike Monday.

The 600 Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members are employed by outsourced company G4S on the minimum wage of £11.44 an hour. They turned down an offer of an extra 23p an hour.

Picket lines were mounted at Birkenhead, Bradford, Grimsby, Middleton, Oldham, St Helens, Sheffield and Walsall.

Around 1,500 GMB union members working as security guards have also taken action over pay and held a joint strike with PCS members at the end of August. GMB began stoppages in May, while PCS members began in June.

The GMB union suspended action by its members while they vote on an improved offer from G4S. PCS members are also balloting on the offer and on holding any further pay stoppages.

The walkouts by security guards have led to the closure of some job centres over safety concerns.

## School support staff in Birmingham, UK strike over equal pay

Around 1,500 school support staff in the UK city of Birmingham went on strike Monday. Those taking part included administrative, catering, ground maintenance staff and teaching assistants at 35 schools across the city.

The GMB union members are pursuing an outstanding claim for equal pay. The mainly women workers argue they should be paid the same rates as workers in male-dominated roles. They last walked out over the issue in May. Around 800 of the strikers held a rally in Birmingham’s Victoria Square.

GMB states further action could take place, and another 15 schools are balloting over the issue.

*BirminghamLive* quoted a Birmingham council spokesperson saying, “The council has been engaging with GMB and UNISON for many years on equal pay. A new approach to job evaluation to settle Birmingham’s equal pay issues once and for all was agreed with the Trades Unions in October 2023. The council is keen to work together with our recognised

unions to explore solutions, as it remains committed to resolving historic equal pay issues and settling all legitimate claims from our employees.”

Birmingham city council, Europe’s largest local authority, serving 1.1 million people, is one of several councils declared effectively bankrupt since 2017. In March, the Labour-run council approved a further £300 million cuts to key services—the largest cut ever imposed in the history of local government.

#### **Teachers at two UK Thames Learning Trust schools strike over medical appointments policy**

Teachers and support staff at Reading Girls’ School and Baylis Court in Slough, part of Thames Learning Trust in England, walked out Tuesday and Wednesday.

The National Education Union (NEU) members oppose to the trust’s policy on attending medical appointments in school hours. The trust, which runs six schools in the area, says teachers must take this as unpaid leave. The NEU members held a stoppage on September 19 over the issue, and a further walkout is planned October 1-3.

#### **Hospital nursing staff at London hospital trust strike over pay grading**

Health care assistants (HCAs) working for Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust in the UK capital began a three-day stoppage Tuesday.

The Unison union members are pushing for HCAs, on Agenda for Change band 2 but performing clinical tasks, to be paid the higher band 3 level. They are also calling for the upgraded pay to be backdated.

The striking HCAs set up picket lines at University Hospital Lewisham and Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Greenwich. The HCAs previously held a 48-hour stoppage, begun September 4.

#### **Refuse workers on strike in Sheffield, UK hold protests as dispute continues**

UK refuse collection workers in Sheffield, who are continuing their all-out strike begun August 20, have mounted protests against employer Veolia, which contracts with the city.

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.

On Thursday, some of the striking workers supported by other Unite members lobbied a meeting of the Leeds and York NHS Foundation in Leeds. The trust has a financial relationship with Veolia through a funding collaboration scheme.

On September 20, some strikers and Unite officials protested outside Veolia’s headquarters in Paris. Veolia, a French transnational, is involved in energy services, waste management and water management, services

normally managed by public authorities.

Unite has a national bargaining agreement with Veolia across numerous depots throughout the UK.

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

#### **Food production workers in Spalding, UK set to walk out over pay**

Around 700 UK food production workers employed by Bakkavor at their plant in Spalding in Lincolnshire, are due to begin a continuous stoppage on Friday.

The walkout comes after the Unite union members overwhelmingly rejected a 6 percent pay rise offer made in May, with over 92 percent voting to strike. Unite represents about half the workforce at the site and the action is expected to impact supplies of food products and cause nationwide shortages.

Bakkavor produces food products such as bread, desserts, pizzas and salads for UK supermarket chains including Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Waitrose.

#### **Ten-day strike set for Nottingham trams**

Around 300 workers on the Nottingham Express Transit (NET) tram system in England are due to begin a 10-day stoppage on Friday.

The GMB union members including drivers, maintenance and ticketing staff overwhelmingly rejected a 3.5 percent pay offer and want a 10 percent rise. The 10-day stoppage will coincide with the prestigious Nottingham Goose Fair taking place over the same period.

#### **Ongoing protests in Iran over deteriorating living conditions**

Protests took place Sunday across Iran, including by retired coal miners in Kerman protesting the dwindling value of pensions failing to keep up with the cost of living.

In Zahedan, heavy goods vehicle drivers demonstrated outside the governor’s office against not being able to obtain fuel cards needed to carry on working.

People with disabilities held rallies in Kermanshah, Mashhad, Qom and the capital Tehran. They were protesting the failure of the state to implement Article 27 of the Disability Law, guaranteeing disabled people the right to employment.

Other protests included one in Kahnuj. Around 70 students protested the poor state of the infrastructure of their village school in Sharikabad by boycotting lessons.

Monday saw the fifth day of protests by around 350 workers at the Mahshahr Petrochemical Terminals and Oil Reservoirs Company who unload chemicals from ship’s tanks. They were demanding parity of conditions with workers in neighbouring companies and arrears of wages.

Oil workers on permanent contracts at various centres, including the South Pars Complex, the Fajr Jam Gas Refining Company and the Pars Kangan Oil and Gas Company (site 2) held protests. Their demands included removal of salary caps, removal of the limitation of retirement years and payment of wage arrears.

Protests and strikes are ongoing against Iran's authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions. The Israeli bombing and imminent invasion of Lebanon on the pretext of targeting Iranian-backed Hezbollah are a prelude to NATO military action against Iran, which it accuses of arming Russia.

### **Teachers in Nigerian capital territory walk out over pay arrears**

Primary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) around Abuja, Nigeria went on indefinite strike September 22, demanding payment of arrears of their N35,000 wage award and other entitlements.

Previously, the unions collaborated with the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, to obtain 40 percent of the total sum of 25 months' minimum wage arrears repaid to get teachers back to work.

Strikers are determined that public primary schools in FCT will remain closed until they are paid what they are owed.

### **Residents in Oyo State, Nigeria protest to stop mass evictions**

Thousands of residents of Oyo State, Nigeria held a protest in Ibadan, the state capital on September 23, against the requisition and demolition of their homes to make way for a "corridor" road.

Victims of the evictions and African Action Congress members held up the demolition, which will displace up to 300,000 people and has already cost dozens of lives, according to local news reports.

Protesters pushed through the main entrance of the Oyo state government secretariat in Agodi, shouting, "No more corridor" to prevent government plans. Residents also blocked some of Ibadan's major roads last week and stormed the state secretariat to prevent the demolition proceeding.

### **Kenya university staff on pay strike in defiance of union-backed court order**

Kenya university staff began strike action on September 18. They are demanding a pay rise of 7-10 percent in line with the 2021-2025 Collective Bargaining Agreement, after years of the government refusing to abide by its own agreement.

Acting in the interests of the government, Justice Jacob Gakeri ordered the suspension of the strike by the University Academic Staff Union and the Kenya Universities Staff Union members. The unions responded by instructing the university staff to return to work.

The workers, however, held a strike and peaceful protest September 24 in the Nairobi Central Business District. Police responded by throwing teargas canisters to disperse them.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**