

Portugal hit by 24-hour national strike in meat industry; one-day strike by court clerks in France organised outside unions; Nigerian primary school teachers in Abuja in indefinite strike over pay

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 September 2023

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

National strike in the meat industry in Portugal

On Monday, workers in the meat industry throughout Portugal stopped work, demanding an 850 euro minimum monthly salary, a 35-hour week, and an end to precarious contracts, along with other improvements to pay and conditions.

The National Food Industry Union (Stiac) also called for a protest on Monday outside the headquarters of the Portuguese Meat Industry Association (APIC) in Montijo, near Lisbon, *Lusa* reported.

Stiac told *Lusa* that around 80 percent of meat workers joined the strike. Despite the widespread participation, it immediately ruled out any further mobilisations, saying it would give APIC a month to respond to its demands, then “depending on the response or lack thereof” it would move ahead with strikes on November 2-3.

Court officials resume strikes in Portugal

Court officials began new strikes on Saturday, resuming stoppages in a long-running campaign over pay. The Judicial Employees’ Union (SFJ), representing 6,000 court officials, told *Lusa* that in the regions where they called the strike, around 90 percent of workers in the courts stopped work.

The SFJ said it thought its one-day strikes could be “checkmate” in the dispute. The union is calling for the integration of a bonus agreed with now-prime minister António Costa when he was the minister of justice. The SFJ divided the strikes by regions, and regional walkouts will take place between now and September 22.

National strike by court clerks in France

On Monday, clerks in courts throughout France held a one-day

“surprise” strike, *France Bleu* reported, to demand increased pay, improved workloads and other conditions. Another day-long strike is planned for next Monday.

The clerks’ strike movement is not organised by the unions, but first began in the Facebook group “Greffiers/Greffières/Adjoints en colère” (Angry Clerks/Assistants) in July, which has nearly 6,000 members.

French air traffic controllers’ union calls off strike, agrees year-long no-strike “Olympic truce”

The French National Air Traffic Controllers’ Union (SNCTA), the largest air traffic control union, called off a strike planned for this Friday, announcing it had signed a deal over wages with the Directorate General for Civil Aviation. The National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (UNSA) also signed the wage deal.

Neither SNCTA nor UNSA said whether the deal met their previous demand for “catching up with inflation.” Any strike would have affected the ongoing Rugby World Cup, and the large revenues it generates for French airlines and other parts of the tourism sector.

The SNCTA also pledged, at the request of the Minister for Transport, not to strike until after the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris in September 2024. The “Olympic truce” followed the suggestion on Sunday by a deputy from President Macron’s Renaissance party that the government should ban demonstrations and strikes before major sporting events. There has also been a months-long campaign, led by Ryanair and other airlines, to impose compulsory arbitration before any strikes in the sector.

Greek sailors hold 24-hour strike to condemn drowning of ferry passenger

Sailors in Greece held a 24-hour national strike on Wednesday to denounce an incident last week, when a passenger trying to board a ferry from Athens to Crete drowned after being pushed overboard by several members of the crew as the ferry was departing. The captain and three other crew members were arrested.

The Panhellenic Seamen's Federation said participation in the stoppage was "universal," and the Panhellenic Merchant Seamen's Association wrote in a press release that "the strike is not only intended for seafarers to separate themselves from this heinous crime, but at the same time to take all those measures that will ensure the safety of ships, navigation and human life at sea."

National strike at Italian airports

Ground handling workers at Italian airports joined a national one-day strike on September 8, called by the CUB and USB unions. According to ANSA, more than 200 flights were cancelled on the day of the strike, while few were cancelled at Rome because airlines had already rescheduled or cancelled flights.

CUB said that over the last 10-year contract, workers' monthly salaries were worth 400 euros less relative to inflation, and that they had been offered only a 250 euro increase spread over three years. Striking workers also opposed an increase in working hours.

Romanian rail workers hold warning strike against decay of railway system

Rail workers in Romania will hold a two-hour warning strike on Friday, demanding investment in the rail infrastructure, modernisation of the rolling stock and improvements to pay and conditions, *Agerpres* reported.

The strike will take place at CFR Infrastructur?, the state-owned company which maintains the infrastructure on the national rail network.

The unions wrote in a joint press release that "For more than 30 years," (since the restoration of capitalism) "railway workers have been working in the same precarious working conditions, without sanitary facilities, adequate personal protective equipment, the lack of staff generating a very large number of overtime hours, an aspect that affects the health status of employees."

Workers continue indefinite strike at Turkish electricity company FEDA?

Around 120 workers at FEDA?, an electricity company in Turkey, have been on indefinite strike for more than a month over pay.

According to *Haberler*, they first called a slowdown, and walked out when their demand for an improvement of pay and bonuses was ignored. The strike has reportedly had a major impact in Tunceli, with frequent power outages.

Yeni Demokrasi reported last week that FEDA? brought workers from other regions under police escort to Tunceli Province, a Kurdish-majority region in eastern Turkey. After strikers were able to speak to some of those transferred, they refused to work and left to applause from the picketing workers.

Gas maintenance workers in Ireland strike after pay deal is not implemented

Workers at GMC Civil and Mechanical Engineering, a company contracted by state-owned Gas Networks Ireland to maintain the gas network, began a strike on Wednesday after GMC did not implement a previous agreement, *RTÉ* reported.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union said that it and GMC agreed recommendations after arbitration in May, but the company recently announced it would not implement them.

GMC did not deny reneging on the previous agreement but issued a vague statement to the media claiming it had "not frustrated any resolution of the pay dispute" and expected the dispute to be resolved at the government's Workplace Relations Commission next week.

Spontaneous strike at Belgian post office after 250,000 euro "signing bonus" for new CEO

On Wednesday, workers at the sorting centre for international shipments in Brussels Airport, run by the national postal carrier Bpost, stopped work spontaneously. Workers denounced the 250,000 euro "signing bonus" paid to Bpost's new CEO, supposedly as compensation for leaving his previous post at energy network Elia, *Het Laatste Nieuws* reported.

A Labour Party MP who spoke with the striking postal workers told media they had also warned equipment in the sorting centre was out of order, and there had recently been a serious accident due to a machine malfunction.

Academic staff at Stirling University, Scotland strike over pay deductions for taking industrial action

Academic staff at Stirling university began five days of stoppages this week, with a further five days scheduled next week.

The University and College Union (UCU) members are walking out over 50 percent deductions imposed on their salaries for taking part in the recent nation-wide marking and assessment boycott. UCU members boycotted the assessment of students as part of their campaign for improved pay and against the attacks on conditions.

Following next week's stoppages, the UCU members at Stirling will be joining around 70,000 members at universities across the UK, who begin five days of stoppages on September 25. The national action is a continuation of industrial action for improved pay, in opposition to increasing workloads and casualisation.

Strike by academic and support staff at Kirklees, UK college over pay

Lecturers working for Kirklees College at its Huddersfield and Dewsbury sites, England walked out Monday and Tuesday in a dispute over pay.

The UCU members have already held six days of stoppages in May and June. They rejected the college pay offer for 2022/23 of only one percent plus a £500 non-consolidated lump sum. Also, they rejected the imposed "cost of living" pay award of 2.5 percent for 2023/24.

According to the UCU, the college refused to enter negotiations over the summer and that, despite having £10 million in reserves, pays newly hired lecturers as little as £25,000 (full time equivalent pay). The UCU states

the college received monies intended to fund pay rises which could have averted the strike.

On strike the same days this week were college support staff, Unison union members who voted by an 80 percent majority to walk out. Unison called for a 10 percent pay increase with a minimum rise of £2,000 backdated to September 1 and for the college to pay the living wage rate of £10.90 an hour. Unison points out that the college was forced to pay its lowest paid staff nine percent just to be in line with the government's national living wage rate, currently at £10.42 an hour.

UCU and Unison members at the college are scheduled to strike on September 20-21.

Also striking on Monday were support staff at Barnsley College in South Yorkshire, where Unison members voted by 90 percent to reject the college pay offer plus a £300 one-off payment. The offer is below the Association of Colleges' recommendation of 2.5 percent plus a one-off £500 or £750 payment, depending on salary.

Teachers and head teachers on UK Channel Island of Jersey strike over pay

Teachers and head teachers on the UK Channel Island of Jersey held a one-day strike Tuesday.

National Education Union (NEU) along with some National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) members oppose the 7.9 percent pay offer from the Jersey government. They want a 15.4 percent rise and are also protesting excessive workloads.

The NASUWT teaching union on the island cancelled a planned strike for Tuesday and accepted the 7.9 percent offer. Hundreds of striking teachers and heads protested outside the Jersey States Building on the day of the strike.

Cleaners at Kingston-upon-Thames school strike over outsourcing plans

The strike, begun September 5, by cleaners at Lovelace Primary school in Chessington, Kingston-upon-Thames, England is due to end Friday.

The GMB members are protesting the school's plan to outsource the cleaning service. The cleaners offered to reduce their hours to term time only, equivalent to a 25 percent pay cut, but the school insists outsourcing would be cheaper.

A further stoppage is planned for September 28 to October 1, with further dates possible.

Support staff in Scottish schools to walk out over pay

School support staff in Scotland including administrative, cleaning and catering workers along with classroom assistants are to walk out later this month demanding an improved pay offer. They will strike September 26-28 after rejecting the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' (COSLA) pay offer.

Around 21,000 Unison members at 2,000 schools across 24 Scottish local authorities will take part. They will be joined by thousands of Unite union members across 11 Scottish councils.

School support staff represented by the GMB union at 10 Scottish schools were due to strike two days this week, but the actions were suspended. A GMB press release said talks were taking place with Unite and Unison, with the prospect of GMB members joining the action later in the month.

Health staff at four London, UK hospital trusts strike over staff shortages and pay

Nearly 3,000 health staff including caterers, cleaners, nurses, pathologists and porters at four London hospital trusts began stoppages on Wednesday.

Unite union members at Barts Health NHS Trust began a two-day strike Wednesday, and plan to strike September 16-22. Those at East London Foundation Trust were on strike Wednesday. Workers at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Trust and Guys and St Thomas' Trust began a two-day stoppage Wednesday.

The issues include staff shortages. A recent Unite union survey revealed nearly half the trusts reporting that staff shortages over the last year regularly reached levels to compromise patient safety. They are also protesting low pay. Unite members rejected this year's five percent pay offer accepted by staff in other unions. Also, around 1,000 staff at the Barts Trust did not receive the £1,655 lump sum payment made to health staff because of the 2022/23 NHS pay settlement. The affected staff were previously employed by outsourcer Serco and were only recently brought back into the NHS.

Nurses on Isle of Man strike over pay

Nurses on the Isle of Man, a self-governing UK dependency in the Irish Sea held a 12-hour strike Thursday.

The Royal College of Nursing members rejected a recent improved offer from employer Manx Care of a £1,000 consolidated amount on top of the already implemented six percent increase for 2022-23, following a four percent rise for 2021-22. Thursday's stoppage follows a one-day strike in July, the first ever strike of nurses on the island. Two further 12-hour stoppages are scheduled for October 18 and 19.

Health staff walk out over pay grading in Wirral, UK

Around 400 UK clinical support workers (CSWs) employed by the Wirral University Teaching Hospital (WUTH) NHS Foundation Trust at its Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge hospital sites began a 72-hour strike Monday. It follows a 48-hour walkout begun August 31.

The Unison union members voted by a 99 percent majority to walk out. CSWs work on wards alongside nursing staff helping to feed and care for patients. Most are paid at the lower end of the band 2 pay scale. However, they routinely carry out tasks such as blood monitoring and inserting cannulas which count as band 3 pay scale work, for which they should be earning around £2,000 a year more.

Despite a collective agreement signed by over 400 staff, WUTH refused to consider their request. Seven other health trusts in the northwest of England agreed to put CSWs on the band 3 pay scale and backdated pay

to April 2018.

Midwifery support workers at Southmead hospital in Bristol, UK to strike over pay parity

Midwifery support workers, housekeepers and receptionists in the Women's and Children's Division at North Bristol NHS Trust's Southmead hospital were set to walk out Thursday and Friday this week.

The GMB members demand to be paid the shift enhancements paid to other staff working in the Women's and Children's Division. Following months of talks, the trust agreed in June to pay the enhancement but then did a U-turn and did not pay it.

Library staff at Westminster council, London strike over pay offer

Library staff working for Westminster council in London were on strike Wednesday and are due to walk out again Friday.

The stoppage by the Unite members follows two days of stoppages last week. They are opposed to the flat rate increase £1,925 pay offer to local authority workers. The action is part of a programme of stoppages at 23 local authorities by Unite members in opposition to the local government settlement.

Engineers in Chesterfield, UK strike over pay

Around 40 UK engineers working for ERIKS Industrial Services based in Chesterfield held a 48-hour strike Monday. It will be followed by 48-hour strikes on September 18, 25 and October 2.

The Unite members voted unanimously on a 100 percent turnout to reject a pay offer of six percent with an extra one percent if they increase the working day by 30 minutes. The skilled workers are paid £14.82 an hour, but want parity with ERIKS colleagues at Cardiff and Swansea who earn £15.64 an hour.

ERIKS provides specialised industrial services, including power tools and industrial seals for companies such as British Steel and Thames Water.

Strikes hit refuse collection at councils in Wales

Refuse collection at some local authorities in Wales were hit by stoppages.

The strike of Unite members at Wrexham and Cardiff local authorities, begun September 4, is due to end Friday. Those at Gwynedd Council began a stoppage on Monday running to September 17. Refuse workers employed by Cynon Valley in the Rhondda have voted to strike but are yet to set a date.

The strikes are part of a programme of strikes by around 3,000 Unite union members across 23 local authorities in England and Wales who are due to strike. Among the local authorities included will be Coventry, Newham, Sefton, Warrington and Wigan.

The local government workers rejected a £1,925 pay offer from the local authorities' employers' body. Unite is reballoting local authority workers in some areas.

Refuse collectors at London borough to strike over pay

Around 200 workers employed as refuse collectors and street cleaners for Tower Hamlets council in the UK capital are due to begin a two-week stoppage September 18.

The action by Unite union members is against the flat rate pay offer of £1,925 to local authority workers. The action is part of a programme of stoppages at 23 local authorities by Unite union members in opposition to the local government settlement.

Mental health social workers at Barnet council in London set to strike over staffing issues

Mental health workers at Barnet's north and south teams in London are to walk out for six days over chronic staffing issues.

The Unison members are to walk out on September 26, October 3-4 and October 10-12. In June, the Unison union branch reported nine workers out of a full complement of 22 had left this year. There is also a lack of experienced workers in the teams.

Unison is calling for a 20 percent pay supplement to help retention of staff. The council has offered £1,000 a year, representing an average 2.5 percent increase.

Baggage carousel workers at Heathrow airport in London to strike over pay

Around 170 workers employed by Vanderlande Industries at London's Heathrow airport are to strike over pay.

The Unite union members, responsible for maintaining and servicing the airport's baggage carousels, rejected two below-inflation pay offers. According to the Unite press release, the company is pleading poverty yet posted profits of £3.7 million in its latest accounts.

The workers are set to walk out October 6-9 and again October 20-30.

Humberside, UK airport staff vote to strike after rejecting pay offer

Staff including cleaners, firefighters, refuellers and security staff at Humberside airport in England voted by a 71 percent majority to strike.

The Unison members rejected a pay offer and demand to be paid in line with workers performing the same role at Leeds Bradford and Manchester airports. Unison has not yet named any dates for proposed walkouts.

UK maintenance engineers ballot over pay

Around 3,000 UK maintenance engineers covered by the National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry are balloting for strike action.

The pay of the Unite union members has fallen since the pandemic. Unite agreed to their pay being frozen during the pandemic, even though they were essential workers. The freeze was followed by pay offers of only 2.5 percent in 2022 and 2023.

The engineers carry out maintenance at various facilities such as oil refineries, power stations and petro-chemical plants. Included in the ballot are around 1,000 maintenance engineers at Sellafield nuclear plant.

The ballot closes mid-October, with any stoppages if agreed to be held late October.

GMB union suspends strikes by emergency social workers over pay cuts in Swindon, UK

The GMB union has suspended the strike of social workers employed by Swindon council, providing out of hours emergency cover. The GMB members took action from August 31, but returned to normal working on Monday evening.

They were protesting the council's plan to cut unsocial hours pay by 20 percent, meaning social workers would lose around £700 a month.

The striking social workers were concerned that despite management's reassurances emergency cover provided during the strikes had missed emergency calls to the service.

Announcing the suspension, the GMB called on the council to enter talks via the government mediation service Acas to resolve the issue.

Unite union suspends strike of ground handling staff at Luton airport, UK

Unite has suspended the strike of ground handling staff working for GH London at Luton airport. They previously held two days of stoppages over several issues including arrears of wages, harassment of a Unite union rep and failure of the company to follow its own grievances procedures.

Unite said it had suspended the strike to allow talks to go ahead but should the talks fail to resolve the issues a planned four-day strike scheduled to begin September 20 will go ahead.

Machinery manufacturing workers in Iran strike over low pay

The series of strikes by workers at Arak Machinery Manufacturing in Iran is continuing. Over the last months, the workers held walkouts over low pay, non-payment of wages and working conditions. Most of the workers are on less than \$200 a month.

They pledge to continue their programme of stoppages until they achieve their demands.

Arak Machinery produces equipment for the oil and gas industries, power plants and the cement industry as well as other areas.

Nigerian police shoot at University of Lagos students protesting hike

in fees

University of Lagos students protesting peacefully on September 6 against an increase in fees were confronted by armed police, who shot into the crowd and made arrests.

The National Association of Nigerian Students previously informed the police of their intention to demonstrate and asked them not to intervene.

Primary school teachers in Abuja, Nigeria begin strike over unpaid arrears

Primary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on September 11 to demand payment of arrears accumulated over 25 months. These include promotion arrears, arrears from non-upgrading of teachers and arrears of annual increments.

The Nigeria Union of Teachers members are also demanding implementation of a 40 percent allowance they were promised.

Nigerian health consultants' national strike suspended for three months by union

The Medical and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) suspended its planned nationwide strike over funding for three months after an appeal by coordinating minister of health and social services, Muhammad Pate.

MDCAN president Aminu Muhammad said the suspension would give the chance for "the federal government to address all the pending issues." Speaking on the brain drain caused by the declining funding for health care, Muhammad noted that over 500 highly trained doctors and consultants had left Nigeria.

South African Farm workers march through Paarl, South Africa to demand end to pesticide use

Two hundred women who support the Women on Farms Project (WFP) marched through Paarl, South Africa's Western Cape last Friday to demand an end to the use of 54 different pesticides in agriculture.

The pesticides, banned in the EU but exported to South Africa by pharmaceutical and biotechnology company Bayer, are making women who work on the farms ill.

Groundup reported the protesters carried placards stating, "Bayer, your pesticides are deadly" and "End double standards."

WFP organiser Katrina Claasen told *Groundup* they get a lot of complaints from women on the farms about asthma, sinus problems, and skin irritation on their hands after working with crops that had been sprayed with the pesticides. She also said she knew of male farmworkers who worked with pesticides on a farm in Rawsonville without gloves, face masks, or any protective clothes.

WFP research in 2017 found that many farm workers and dwellers are repeatedly exposed to pesticides.

Last September, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development said it would start phasing out certain pesticides and ban

them completely by June 2024.

Municipal workers in Matjhabeng Municipality, South Africa demand Mayor's resignation

Municipal workers in the Matjhabeng Municipality in the Lejweleputswa District, South Africa have threatened to take the municipality to court if it does not meet their demands.

Hundreds of South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members marched in Welkom last week, demanding the resignation of Mayor Thanduxolo Khalipha. They accuse him of nepotism in recruitment, exploitation of the workforce, humiliating and belittling women in public, and harassment of employees—calling workers after hours and during weekends. Grievances were handed over in a memorandum.

Tiisetso Mahlatsi, the SAMWU secretary in Free State told *SABCNews*, “Things have changed since the new mayor joined the municipality as he controls everything.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact