

# 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.*

## Thousands of Greek workers demonstrate during general strike to protest anti-worker laws

Thousands of workers held a one-day nationwide strike in Greece Wednesday, protesting recent government changes in employment law that attack working conditions and social and political rights.

Demonstrations were held in Athens, Thessaloniki and other cities, as the stoppages affected transport, schools, hospitals, courts, municipal and other public services.

The Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY) and the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) called the strike day, and were joined by a dozen other unions. Their leaderships are attempting to preempt a broader protest movement, as anger is erupting among Greek workers and students over high living costs, low wages and long working days. There is also anger at tougher disciplinary law in the bill for civil servants, aimed ultimately at criminalising political opposition.

## Airline workers in Italy strike for improvements in pay and conditions and in solidarity with Palestine

Airline workers, including ground staff, security workers, baggage handlers, pilots and flight attendants, held a one-day work stoppage at Milan's airports September 26 to demand wage increases and improvements in working conditions.

Disruption was caused to WizzAir and Volotea flights and also affected cargo flights out of Milan.

The strike by CUB, USB and CGIL union members was also held in solidarity with other Italian workers' actions against the genocide in Gaza and to voice their concerns over flights to and from Tel Aviv, Israel. Dock workers in Genoa and Livorno blocked arms shipments to Israel on Saturday, in one of the largest anti-genocide demonstrations in Italy.

## French energy workers in continuing strikes for wage improvements and a reduction in energy tax

Energy workers at three Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) port terminals in France operated by the Elengy company have been on strike since

September 26, as part of ongoing national energy sector strikes around wage increases and other demands. The LNG terminal at Dunkirk operated by Fluxys has also been affected by the energy workers' stoppage.

Nuclear energy workers at government-owned EDF, who previously held stoppages in August and September, began a two-day strike Tuesday. The General Confederation of Labour union members want a 9 percent rise for those on the lowest salary, a reduction in value added tax on gas and electricity and higher on-call payments.

## Thousands in Namur, Belgium protest regional and national austerity measures

On September 24, over 8,000 workers and unemployed marched in Namur, capital of the Wallonia region, Belgium, demonstrating against high unemployment and cost of living, housing shortages and attacks on benefits and pensions.

The demonstration, organised by the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, the General Labour Federation of Belgium and the Belgian Network for the Fight against Poverty, gathered outside the Walloon parliament building to protest the austerity policies of the regional coalition government.

A national strike against the federal "Arizona" coalition government's austerity measures and attacks on pensions and benefits takes place October 14.

## Workers strike for improved redundancy payments at Belgian food manufacturer

Bakery workers at the Alyse Food factory in Seneffe, Belgium began a strike September 18, after plans to make 92 of the 210 workforce redundant. Many have been employed there for over 20 years.

The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions members demand greater compensation for those losing their jobs and a commitment of job security for the remaining workers.

## Workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, England continue pay stoppage

Workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, England

are continuing their stoppage begun August over pay. The 40 Unison members rejected a pay offer of 5 percent or 80p an hour. Some workers earn just £12.60 an hour. Unison said the museum's chief executive refuses to negotiate.

Many of the workers are former miners involved in the bitter year-long strike in 1984/85. The Trades Union Congress refused to call a general strike at the time, leaving the miners isolated. This led to the decimation of the industry.

Alan Woodcock, who worked at Nostell Colliery near Wakefield as an apprentice electrician in 1978, told the BBC, "We are not just tour guides, we are fitters, electricians and train drivers... we are on a pittance."

Wakefield council, run by a Labour majority, is withholding government funding from the museum until the dispute is resolved.

### **Lecturers at University of Leicester, England begin stoppage over job cuts**

Academic staff at the UK's University of Leicester began a three-week stoppage Monday until October 17 against plans to make cuts of £11 million targeting jobs.

The action by University and College Union (UCU) members is discontinuous, meaning staff can choose when and how often to participate. Action short of striking is planned until February 28. On Tuesday, students joined the picket lines. Departments under threat of redundancies include chemistry, history, geography, geology and the environment, education and modern languages.

Academic staff at the University of Nottingham, England are continuing their four-week strike over 200 proposed redundancies, begun September 22.

Universities across the UK face cuts and 10,000 job losses. There have been strikes at Bradford, Newcastle and Dundee universities, but the UCU refuses to mobilise its members in unified action, in order to impose sellout deals involving voluntary redundancies on a university-by-university basis.

### **Protests and demonstrations spread across Iran over wages, pensions and conditions**

Protests and demonstrations over unpaid wages and worsening conditions have continued across Iran, as the country confronts the reimposition of UN sanctions. Different sectors of workers and retirees have demonstrated in cities nationwide.

On September 30, aspiring teachers staged a third consecutive day of protest outside the Ministry of Education in Tehran. After preparing a year for recruitment exams, they are angry at the drastic reduction in available positions and last-minute rule changes and exam guidance which bureaucratically eliminated thousands of candidates.

They had been told there would be 30,000 positions, but a capacity of only 11,000 was finally announced. Protesters said the process had been rigged in favour of insiders.

In Tabriz, medical staff and hospital workers protested outside the main university medical building at severe pay delays, inadequate bonuses, and overtime and allowance disparities between administrative and frontline staff. Nurses complained of rising workloads, warning that patient lives are being put at risk.

There have been widespread demonstrations in universities. At Khajeh

Nasir University in the capital, students held a night rally and sit-in against mounting tuition fees and poor living conditions. They say protests will continue until the authorities respond.

Medical students in Isfahan refused to eat dormitory food in protest at unhygienic conditions. Staff at Sharif University protested at their living conditions and benefits. At Dezful University of Medical Sciences, workers demanding months of unpaid overtime were met with contempt by the university president.

Protests by bakers were reported across the country, including at Khorramabad, Yazd and Mashhad. Bakers are angry at delays in payment of state subsidies. In Isfahan, bakers said they had received no subsidies since July.

Bakers are protesting mismanagement of the distribution system, resulting in higher production costs and reduced income. Bakers in Isfahan said the problems are making it impossible to continue operating.

Protests have erupted over social conditions generally. Farmers protested outside the Khuzestan provincial governor's office on Monday at water shortages and the damage they have caused. Investors in a stalled commercial complex held a rally in Rasht over broken contracts, while farmers and tractor owners in Yazd protested to demand restoration of the fuel allocations they require for seasonal work.

Oil workers and pensioners in Ahvaz, Asaluyeh and the South Pars platforms protested to demand payment of overdue wages and benefits, and enforcement of legal rules on entitlements. Firefighters in Nishapur protested against low wages, stalled overtime, the appointment of unqualified operational staff and inadequate bonus rates.

This week also saw two days of protests over months of unpaid wages by workers at the Chini Taghdis factory in Gonabad. On Monday, workers from the Iran National Steel Industrial Group marched from the Khuzestan provincial governor's office to the Ahvaz governor's office and the headquarters of the National Bank of Khuzestan.

They have been staging similar protests for two weeks, demanding overdue wages, proper supplementary health insurance and the reopening of suspended production lines. They are protesting the sudden reduction of overtime pay, cancellation of meal provisions and that their work is not classified as hazardous for retirement calculations.

Retirees have been at the forefront of protests. In Kermanshah, retirees in various pension funds protested delayed payments and the inadequacy of their pensions. Retirees in Fars province staged a protest in Shiraz on September 29. That day also saw protests against hardship by telecommunications retirees in many cities.

Living conditions have collapsed and the economy continues to deteriorate. The situation is exacerbated by this weekend's reimposition of UN sanctions, part of the US/NATO restructuring of the Middle East as a prelude to war against China.

### **Protests topple government in Madagascar over poverty living standards**

Mass protests over falling living standards and shortages of power and water toppled the Madagascan government at the beginning of the week. Protests in the capital Antananarivo (population 1.4 million), led by young people, began last week and continued into Monday, September 29.

The protesters gathered at the main university in Antananarivo Monday, carrying placards and singing songs. They then marched into the city centre.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds and authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Security forces used rubber bullets in an attempt to put down the unrest.

The president, Andry Rajoelina, dissolved the government in response to the mass protests. Appearing on television on Monday, he acknowledged the widely held public grievances, feigning contrition for his government's failings.

Madagascar, an island off south eastern Africa, is one of the continent's poorest countries. Around 75 percent of its 30 million population were below the poverty line in 2022, according to World Bank statistics.

### **Residents of Ventersdorp, South Africa protest for jobs, suffer brutal police attack**

South African residents of the small town of Ventersdorp protesting for jobs were brutally attacked by police while protesting on September 22.

Workers have been blocking roads with burning tyres to pressure the JB Marks local municipality into offering them employment at the nearby diamond mine. They claim unfair discrimination, saying African National Congress councillors instruct management at the mine to hire their friends and relatives.

### **Nigerian oil workers in nationwide strike over job losses**

Nigerian oil workers began a national strike September 29 after the Dangote oil refinery dismissed more than 800 unionised staff.

The workers at the privately owned Dangote Oil Refinery—Africa's largest oil producer, with a capacity to process 650,000 barrels per day—were reportedly fired en masse September 25 for joining the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN).

The courts intervened on behalf of the employers, demanding a return to work. PENGASSAN made clear it would seek to comply with the court order as soon as proper procedures were followed. The union said it did not comply with the order because it had not yet been served officially.

### **Ugandan teachers resume strike over pay**

Just before the start of term, Ugandan teachers resumed their national strike on September 15 over the government's failure to enhance salaries. Many teachers did not report for duty. The government issued a stern warning, urging teachers to return to their posts or face dismissal. The government claimed that salary increases are planned for the 2025/2026 financial year.



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