

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 October 2025

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

Public health care workers in France hold one-day work stoppages against austerity

Public workers in hospitals, schools, daycare centres and mental health settings across France engaged in strikes and marches October 9, protesting the lack of resources in health, social care and nursery education.

The General Confederation of Labour and other union members, including nurses, nursery assistants, care assistants, classroom assistants, family care workers and social workers, complain of low wages, staff shortages and deteriorating working conditions due to underfunding of public services.

Harbour pilots at Belgian ports strike over pension reforms

Maritime pilots at the Belgian ports of Antwerp, Zeebrugge and Ghent have been on strike since October 5, leaving hundreds of ships waiting to enter or leave the container terminals. Navigation into both sea and river docks is impossible without the expert guidance of the pilots.

The members of the AvK, BvL and OVL professional maritime pilots associations and the ACOD, ACV and VSOA unions have been protesting sporadically since March, when public employee pension reforms were first announced.

The government plans to save 2.7 billion euros annually on pension costs by calculating public sector pensions in the same way as those in private sector. The pilots say the proposed reforms will disproportionately impact lower-income earners compared to the previous system, which provided retirees with a lump sum based on career length.

UK phlebotomists in Gloucestershire continue longest pay dispute in NHS

A group of UK phlebotomists at Gloucestershire National Health Service (NHS) Trust are continuing their stoppage begun in March. The strike has lasted more than 200 days, making it the longest dispute in NHS history.

The 37 Unison members, paid on Band 2 of the NHS pay scale, demand

to be paid on Band 3, commensurate with their skills. They take and handle blood samples, as well as dealing with personal care.

Some NHS Trusts pay phlebotomists according to Band 3, depending on experience and location.

Birmingham bin strike continues in face of court action

Striking refuse workers in Birmingham, England face High Court action instigated by the Labour Party-run city council.

More than 350 Unite union members began intermittent strike action in January, and have been on an all-out stoppage since March. They voted by a 99.5 percent majority to renew their mandate to strike until March 2026. They are opposing the council's plans to cut safety-critical jobs and the pay of loaders and drivers by £8,000 and £10,000 respectively.

Council lawyers argued that the strikers had breached a court order forbidding what is in fact effective picketing—blocking scab refuse trucks at depots and on the streets. Threatened with a financial penalty, Unite admitted the charges and apologised “unreservedly.” As well as isolating strikes, the unions and Trades Union Congress accepted the draconian anti-union laws overseen by all governments.

The council, which plans cuts of £300 million across all services, has organised scabbing operations overseen by the Starmer government to try to break the strike. Unite reported that around 15 agency workers employed by Job and Talent refused to cross the picket line at three depots.

Staff at London school walk out over workload and class sizes due to council cuts

Teachers and learning support assistants at the London East Alternative Provision secondary school in Tower Hamlets went on strike October 7 for four days, over workload and increased class sizes.

The National Education Union members had engaged in 22 strike days since the council closed a site on the Isle of Dogs. As a consequence, the staff/pupil ratio is doubling from 1:7 to 1:14. Children at the school have special educational needs and disabilities.

Middle East

Iran: Motogen (Tabriz) workers strike over contracts and wages

Workers at the Motor-Generator (Motogen) Company in Tabriz, Iran were on strike for five days last week over low wages, temporary contracts and poor conditions.

Motogen, affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, employs around 1,000 workers, mostly on temporary or contract-based terms. Under threat of layoffs, the workers are demanding formalisation of their contracts, direct employment by the company and equal pay for all workers.

Workers at the industrial complex have been protesting these conditions for three years, without response from management. Management have stepped up security at the factory against the strikes, with managers reportedly monitoring workers' mobile phones to prevent news of the protest spreading. The workers have said they will continue the strike.

Iranian protests continue over pensions, wages, condition

Strikes over unpaid wages continue to break out across Iran. At the Bandar Abbas Star Oil Refinery last week, workers refused to leave their project dormitories, awaiting payment of four months' salaries. In Ilam, municipal service workers employed by a contracting company went on strike demanding immediate payment of three months' unpaid wages and arrears. Physical confrontations with workers were reported.

Retirees across Iran continue to demonstrate over poverty, rising prices, insecurity and living conditions. In Shush, retirees from Karkheh, Haft Tappeh and Shush itself chanted "Expenses are in dollars, our wages are in rials." In Tehran, retirees protesting at the Social Security Organisation chanted "Water, electricity, livelihood!"

Protesting retirees are linking their conditions to government corruption. Retired steelworkers in Isfahan shouted "The result of the government's work is the plundering of people's pockets" outside the governor's office.

Mohammad Reza Kamrava, a protesting retiree, was arrested on 11 October by intelligence agents. Protestors demanded his release, and Social Security retirees chanted "Looking through glass is not an answer to us."

Protests continue over social conditions generally. Farmers from Garmsar and Aradan protested water shortages during a visit by the Minister of Energy. The farmers are demanding implementation of the Law on Fair Water Distribution, and an end to the theft of water resources.

Living conditions continue to deteriorate and the economy is collapsing. The situation has been exacerbated further by the "snapback" reimposition of UN sanctions. This is part of the US/NATO's restructuring of the Middle East as a prelude to war against China.

Africa

Students protest at University of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape, South Africa over conditions

Students at the University of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape, South Africa, have been protesting about poor accommodation, lack of security, delayed allowances and inadequate support services.

The final straw came when the university administration suspended this year's elections for the Student Representative Council (SRC) and installed an interim SRC.

The university administration closed its Alice and East London campuses, citing criminal damage to property and called in the police. Students fear they will be unable to sit their exams.

Cement workers on strike over pay in Alberton, South Africa

Workers at Pharaoh Cement in Alberton, South Africa walked out indefinitely on October 12 over low pay, after the company refused to improve pay offer.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members are on R35.55 an hour. The NUM initially put in for a R10 increase then revised it down to R7 "to find common ground" with the company. The company's final offer was R2.14—R2.48, described by the union as "simply an insult to the workers."

Nigerian university lecturers in two-week strike

Nigerian university lecturers began a two-week strike on October 13 over low pay and lack of funding.

The government is threatening to impose the "No work, no pay" labour law, as it has several times during previous strikes by lecturers.

Agreements made by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) with the government in 1992, 2009 and 2013 have gone largely unmet, leading to further strikes.

ASUU President Chris Piwuna said all the academic bodies, the National Association of Medical and Dental Academics and the Congress of Nigerian University Academics supported the strike.

Staff at the University of Cross River in Calabar, Cross River State, held a day-long protest on October 9 to protest the federal government's failure to implement a 2009 agreement regarding their welfare and benefits.

Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions members carried placards with inscriptions such as: "We worked, You withheld—release our wages;" "Enough is Enough, pay our two months salaries," and "No more empty promises, Action now."

Similar protests took place in other Nigerian states, including Kano, Kaduna, and Nasarawa, in response to a call for national action.

Port workers in Liberia on go-slow

Port workers at the Free Port of Monrovia in Liberia began go-slow action on October 8 to disrupt cargo handling. The action follows UK-based APM Terminal's refusal to make a Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Dock Workers Union of Liberia since 2015.

The union held a recent meeting with government officials, including the finance minister, the Commissioner General of the Liberia Revenue Authority and the Managing Director of the National Port Authority, without achieving anything.

Ugandan teachers continue their stoppage over pay and conditions

Ugandan teachers have been on strike since the beginning of the school term to demand better pay, as well as improved working conditions and allowances.

President Yoweri Museveni publicly criticised the teachers, claiming

there was no money to increase their pay and telling them to wait until the next national budget.



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