

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Europe

### **Thousands of public sector workers across Portugal strike against government cuts, low pay and poor working conditions**

Portuguese teachers, doctors, nurses, transport workers, civil servants and municipal workers held a 24-hour general strike against government cuts October 24, causing disruption throughout the country. Workers demand pay increases, greater investment in public services and improved working conditions.

The stoppages and protest marches were organised by the Common Front, a collection of 29 public service unions, the National Teachers' Federation, the National Federation of Doctors and other health unions.

### **Petrochemical workers in Bilbao, Spain strike over shortfalls in health and safety and pay**

Petrochemical workers at the Petronor refinery in Muskiz, near Bilbao, Spain have been on indefinite strike since September 25 in protest over working conditions.

The strike was prompted by the move of shower and changing rooms to a more distant building on the site, which caused an unpaid extension to the working day. Workers say that underlying this is a general deterioration of facilities in a workplace where they are daily exposed to carcinogenic materials.

They demand greater investment in plant maintenance to ensure the health and safety of employees, local people and the environment. They also want pay for time spent on personal hygiene and travel and an increase in staff levels to avoid unwanted overtime.

Petronor is owned by Madrid-based multinational company Repsol, which employs over 25,000 worldwide.

### **Hundreds of Spanish engineering workers at auto parts supplier Mahle strike against job cuts**

Electronic engineering workers at German automotive parts

manufacturing giant Mahle, in Motilla del Palanca, Cuenca, Spain held strike days October 23, 27-28 in protest over a proposed 550 job losses at the facility. The CCCO and UGT union members also demonstrated at the entrance to the plant.

Mahle also plan 190 redundancies at their technology centre in Paterna, Valencia as part of their cost-cutting jobs cull to the 2,500 workforce in Spain. The automotive parts supplier is one of the largest in the world.

### **Agency workers brought in to scab on UK bin strike in Birmingham ballot to join dispute**

Agency workers brought in by Birmingham Labour-run council to break the long-running UK stoppage by refuse workers are being balloted for industrial action by the Unite union.

More than 350 Unite union members began intermittent strike action in January, beginning an all-out stoppage in March. They voted by a 99.5 percent majority to renew their mandate to strike until March 2026. The council plans to cut safety-critical jobs crucial for the protection of the public and staff and slash the pay of loaders and drivers by £8,000 and £10,000 respectively.

The council instigated legal action to try and break the strike. Council lawyers argued that 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.”

The council, which plans cuts of £300 million across all services, organised scabbing operations overseen by the Starmer government to try to break the strike. Unite reported that an increasing number of the Job & Talent agency workers brought in to replace the strikers are refusing to cross the picket lines due to “unsustainable” workloads, “bullying” at the refuse department, and the threat of blacklisting.

At Veolia in Sheffield, where 100 refuse workers have been on strike for a year over union recognition, Unite is winding down the action to every alternate week from November 10.

Unite refuses to unify the determined struggle of the Birmingham bin workers with refuse workers across the sector and its more than a million members across other sectors such as transport workers, in national action over pay and conditions.

### **Museum workers at National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, England to continue pay strike until January**

Workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, England

are continuing until January the stoppage over pay they began in August because of the intransigence of management.

Management's latest pay offer was a paltry £1 an hour rise for specialist museum guides, such as fitters and electricians, and 5 percent for other staff. According to the Unison union, 5 percent would be lower than the 80p an hour increase initially offered. Some workers earn just £12.60 an hour.

Unison revised its earlier demand down from £2.50 an hour to 5 percent or £1 an hour, whichever is greater.

Many of the 40 workers are former miners involved in the year-long strike in 1984/85 over pit closures. The Trades Union Congress refused to call a general strike, leaving the miners isolated and leading to the destruction of the industry.

Labour majority-run Wakefield council is withholding government funding for the museum until the dispute is settled. The museum is open to the public, but underground tours are not available.

### **Sellafield nuclear workers in Cumbria, England continue walkouts over hazard pay**

More than 1,500 workers at the Sellafield nuclear site in Cumbria, England walked out October 27 for two weeks and set up picket lines, with planned marches. This is their third stoppage over pay.

The Unite union members, including electricians, pipefitters, joiners, welders, riggers and groundworkers, began an overtime ban on October 14. The highly skilled workers work in a dangerous environment and demand a hazard allowance. They are employed by subcontractors Altrad, PPS Electrical, Enigma, ES Steel, Meldrum Ltd and PPS Electrical, supplying labour for 37 contract firms.

Unite stated, "Unite have always been open to negotiations, we have highlighted that Acas could be the vehicle if the employer should wish to introduce them." The government arbitration service is the vehicle for pushing through sellout agreements over pay and conditions.

The largest nuclear site in Europe, Sellafield Ltd is owned by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, a government public body.

### **Teachers at London sixth form college strike to defend pay**

Last week, 60 teachers walked out at Capital City College (CCC) sixth form campus in London to defend pay rates. A further stoppage by the National Education Union members is planned for November 10.

Management at FE (further education) CCC aim to freeze the pay of their sixth form teachers, whose legacy pay is higher than that of their other college lecturers, until they equalise. FE lecturers get paid around 23 percent less than school teachers.

## **Middle East**

### **Workers at Israel's Holocaust museum strike over pay deal**

In the first ever full strike at Israel's Holocaust museum and memorial, workers at Yad Vashem have protested for two days outside the Finance

Ministry in Jerusalem over a wage agreement.

The strikers accuse the Treasury of withdrawing from a negotiated wage agreement that was only reached after seven years of talks. The museum said despite the strike the site remained open.

A union of 400 workers has said that the average Yad Vashem salary is 72 percent lower than the public sector average. Many staff earn less than NIS 9,000 (\$2,723) a month.

Workers' committee member Yiftach Meiri told media this was "a moral failure by the state," saying "Employees who have devoted their lives to preserving the memory of the Holocaust are being treated with contempt."

Calling the disputes "bridgeable," Yad Vashem said 95 percent of the new collective agreement was now finalised, with "significant wage increases" over the next five years.

### **Israel's Bank Hapoalim suspends cuts after workers strike**

Facing a strike across the whole organisation last week, Israel's Bank Hapoalim has suspended its 2025-28 optimisation plan. This would have seen the loss of 770 jobs, around 10 percent of the workforce.

Members of the Bank Hapoalim Workers' Union were on strike at branches in Tel Aviv, the Ono Valley, Ramat Gan, Givatayim and Petah Tikva. The Financial Markets and International Banking Division and the national call-centre were also going to take action, and the union announced unlimited daily regional strikes, moving from area to area.

The strike followed plans by CEO Yadin Antebi to eliminate posts by not filling vacant positions, merging roles and the forced relocation of hundreds of workers. The union said this would also affect salaries and career advancement.

The workers were already dealing with increased workloads following implementation of a previous cost-cutting plan and staffing changes.

Union chairman Roni Garfunkel called the plan "aggressive and disconnected." He accused Antebi of "promoting forceful, unilateral, and closed measures intended to serve only the profit margin, at the expense of customers and workers."

The bank, which has been making record profits, suspended the plan pending further negotiations. It also cancelled its plan to deduct the cost of days missed due to the strike from workers' salaries.

### **Protests continue across Iran over wages, conditions, pensions**

Retirees across Iran have again taken to the streets this week protesting poverty. Social Security retirees protested outside the Shush governor's office, chanting "Poverty, inflation, are the bane of our people." Pensioners in Ahvaz, Kermanshah and Rasht protested that hyperinflation had rendered pensions worthless, and pointing to the collapse of health care services.

In Tehran, retired steel and mine workers demonstrated outside parliament against the illegal transfer of pension funds and the government's failure to adjust payments to the cost of living.

Retirees are also protesting overdue pension payments, with demonstrations reported from Tehran, Esfahan, Gilan, Fars and other cities. Protestors outside government buildings in Zanzan and Tabriz included veterans of the Iraq-Iran war now facing financial insecurity. They chanted "Yesterday's warriors are today's claimants."

Workers across the country have demonstrated over unpaid wages.

Workers at the Kashi Kazheh tile factory in Eslamabad-e Gharb held a protest over months of delays to their salaries. At the Goharzamin mining company in Sirjan, workers held a strike over unpaid bonuses and hazardous conditions.

Workers at the Refah chain store in Zanjan protested that wages have gone unpaid for three months, and seven months of insurance premiums are missing. One worker told press “We are all minimum-wage earners: even a one-month delays creates many problems.”

Emergency health workers held a protest in Fasa over low and delayed wages. In Ahvaz, electricity distribution workers walked off the job in protest that their wages have been wiped out by hyperinflation.

Mashhad bakers have held a further rally outside the provincial governor’s office. They have now worked for 100 days without receiving subsidies promised by the government. Poultry farmers in Khorasan Razavi province protested after they had to cull their chickens. They had paid the government for animal feed that was never delivered, leaving them with empty warehouses.

Workers are also walking off jobs over conditions. Workers walked out at the Ilam Petrochemical plant when a contractor with a record of non-payment of wages was again awarded the maintenance contract. “This is obvious corruption,” protested one worker.

Workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane complex were on strike for four days over their meals. A contractor is paid 450,000 toman for each meal, but workers say the food provided them is worth only 60,000 toman.

Students at the Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences also protested over contaminated canteen meals that have caused food poisoning. They also protested escalating surveillance of their dormitories.

With the “snapback” reimposition of UN sanctions, the economy is collapsing and basic goods are becoming unaffordable. A Tehran grocer said the cost of his rice had risen in one month from 14.5 million rials (\$13) to 21 million rials (\$19). “How can a head of a family with monthly income of 20 million rials (\$18) afford that just for rice?”

## **Africa**

### **Kenyan postal workers in nationwide strike over salary arrears**

Over 2,000 postal workers in Kenya have downed tools to protest more than six months of unpaid salaries.

Secretary General of the Communication Workers Union, Benson Okwaro, said, “Our members have endured untold suffering for half a year without a single penny. This strike will persist until all pending dues are cleared and justice is served.”

The Postal Corporation of Kenya, once a well-run service, has been run down in recent years and is now saddled with mounting debts.

### **Postal workers in Embu, Nigeria strike to demand unpaid salaries**

Postal workers in Embu, Nigeria walked out October 27 to demand immediate payment of five months of salary arrears.

Branch Communication Workers Union chairman Joseph Rwanjau said, “The last time they received a salary was in April. Since then, they have been struggling to survive... We are public servants, yet we cannot feed our families or pay our bills... Our children ask us for food and school fees, and we have nothing to give them.”

Aaron Kamau, a striker, vowed that threats and intimidation would not silence them. “We will not be cowed. No salary means no work. It is that simple.”

### **Court staff in Kaduna, Nigeria on indefinite strike to demand financial autonomy**

Court staff in Kaduna State, Nigeria began strike action October 27 over several issues, including the financial dependence of the courts on the state government.

In addition to demanding financial autonomy, they also called for implementation of salary adjustments, payment of unpaid salaries for April and May 2021, payment of nine years’ arrears of a 20 percent salary increase from 2016 onwards, payment of nine years’ leave and transport grants, and staff outfit allowances.

### **Residents in South Africa protest outside Durban block of flats as two children fall down lift shaft**

Hundreds demonstrated outside a block of flats in Durban, South Africa after two children plunged four floors down a lift shaft on October 18.

Eight-year-old Aphelele Diamini tragically died from his injuries, while his sister Apile remains in hospital. The children were playing with friends in the HOMii building on Joe Slovo Street.

Residents believe the tragedy could have been avoided. A similar incident occurred two years ago in the same building, when a woman fell down a lift shaft to her death. HOMii is a property management company that supplies rooms for rent.

### **Workers at water company in Maluti-a-Phofung Municipality, South Africa walk out to defend jobs**

Dozens of workers at Maluti-a-Phofung Water at Free State in South Africa walked out on Monday to protest closure plans. They blocked the company office entrance.

The company, which provides water services, is being taken over by Maluti-a-Phofung Municipality. Permanent workers will supposedly be kept on, but many fear for their jobs.

### **Khayelitsha waste workers in Cape Town, South Africa protest non-payment of wages**

Dozens of Khayelitsha waste workers in Cape Town, South Africa held a protest October 23 to demand payment of their wages. They are employed by one of the City of Cape Town’s contractors, Manandi Services.

The workers have been employed to collect rubbish from Khayelitsha since September, but complain they are short-changed or not paid at all. Workers say they are having to take out short-term loans which they cannot repay.

Worker Nosisi Ngxabano told press, “I have no food to eat at lunchtime at work. I just fold my arms at lunchtime.”



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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