

One-day general strike in France for repeal of pension reform; ongoing protests escalate against worsening conditions in Iran; police use teargas and live ammunition against hunger protests in Nigeria

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.

One-day general strike in France

On Tuesday, workers in several sectors in France joined a one-day general strike, called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and several other unions. They called for repeal of the pension reform forced through without a vote in the Assembly last year, and opposed the installation of the far-right Barnier government against the will of the voters.

Rail workers and local public transport workers joined the strike. Teachers joined, denouncing widespread low staffing levels. Workers at state-owned energy company EDF also walked out.

According to *RFI*, most of the large unions apart from CGT refused to join the strike, including the French Democratic Confederation of Labour and Force Ouvrière, which called striking “premature.”

While the CGT’s general secretary Sophie Binet said “It’s social mobilisation that changes the situation,” it was in fact the CGT and other unions who prevented a mobilisation to block the economy, a measure supported by a majority of the population, during last year’s mass movement against the pension reform.

Le Figaro reported that by the CGT’s figures only 170,000 workers joined demonstrations throughout France. The police claimed it was as few as 95,000.

Workers from EU countries protest in Brussels, Belgium

On Tuesday, around 1,000 workers from several countries in the European Union joined a protest in Brussels, during a nationwide strike in Belgium. The UNI Europa union said half of EU tenders are awarded to the lowest bidder, without regard for working conditions, and called for a reform to the rules, *RTL* reported.

Many sections of the working class in Belgium joined the strike. All

flights from the country’s two largest airports, Brussels and Charleroi, were cancelled as cleaning, security and catering workers walked out, according to *Europa Press*.

Strike ended at hygiene product manufacturer despite rejection of redundancy plan in Eeklo, Belgium

Workers at the Ontex hygiene products factory in the Belgian town of Eeklo returned to work September 26, after a vote on a new “social plan” proposed by the company to close the site. According to *Nieuwsblad* the plan was rejected by 55 percent, but the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB) said “If a strike action is in progress, there must be a two-thirds majority to continue the action,” and pledged to “honour the content of the social plan.”

The strike began September 13 as a spontaneous walkout, and workers voted by 93 percent to reject a redundancy scheme a few days later. The ACLVB claimed the more recent plan was “a significantly better proposal, more than just a piece of cake,” but a majority of workers disagreed. The factory will now close on December 20, with the loss of 350 jobs.

Strike by cash and valuables transport workers in Germany

Workers in the secure transport of cash and valuables joined a nationwide two-day warning strike on Monday and Tuesday, during collective bargaining negotiations between Verdi and the Federal Association of German Money and Valuables Services (BDGW).

The strike, and protests involving hundreds of workers, continued on Wednesday in some states.

The contract covers around 10,000 workers, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported. Verdi is calling for an increase in wages and overtime, and 31 days of annual holiday. BDGW claimed that wages in the industry were already high and insisted during negotiations that annual leave must be cut.

Kindergarten strike banned in Berlin, Germany

Last week, the Berlin Labour Court banned an indefinite strike by 7,000 kindergarten workers in the German capital, due to begin this Monday. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the court agreed with the Berlin Senate, led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), that meeting workers' demands would risk Berlin's expulsion from the Collective Bargaining Association of German States (TdL), so a strike for those demands would not be legal.

The United Services Union (Verdi) was calling for a reduction in workloads in the kindergartens owned by the city, and has said it plans to appeal the ruling. The court cited an agreement between members of the TdL that they would not sign any agreements reducing workloads. Verdi said this undermined the right to strike, as it "would allow employers' associations to restrict the unions' exercise of constitutional rights solely through internal agreements."

The Senate has long refused to negotiate in the long-running dispute, which has involved many walkouts including a five-day strike in July. According to *Junge Welt*, before the court banned the strike entirely the Senate had demanded a minimum service provision of between 70 and 80 percent during any stoppage.

Firefighters begin month-long strike over pay in Lisbon, Portugal

Firefighters in Lisbon, Portugal began a strike on Tuesday for all of October, against "illegal" low pay. The Workers' Union of the Municipality of Lisbon (STML) told *Lusa* the pay structure for firefighters had not been revised for 22 years, and they could "earn much less than the national minimum wage... We are talking about 722 euros in base salary for a firefighter at the beginning of his career."

The STML said 95 percent of firefighters joined the strike, but continued to respond to emergencies. Other demands included a risk bonus, which firefighters do not currently receive despite the obvious dangers of the job, early retirement and days off in compensation for working on public holidays.

Air traffic controllers' work-to-rule against understaffing has major impact in Athens, Greece

Air traffic controllers at Athens International Airport began working to rule from the evening of September 26, after a disagreement between the Civil Aviation Authority and Air Traffic Controllers Association of Greece, *Kathimerini* reported. The action, involving strictly observing the nominal capacity of each runway, reportedly had a major impact, delaying many flights by 15 minutes and some by up to two hours.

According to *ef.syn*, air traffic controllers are opposing overwork, and calling for urgent recruitment. Flight numbers increased by 6.8 percent in the first eight months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. The news site reported that workers are also dissatisfied as discussions are ongoing to permanently increase their working hours.

Hundreds of workers in the Zaragoza Home Care Service, who assist those with disabilities or complex healthcare needs living at home, held their fourth protest in the Spanish city on Wednesday.

The care workers denounced the reduction in hours assigned to each user of the service. The General Workers' Union (UGT) said that the City Council, led by the right-wing People's Party, "continues not to listen to the workers, nor to the reasons for the mobilisation, which is why we are considering carrying out a strike in the sector," *El Periódico* reported.

The UGT also denounced the fact that if a user stopped using the service, workers' salaries are reduced, so they can receive as little as 150 euros in a month. According to *El Periódico*, 95 percent of home care workers are part-time and earn only between 600 and 800 euros each month.

Workers at Beko white goods factories in Poland protest closure

Workers at the Beko white goods factories in the Polish cities of Łódź and Wrocław are opposing the closure of their plants, which threatens around 1,800 jobs. On September 20, workers protested outside the factory in Łódź, which is due to close on April 30. The head of the Solidarity union at the plant said "We are fighting for the continued operation of the factory and our jobs. And if it fails, for a decent severance package," *TVN24* reported.

Last week Solidarity called another protest outside the Turkish embassy in Warsaw. Beko is a private company headquartered in Turkey, with facilities all over the world.

Another Solidarity official claimed "I am not against Italian workers either," but said they had data showing "the cost of an employee in Poland is EUR 22, in Romania it is EUR 25, and the cost of an Italian employee is EUR 100."

According to a report by *First Online*, Beko's "Italian factories and the future of the 5000 employees remain uncertain," showing that workers across borders face the same issues and cannot save jobs without a joint international struggle.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary workers on UK vessel work to rule over pay dispute

UK seafarers on the *Cardigan Bay*, part of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), are working to rule as part of a pay dispute by 600 RFA workers.

The Nautilus union members refuse to move the ship 160 miles for repairs and maintenance to Falmouth from Portland Harbour, where it has been docked for three weeks. The workers took action, including several strike days, after the Ministry of Defence imposed a 4.5 percent pay settlement, despite workers voting it down twice. Pay declined 30 percent since 2009.

The mandate for industrial action runs out October 4, when workers are legally obliged to move the ship. A further strike ballot will run until November.

Around 1,000 Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members at the RFA also held stoppages over poor pay and conditions. The RMT protested outside the UK Labour Party conference in Liverpool, with a rally addressed by 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 British 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 to support Israel.

Nautilus, the RMT and 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.”

Retail workers at Bakkavor factory, Oscar Mayer and Asda store in England walk out over pay

Bakkavor retail workers in Spalding, England walked out September 27, after rejecting a pay offer between 6.4-7.8 percent, plus a one-off £50.

The 700 Unite union members, who make and prepare bread, soup, meals, salad, desserts and pizzas for supermarkets Waitrose, Tesco and Marks and Spencer, are paid just above the minimum wage of £11.44 an hour. Work conditions are barbaric, with long shifts in near-freezing temperatures.

The company reports £55 million profit to date for 2024, while many employees resort to foodbanks.

Around 550 workers in food production at Oscar Mayer in Wrexham began strikes September 12, with action continuing until October 10. They oppose the elimination or reduction of some breaks and enhanced payments and time off in lieu of working bank holidays. If the changes are not accepted, management have threatened fire and rehire on pay reduced by £3,000.

Oscar Mayer supplies ready meals to Tesco, Asda, Greggs, Waitrose, Aldi, the Co-op and Sainsbury's.

Workers at retailer Asda protested outside the Asda Skelton store in York, England ahead of their pay strike last week.

The GMB members voted by 75 percent to demand equal pay with male counterparts in the warehouses, who get up to £3.74 an hour more.

Asda workers throughout the industry are owed millions of pounds of backpay. The case is being taken to the Employment Tribunal in Manchester.

Court interpreters and translators at some UK courts withdraw labour over pay and conditions

Court interpreters and translators at Chelmsford Crown Court, London have withdrawn their services over work conditions which leave them on the poverty line.

The service was outsourced in a £15 million contract by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in 2016 to contractor thebigword(TBW), which introduced a booking app leading to mistakes and delays in payments.

An MoJ spokesperson said there were walkouts “at a small number of criminal courts” but denied they had an impact. There is, however, already a 60,000 backlog of court cases in the UK.

As freelance workers, they are denied holiday pay and the minimum wage.

Teachers at academy school in England strike over workload and conditions introduced after Ofsted report

UK teachers and support staff at secondary (11-18) The Deepings School in south Lincolnshire went on strike Tuesday and Wednesday over excessive workload.

The National Education Union and NASUWT members accuse management of constantly introducing new practices after a poor inspection report, increasing workload. This has led to problems with recruitment and staff retention, impacting on the behaviour of pupils at the school. Seventeen staff have resigned the last 18 months, while new staff are expected to work over lunch.

Employer Anthems School Trust runs 16 primary and secondary schools in the East Midlands, London and the Thames Valley. School inspectorate Ofsted rated the school “requires improvement” in September 2023.

Further strikes by workers at UK Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office in Scotland 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 Tuesday 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 have taken strike days since September, and plan further walkouts on October 8, 10 and 15.

PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote, said, “Despite our efforts, OCS has not responded to our suggestion of further negotiations in an attempt to resolve the dispute.”

Protests continue across Iran against worsening social and economic conditions

October 1 saw widespread protests and strikes across Iran over wages and conditions.

In southern Iran, gas refinery workers held several protests, reflecting frustration with economic mismanagement and poor conditions. Workers from the South Pars Gas Refinery held their ninth consecutive weekly protest in Bushehr, demanding improved conditions and the reinstatement of dismissed colleagues. They also call for implementation of job classification plans for contract workers and fairer pay.

Workers at the Parsian Gas Refinery in Mehr County protested with similar demands. This follows rallies last week by oil workers in southern Iran. Offshore workers protested for fair wages and job security in Bushehr, while Iranian Offshore Oil Company workers protested again on Siri Island over wages and safety.

In Tabriz, in Northwest Iran, workers at the Telecommunications Company of Iran protested Tuesday, as part of a strike for higher wages and job security. They protested the failure of wages to meet the rising cost of living.

In central Iran, there was a strike of workers at the Chadormalu Industrial Complex in Ardakan over wages and conditions. Last week drivers protested outside the governorate in Ardakan over unresolved economic problems caused by rising living costs.

The weekend saw renewed protests by retired government workers and

telecommunications pensioners for higher pensions and better conditions. Steel sector retirees protested in Isfahan for better pensions and conditions. There was a rally of oil sector retirees outside the Ministry of Oil in Tehran, protesting low pensions and poor conditions.

Tehran also saw a protest of retired government workers Saturday over pension conditions. Last week, literary educators protested in the capital demanding official recognition as teachers.

Ahvaz has been a focus for pension disputes in the southwest, but there were also protests by Social Security Organisation retirees in Kermanshah and Shush. Social Security retirees there also expressed solidarity with victims of the recent Tabas mine disaster.

Nurses in Yazd began ongoing protests on September 25. They are calling for labour reform, overdue wages and improved conditions. They demand the government fulfil its promises to healthcare workers.

Protests are erupting over every aspect of social life and conditions, including housing. In Arak, residents last week protested delays in the delivery of homes from the Kuy-e Kowsar housing project. In Sabzevar, creditors of the Maskan-e Melli housing company protested rising costs and unfulfilled housing projects.

Protests and strikes are ongoing against Iran's authoritarian regime and collapsing living standards, exacerbated by US sanctions. The situation is worsening as the US and Israel escalate preparations for war against Iran.

Police in Abuja, Nigeria confront protesters against hunger with teargas and live ammunition

Nigerian police shot teargas and live ammunition at thousands of protesters peacefully demonstrating against hardship and poverty in the capital, Abuja on October 1.

Many chanted, "We are hungry" as they marched along the roads. The protesters had responded to calls on social media using the #FearlessInOctober hashtag. Placards included "Enough is enough—revolution now."

"We are buying fuel [at] N1,000 and you expect us not to come out and protest? What are we saying—we are hungry," said one protester. Fuel prices soared due removal of subsidies demanded by the World Bank. Import prices also rose due to the fall in the naira.

Workers also protested in Lagos and Ilorin, in a second wave of mass protests. In August, several protesters were shot dead by police and hundreds arrested.

According to the World Food Programme, almost 26.5 million face food insecurity, up from 19 million in 2023.

Medical staff in Kano State, Nigeria walk out over pay and lack of basic equipment

Dentists and doctors in Kano State, Nigeria walked out October 1, after the state government failed to honour an agreement reached with the unions in June.

Doctors and dentists are also angry at the poor state of healthcare in hospitals due to lack of medical equipment, as well as the non-payment of salaries for doctors hired in September 2023.

National Association of Government General and Medical Dental Practitioners secretary Dr Anas Hassan, said "Despite reaching an understanding three months ago, the Kano State Government has not met our demands, particularly the payment of post-COVID-19 hazard

allowances, which the federal government has been paying [the state] since 2021."

South African food giant uses untrained casual staff to break ongoing sweet factory strike

More than 385 confectionery workers, out of a total workforce of 602, are continuing their indefinite pay strike begun August 19 at the South African food giant Premier Group's Mr Sweet factory in Johannesburg.

The company is trying to break the strike by substituting unqualified and poorly trained casual workers, one of whom lost a finger in a machine last week.

The Simunye Workers Forum members dropped their initial demand for a R19,500 basic monthly salary to R12,000, but Premier Group still refuse to offer more than a 7 percent rise on existing pay of R6,000. A basic monthly food basket for a South African worker costs R5,200, while last year Premier Group made R921 million profits, up 15 percent from the year before.

South African teachers in second protest over 2,400 provincial job losses due to government cuts

Teachers in Western Cape, South Africa, picketed again outside the provincial education offices in Cape Town Monday to protest an estimated loss of 2,400 teaching posts if proposed government cuts in the educational budget go ahead.

The teachers were gathered under the umbrella Western Cape Education Crisis Committee, consisting of South African Democratic Teachers Union members, educational lobby groups, community organisations and parents.

Ghanaian mortuary workers begin indefinite strike over pay and conditions

Ghanaian mortuary workers began a nationwide indefinite strike September 27, due to unpaid salaries and lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

General Secretary of the Mortuary Workers Association of Ghana, Mr. Richard Kofi Jordan said, "Our primary concern is the lack of PPEs, which is non-negotiable. We need them to safely carry out our duties, but right now, we don't have enough, and it's seriously affecting our work."

The union, however, has allowed its members to go for years without pay and proper protection.

Liberian community youth workers in Monrovia protest unpaid wages, block major roads

Workers on the Temporary Empowerment for Community Youth (TECY) project in Liberia's capital Monrovia staged a protest outside the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning on September 30.

Protesters, including many women and older citizens, held up placards and brooms, while others sat in roads to obstruct traffic. Chants by the protesters included “We want our pay,” “Our children are not in school due to lack of fees,” and “We have no way to sustain our families.”

TECY was founded in April 2022 to create jobs for 1,100 vulnerable individuals from 14 slum communities in Montserrado County



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