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.

Firefighters in France strike for increases in staffing and resources

French firefighters began another national strike Tuesday, following a major strike and protest August 13, and after an exceptionally severe wildfire season. The stoppages are scheduled to continue in various forms for more than a month with a national demonstration in Paris planned for September 29.

The fire service union members demand increased recruitment, improved working conditions and greater resources. They warn that services are under growing pressure as the number and intensity of fires and other emergency interventions increase, while staffing levels and equipment have failed to keep pace.

The strike reflects growing anger among firefighters that the government has failed to provide the resources necessary to protect both emergency workers and the population, and that promises of reform have not been matched by concrete measures.

Thousands demonstrate in Thessaloniki, Greece against New Democracy government

Thousands of workers, farmers, pensioners, students and the self-employed protested in Thessaloniki Saturday against the right-wing government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, coinciding with his speech at the Thessaloniki International Fair opening.

More than 25,000 people took part in the demonstrations, organised by the General Confederation of Greek Workers, the Confederation of Greek Civil Servants' Trade Unions, the All-Workers Militant Front, the Thessaloniki Labour Centre and relatives of the victims of the Tempi rail disaster.

The protests reflect widespread anger over soaring prices, low wages and pensions, taxation and deteriorating public services. Average incomes remain around 2009 levels while essential costs rose sharply, leaving Greece with the lowest purchasing power in the European Union.

Italian rail workers' stoppage in protest over poor pay and conditions

Italian railway workers staged a national 24-hour strike Monday which affected high-speed, long-distance and regional services across the FS Italiane, Trenitalia, Trenord and Italo companies, causing cancellations and alterations to services throughout the country, with disruption potentially extending beyond the official strike period.

The National Assembly of Train Drivers and Onboard Personnel, CUB Trasporti, SGB, and CAT union members oppose deteriorating working conditions and privatisation, and demand wage increases in line with inflation. They also want improved health and safety protections, shorter working hours, safeguards for apprentices and night-shift workers, an end to outsourcing, and lower retirement ages.

The stoppage follows an earlier strike in July and is part of a wave of industrial action across Italy as workers resist declining real wages, worsening conditions and government-backed restructuring.

Transport strike and demonstration in the Netherlands against government attacks on benefits and pensions

Thousands of public-sector workers demonstrated Tuesday in The Hague, Netherlands against the government's planned cuts to social security. The FNV, CNV and VCP union members demand that proposed reductions to unemployment benefits, disability benefits, state pensions and domestic care are abandoned.

The protest was followed Wednesday by a nationwide 24-hour public transport strike, involving railway, regional bus and urban transport workers. The FNV and CNV union members also oppose the government's social-security cuts, warning that transport workers face risks of injury and disability because of the strenuous nature of their work.

The successive actions point to mounting opposition among workers as they are expected to bear the costs of austerity and war via attacks on pensions, unemployment and disability protection.

Domestic appliance workers in Italy strike against factory closures and job losses

Workers at domestic appliance manufacturer Beko's Melano plant in Fabriano, Italy, walked out Tuesday and held a protest against the company's failure to honour agreements on investment, production and employment.

The 2025 industrial plan was supposed to guarantee the site's future, but 66 planned job cuts and around 30 further voluntary departures have taken place. Workers remain on short-time working as production falls and fear further relocation of production.

The Beko action comes amid a broader assault on jobs in Italy's domestic appliance industry. Electrolux workers are due to strike for eight hours at all the company's Italian plants on September 15, with a national demonstration at Cerreto d'Esi, which Electrolux plans to close with around 1,450 jobs at risk.

Prison warders in Belgium strike over staff shortages and overcrowding

Belgian prison officers began a five-day nationwide strike on Sunday over chronic overcrowding, staff shortages, deteriorating infrastructure and unsafe working conditions.

The General Union of Public Services members demand structural action to end overcrowding and understaffing, pointing to hundreds of prisoners forced to sleep on floors, leave accumulating and mounting pressure on prison staff. They say previous talks with the Justice Minister produced no concrete solutions.

On Tuesday, staff were requisitioned in almost all Belgian prisons to maintain minimum staffing levels, while police were brought in at some establishments. The prison warders warned of further action if the government fails to address the crisis, which has persisted despite earlier emergency measures.

Aerospace workers at firm in Leicester, UK begin indefinite walkout

Around 200 UK workers employed by Leicester based aerospace company, SPS Technologies began an indefinite stoppage on Friday September 4. SPS, with an annual turnover of more than £54 million, is a subsidiary of Precision Castparts Corp (PCC), a US based industrial goods and metal fabrication company.

The Unite union members rejected a two-year pay deal of 4 percent this year and four next year. It is the third consecutive year the workforce voted for action after rejecting an inferior pay offer.

The union members are calling for parity with higher pay offers made to other PCC companies based in the East Midlands. They are also opposed to proposed changes in conditions, such as removing the use of emergency holiday leave and changing the absence policy for workers on nine-day fortnight rotas.

Academic and administrative staff at Caledonian University Glasgow, Scotland, hold stoppage over job cuts

Academic and administrative staff at Glasgow's Caledonian University held a joint stoppage Monday, Tuesday and Thursday this week as the new academic year began.

The members of Unison, Educational Institute of Scotland-University Lecturers' Association (EIS-ULA) and University and College Unions oppose plans by the university management to cut around 100 jobs as it seeks to meet a £10 million shortfall in overseas students' payments. For the respective union bureaucracies, the main sticking point is management's refusal to rule out compulsory redundancies.

Some staff have also taken action short of a strike such as working to contract and refusing voluntary duties. Previous strikes over the same issue took place in July and August.

Further stoppages by holiday camp safety officers in Bognor Regis, UK over pay and conditions

Safety officers working at the Butlin's Bognor Regis holiday camp on the English south coast finished a four-day stoppage on Monday and are due to begin a six-day one Thursday.

They previously walked out from August 28 to 30 and will begin continuous strike action from September 21 if the dispute is not resolved. They work 12-hour shifts and are responsible for dealing with violent or aggressive holiday makers, responding to medical emergencies and lost children.

Among the seven demands of the United Voice of the World (UVW) members are to be paid £14 an hour, repayment of alleged unlawful deductions, for the appointment of an additional five safety officers to overcome understaffing and for recognition of the UVW for negotiations.

The UVW accused Butlin's of using scab labour paid at £15 an hour and enhanced conditions to try and break the strike.

Ongoing protests by workers across Iran impacted by the country's dire economic crisis

Monday saw protests by workers on offshore platforms operated by the Pars Oil and Gas company as well as the Assaluyeh southern energy hub. Their demands included the removal of salary caps, full payment of wages and benefits and for changes to the tax system for offshore workers. The protests are a regular event taking place each Monday.

The same day saw protests by Iran Telecommunications Company retirees in several cities including Ilam, Isfahan and Kermanshah. They were protesting deteriorating living conditions, demanding implementation of government agreed pension upgrades and health benefits.

Also Monday, workers from the Pouya Nakh factory gathered outside the provincial governor's office. The workers laid off more than a year ago have still to receive employment benefits to which they are entitled.

The same day motorcycle couriers across the city of Arak stopped work and protested over low delivery fares they must charge and high commission charges they must pay.

On Sunday, health care workers and nurses from the Kurdistan Province gathered outside the governorate office in Sanandaj protesting low wages, heavy workloads and compulsory overtime among other issues.

Decades of US sanctions, exacerbated by the US blockade of shipping in and out of Iran has devastated Iran's economy. Ongoing military attacks by the US only adds to the devastation.

Protest and strike threat by Iraqi oil production workers over terms and conditions

Dozens of workers employed as technicians, engineers and administrators working in the West Qurna 2 oilfield in the Basra region of Iraq held a protest Tuesday. They were protesting their employment contracts and unpaid dues. West Qurma 2 is Iraq's largest oil field producing around 10 percent of the country's oil.

The workers demand similar employment contract terms they had when Russia's Lukoil ran the oilfield. Lukoil was unable to continue running the oilfield due to sanctions imposed on the company. US oil giant Chevron is in the process of taking over the running of the oil field. In the meantime, it is being managed by the state-owned Basra Oil Company.

The workers have threatened an indefinite strike unless their demands are addressed within a week.

Nigerian students protest over lack of education

On September 3, students at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA) in Nigeria's Ondo State blocked the university's main gate and surrounding roads, in support of striking lecturers.

The Students' Union Government demand an immediate settlement and reopening of the university, saying students, particularly those approaching graduation, face mounting hardship and uncertainty.

Lecturers organised in the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have been striking over unpaid salaries and the failure to implement the 2025 federal government-ASUU agreement, including a new salary structure and outstanding arrears. The state government announced a 60 percent increase in university subventions, but lecturers said they would remain on strike until the agreement was implemented and arrears dating from January were paid.

The dispute widened further when members of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, Non-Academic Staff Union and National Association of Academic Technologists joined indefinite industrial action across Ondo State-owned universities from September 2.

Student leaders said they would continue protests until the disputes were resolved and academic activities resumed.

Nigerian non-academic workers continue indefinite strike

Non-academic workers at state-owned universities in Ondo State, Nigeria are continuing an indefinite strike begun September 2 over the failure of the state government to implement outstanding pay agreements.

Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, Non-Academic Staff Union and National Association of Academic Technologists members have withdrawn administrative, technical, clinical and other services.

The Joint Action Committee of Ondo State Tertiary Institutions rejected the government's 60 percent increase in university grants as inadequate. Workers are demanding full implementation of the 2026 Federal Government/university unions agreement, including payment of CONTTA and associated allowances and all outstanding benefits dating from January.

Teachers in Zimbabwe refuse to work more than three days a week

Teachers in Zimbabwe announced they will report for work only three days a week because their salaries are no longer sufficient to meet basic living costs. The remaining two working days will be used for other income-generating activities to supplement their wages.

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe estimates teachers need a minimum basic salary of US$1,260 a month to maintain a dignified standard of living.

Tunisian chemical workers strike after death of colleague

Workers at the state-owned Gafsa Phosphate Company in Tunisia staged a three-day strike ending September 3, with a participation rate of more than 95 percent across production sites and administrative departments. The walkout followed the death of a worker at a Gafsa mine on August 22, which was attributed to inadequate health and safety measures.

The Fédération Générale des Mineurs Tunisiens members demand improved workplace safety, implementation of previous agreements and payment of production bonuses withheld for two years. Workers also want access to social benefits, including loans and wage advances deducted from their salaries.

The union said it submitted its demands to management on June 30 but got no response; a meeting that was scheduled for August 4 was cancelled without explanation. Gafsa Phosphate is facing a severe financial crisis, with delayed wages and suspended benefits, even as workers increased phosphate production from three million to four million tonnes this year.

Union suspends strike over pay parity and permanent jobs at BAIC auto plant in South Africa

Around 350 workers at Beijing Automotive Industry Corporation (BAIC) in the Coega Special Economic Zone near Gqeberha, South Africa, returned to work after the union suspended an 11-week strike while negotiations continue.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members walked out on June 15 over wages and conditions. The strike brought production at the vehicle assembly plant to a standstill. Negotiations are continuing under the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, with production expected to resume.

The dispute centres on BAIC's refusal to bring wages into line with those paid elsewhere in South Africa's motor industry. NUMSA says workers are paid as little as R40–R48 an hour, compared with R121 for entry-level workers under the National Bargaining Forum. Spray painters reportedly earn R84 an hour against an industry rate of R163.24, while welders receive R48 compared with R180.53.

Workers also demand permanent employment for long-term contract workers and the restoration of previous wage rates. BAIC is not a member of the National Bargaining Forum, which covers the country's major vehicle manufacturers.

Workers have been without wages for more than two months. NUMSA said some workers were unable to attend pickets because of their financial circumstances.

BAIC is a joint state-owned venture between the Chinese BAIC-group and South Africa's Industrial Development Corporation set up in 2016. It is a manufacturing and assembly plant.

Planned strike by drivers at Cape Town bus company in South Africa face court injunction

Workers at Golden Arrow Bus Services in Cape Town, South Africa planning a walkout from midnight on September10 were issued a court injunction this week after the National Union for All Sectors (NUFAS) issued notice of strike action.

The dispute centres on the company's disciplinary procedures. NUFAS stated the changes were imposed unilaterally, resulting in drivers being dismissed without adequate warning or consultation. The union also argues that employees can face dismissal under procedures that changed without them being party to negotiations.

NUFAS members oppose the way Golden Arrow applies disciplinary sanctions, including the treatment of relatively minor offences alongside more serious driving violations. They also raised concerns over the use of camera footage and disciplinary systems to monitor drivers.

A previous Labour Court judgment on September 1 dismissed Golden Arrow's application concerning an anticipated strike.

The company secured an injunction by invoking the potential disruption to public transport, saying its services are used by hundreds of thousands of passengers across Cape Town.

Retirees protest across South Africa demanding higher pension

Pensioners across South Africa staged pickets outside South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) offices September 7, demanding that the old-age grant be increased from R2,400 to R5,000 a month.

The demonstrations, organised by Pensioners of South Africa (POSA), took place in several provinces, including the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. Pensioners said the current grant of is insufficient to meet basic living costs, including food, electricity, water and transport.

The protesters also raised grievances over the treatment of elderly people by SASSA. They complained of long queues, delays and being turned away because of administrative and computer-system problems. Pensioners said many are forced to use their grants to support unemployed family members and grandchildren, further reducing the money available for their own needs.

The protests point to the severe poverty confronting elderly South Africans and the wider failure of the social welfare system to provide an adequate income. Pensioners are demanding not only a substantial increase in the grant but improved SASSA services and an end to practices that leave vulnerable claimants waiting for hours or facing suspension of payments.