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.

Italian workers in supply chain ILVA steelworks strike and protest to defend jobs

Workers employed by contractors and firms in the supply chain of the former ILVA steelworks in Taranto began a 24-hour strike Monday against the threat of mass redundancies.

ILVA is Italy's partly state-owned major steel producer. It was briefly owned by Arcelor Mittal Group, who were accused of buying the company to deliberately run it down and eliminate it as a competitor.

The action followed the opening of collective dismissal procedures affecting more than 2,500 workers across 28 companies, following the Milan Court of Appeal's confirmation of the shutdown of the plant's blast furnaces and hot production area. The Fim-Cisl, Fiom-Cgil, Uilm-Uil and Usb union members assembled outside the plant, marched through Taranto, blocked roads and disrupted traffic and held a sit-in outside the municipal offices.

The workers demand an immediate halt to the dismissals, measures to protect employment and incomes and an industrial plan guaranteeing the future of the plant and its associated companies.

Air traffic controllers at Charleroi Airport in Belgium strike over pay shortfall

Air traffic controllers at Brussels South Charleroi Airport began a strike at 10 p.m. Wednesday in a dispute over pay for night work. Controllers employed by Skeyes are due to stop work every night from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. until October 10, following the failure of several rounds of mediation.

The action immediately caused major disruption. Charleroi Airport reported that at least 44 flights scheduled between Wednesday evening and Thursday morning were cancelled, directly affecting more than 7,000 passengers.

The VSOA union members say they receive no specific allowance for night work, unlike air traffic controllers at other Skeyes centres such as Liège airport, despite carrying out the same essential duties during the evening, overnight and early morning. They demand an allowance comparable to that received by colleagues performing similar duties elsewhere.

French electricity and gas workers strike to retain tariff allowance

French workers held a major strike Monday and Tuesday to defend their long-standing preferential tariff agent (special status) for electricity and gas. The strike had a significant impact on energy production, with 6.5 gigawatts of generating capacity taken offline overnight. Workers also demonstrated at energy installations, and several hundred gathered outside the Economy Ministry in Paris.

The tariff agent covers around 140,000 current employees and 160,000 retirees from EDF, Engie and related companies. The CGT, CFDT, CFE-CGC and FO union members insist the tariff is part of workers' remuneration rather than a privilege, and warned that increasing its taxation would reduce purchasing power. They threaten further action if their demands are not met.

The Court of Auditors estimates that the benefit cost EDF more than €700 million in lost revenue in 2024, and has called for it to be reformed. The government says it does not intend to abolish the tariff, but wants its taxation and social valuation brought into line with legal requirements.

Teachers in Valencia and Alicante, Spain protest for improvements in pay and working conditions

Thousands of teachers, families and supporters demonstrated in Valencia, Alicante and Castellón Saturday, demanding the resumption of negotiations with the regional Education Ministry over conditions in the public education system. Around 10,000 people took part in Valencia, marching under the slogan, "For the dignity of public education."

The STEPV, CCOO, UGT and CGT union members demand increased staffing, smaller class sizes, improved pay, greater resources for inclusion and vocational education, and more investment in school infrastructure.

The action follows a 32-day indefinite strike last school year, that was suspended June 11 without a comprehensive agreement. The Education Ministry proposed a four-year package including additional teachers, which teachers rejected as insufficient. Teachers warn that Saturday's demonstrations were only the beginning of renewed action.

Municipal workers in Samsun, Turkey in hunger protest for payment of wage arrears

Workers at Atakum Municipality in Samsun, Turkey began a protest September 4 outside the city hall, after months of irregular and unpaid wages. They are owed around five months' wages and payment of a statutory bonus, leaving many in debt and struggling to support their families.

The action escalated when five workers began a hunger strike. On September 10, the Genel-?? union members called for solidarity from other workers and trade union organisations. They stressed that their struggle was not simply over their own arrears but concerned all workers demanding payment for their labour.

After 11 days of the protest, part of the outstanding money was paid and the municipality began discussions. Workers described this as a “first gain” and ended their eight-day hunger strike, amid concerns for their health and pressure from their families. However, they have maintained their vigil outside city hall, demanding the rest of their wages and a transparent timetable for the remaining payments.

Bus manufacturer workers in Scarborough, UK launch further series of strikes over pay

Around 400 UK workers at the Alexander Dennis bus manufacturing company in Scarborough walked out on Monday and Tuesday. Alexander Dennis is a major manufacturing facility in the Yorkshire coastal town. The company is currently working on a £57 million contract to supply around 200 buses to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

The Unite union members have been taking intermittent strike action since June after rejecting a two year pay deal. That deal would have left them with a real terms pay cut in the second year if inflation continues at its current rate. According to Unite, workers’ wages have eroded by around 20 percent in real terms since 2020.

The workers held three days of stoppages last week, and further dates are planned throughout September. The additional dates are September 21-25 and 28-30. Announcing the current round of walkouts, Unite said industrial action will intensify if the dispute is not resolved.

Operating theatre staff at four hospitals in Greater Manchester, England in further strike over overtime pay

More than 350 National Health Service (NHS) workers at four Greater Manchester hospitals walked out on September 14, 15 and 17, following previous strikes in June and August in a dispute over overtime payments.

Operating theatre staff at Salford Royal, Royal Oldham, Rochdale Infirmary and Fairfield Hospital in Bury are fighting the use of NHS Professionals to manage overtime. Unison says this has left some staff earning less for extra shifts than for their normal hours, with losses of up to £80. The latest action brings the total number of strike days since June to 10.

The dispute exposes the chronic understaffing of NHS operating theatres, where workers are being driven to take additional shifts to cover shortages. Unison North West regional organiser Kevin Dolan said the Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust had rejected offers to resume negotiations and given no indication it was willing to re-enter talks.

During the August strikes, the trust declared a critical incident to secure extra support to keep urgent surgery running, with some procedures postponed.

The dispute underlines staff shortages, the reliance on existing staff working extra hours to sustain patient care, and inadequate pay as prices continue to rise.

Hospital biomedics at north west England hospitals hold further stoppages over holiday pay

Biomedics working for the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust (LTHT) Blackburn and Burnley hospitals were on strike this week, following on last week’s stoppage. They are responsible for urgent and routine blood tests as well as wider diagnostic tests.

The Unite union members are taking the action to protest the trust’s failure to pay holiday, to which they are entitled. Some staff are owed thousands of pounds. Several years ago, the employer lost at a tribunal over holiday pay but refused to apply it to all staff. The current trust argues the tribunal findings do not apply, as the hospitals were then run by the East Lancashire Hospitals Trust. LTHT took over running the trust in April this year.

The biomedics have taken previous action over this issue, and week-long stoppages are planned for the weeks beginning September 21 and 28.

Strike by care workers in Wirral, UK over pay

Around 50 care workers employed by Wirral Evolutions began a three-day stoppage over pay on Monday. Wirral Evolutions is a company providing day care for disabled adults, wholly owned by Wirral council.

The Unison union members demand to be paid at a higher level, commensurate with level of duties they perform. The workers began raising concerns over the level of pay nearly three years ago, and began stoppages over the issue in October of last year. With this week’s walkouts, there have been 32 days of strike action.

Strike by dockers at Eastham on Merseyside, UK over pay and conditions

Around a dozen dock workers employed by the multinational logistics GAC at their Eastham facility on the river Mersey, England were on strike Monday and Wednesday.

The Unite union members are highly skilled operatives, who earn around £30,000 a year. They rejected a 2 percent pay offer, a real terms pay cut. They are also protesting proposed changes in the on-call system, and previously walked out on September 1 and 3 over these issues.

Protest by dentists in Gaza over shortage of essential medical supplies

Tuesday saw a protest by dentists in Gaza City over Israeli restrictions on the entry of essential medical supplies used by dentists in the Gaza Strip. The protest took place outside the International Committee of the Red Cross building in Gaza City.

The dentists called on international organisations and health bodies to ensure the provision of essential supplies. According to the Gaza Strip Dentists Association, some clinics and medical centres were forced to close because of the severe shortage of supplies, with others operating with very limited supplies.

Ongoing protests over deteriorating conditions in Iran

Monday witnessed further protests by large numbers of telecommunications retirees outside Ministry of Communications offices in cities across Iran, including Bijar, Isfahan, Sanandaj and Tehran. The retirees pressed their long-standing demands for supplementary insurance and pension equalisation.

On Sunday, Social Security retirees demonstrated outside Social Security offices in several cities, including Ahvaz, Haft-Tappeh, Rasht and Tehran. They were protesting runaway inflation eroding their spending power, leaving them living in catastrophic conditions. Also Sunday, steel industry retirees in Isfahan marched to the Governor's office protesting their meagre pensions, and workers at the Yadavaran oil field in Khuzestan held a protest over the non-payment of benefits.

The living and social conditions of workers and retirees in Iran is impacted by decades of US sanctions and exacerbated by the US blockading the flow of shipping in and out of Iran. The ongoing sporadic US military attacks serve to increase the devastation.

Doctors, pharmacists and dental surgeons in nationwide strike over work conditions and funding in Senegal

Doctors, pharmacists and dental surgeons across Senegal held a 48-hour strike on September 8-9, after the government failed to respond to demands submitted by the Autonomous Union of Doctors, Pharmacists and Dental Surgeons of Senegal (SAMES) in 2023. Emergency treatment and minimum services were maintained during the stoppage.

SAMES members demand permanent employment for medical workers, increased recruitment into the public health system, improved pensions and allowances, recognition of years worked on temporary contracts and better career progression. They also demand more hospital equipment, including scanners and MRI machines, functional laboratories and ambulances, amid severe shortages of staff and resources.

Indefinite strike at three state universities in Lagos, Nigeria demanding collective agreement is implemented

Lecturers at Nigeria's three Lagos State-owned universities began an indefinite strike September 15 over the state government's failure to implement the 2025 agreement between the union and the federal government. The walkout affects Lagos State University, Lagos State University of Education and Lagos State University of Science and Technology.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members demand adoption of the agreement, including payment of the Consolidated Academic Tools Allowance and improved welfare provisions for serving and retired lecturers. The union issued the Lagos State government a 14-day ultimatum on August 31, followed by a final warning, but said the deadline expired without meaningful negotiations or a concrete offer.

Lagos is among around 20 Nigerian states identified by ASUU as failing to implement the 2025 agreement, with similar disputes over pay, allowances and conditions provoking industrial action at universities elsewhere in the country.

Nigerian college workers protest against privatisation creep

Workers at Nigeria's Federal Unity Colleges and the Federal Ministry of Education staged continued protests up until September 16 against the proposed decision of King's College, Lagos, to be run by the King's College Old Boys' Association (KCOBA). King's College staff prevented KCOBA representatives from entering the school on September 15.

Workers and parents argue that handing management of King's College to a private association could set a precedent for other Unity Colleges and threaten affordable public education for working-class families.

The action disrupted the reopening of Unity Colleges across the country earlier in the week, while workers barricaded the Education Ministry in Abuja. On Wednesday, protesters blocked Education Minister Tunji Alausa and senior officials from entering their offices, demanding the concession be withdrawn.

The concession involves the Nigerian federal government keeping legal ownership of King's College, Lagos, but handing over its day-to-day management, financing and operation to the KCOBA for 35 years.

The Trade Union Congress and national leadership of the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria announced a suspension of industrial action after the government agreed to establish a seven-member committee to review the concession within two weeks. The government says King's College will remain publicly owned, with no retrenchments and no increase in fees outside existing federal policy. However, the Joint Workers Council under pressure from the grassroots rejected the suspension and vowed to continue the protests until the concession itself is reversed.

Despite attempts by the union leadership and government to contain the dispute through fruitless negotiations, opposition from education workers remains active.

Health union pushes through end of Kenyan nurses' stoppage without resolving central issue

On September 9, Kenyan nurses returned to work after 43 days on national strike. The Kenya National Union of Nurses and Midwives (KNUNM) signed a return-to-work agreement with the Council of Governors, leaving the central issue unresolved. The 2017 Collective Bargaining Agreement has not been implemented.

The walkout, begun July 29, disrupted services across public hospitals and clinics, as nurses pressed demands over pay, allowances, employment terms and the long-delayed implementation of their collective agreement.

The county governments made some concessions, agreeing to raise the monthly risk allowance from Sh3,850 to Sh8,000 and the annual uniform allowance from Sh10,000 to Sh15,000. Nurses employed under the Universal Health Coverage programme will be moved onto permanent and pensionable contracts, while new career progression guidelines are to be drawn up.

If the 2017 agreement is not implemented in 45 days, to placate its members KNUNM said they would consider calling further action.

Workers at packaging company in Johannesburg, South Africa walk out over pay and conditions

Workers at Masterpack, a packaging company owned by Bidvest, have been on strike in Johannesburg, South Africa since September 7, in a dispute over wages and working conditions.

Around 51 workers—30 General Industries Workers Union of South Africa members and 21 from the Allied Workers Union of South Africa—are taking part. The workers demand a 9 percent wage increase, shift allowances and the restoration of annual bonuses, which have not been paid for six years. Negotiations broke down August 21, after management offered increases of between 5 and 6 percent depending on workers' earnings.

Some workers take home only around R5,000 a month, illustrating the gulf between the wages paid to workers and the wealth generated for the corporation.

Workers said wages previously rose by 7-8 percent annually before the pandemic, but increased by only around 5 percent since then. Machine operators also reported that retrenchments had increased workloads, leaving remaining workers operating several machines and facing greater physical demands.

Around three dozen workers picketed Bidvest's Johannesburg offices and factory on September 14. The danger is the dispute will remain isolated while the unions confine the struggle to negotiations and appeals to the bargaining council.

Masterpack workers are confronting a major corporate group, and a successful fight for decent wages requires the mobilisation of workers throughout Bidvest and the wider packaging, manufacturing and logistics sectors.

The September 23 meeting with Masterpack and bargaining-council commissioners must not become another mechanism for containing the strike. Workers should organise independently, appeal to other sections of workers facing the same attacks. The fight at Masterpack is part of a wider struggle by South African workers against poverty wages, retrenchments and the relentless drive to increase profits at workers' expense.