

Strikes by teachers and support workers continue in Europe over pay, conditions and funding; protests across Middle East in response to Israeli bombing of Gaza; polytechnic workers in Abeokuta, Nigeria begin indefinite pay strike

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.

School strikes continue in Europe over pay, conditions and funding

Teachers and other school workers across Europe continue a wave of strikes, which began at the start of the new academic year. Educators are fighting against deteriorating conditions and infrastructure as schools are ravaged by inflation and cuts to education budgets.

Lithuanian teachers continue a strike, begun at the end of September, which is planned to last a month. The Lithuanian Trade Union of Educational Workers (LŠDPS) members are calling for pay rises, smaller class sizes and a reduction in workload.

The LŠDPS initially called for an immediate pay rise of 20 percent and a further 30 percent in January. According to *LRT*, the union reduced its demand to 15 percent this year, barely enough to cover price rises over the last 12 months, and a further 15 percent next year.

The government signed a collective agreement with other unions, which had not called a strike, for a 10 percent pay rise this year and 10 percent next year, all it claimed it could afford. One teacher at a march in Kaunas told *LRT* he was shocked by “the fictitious contract that was signed last week.”

Non-teaching workers in Portuguese schools, including catering and cleaning workers, nurses, and other support workers, walked out for one day on Monday. They demanded an increase in wages, as the majority barely earn more than the minimum wage, one striking worker told *Lusa*. The National Union of Education Professionals reported that 65 percent of non-teaching workers joined the strike.

The non-teaching workers’ strike follows another one-day national stoppage by teachers on Friday last week, reportedly involving more than 80 percent of teachers, according to *Lusa*. Teachers have held many strikes over the last year, demanding the recovery of six and a half years’ frozen seniority benefits.

On Saturday, teaching assistants in Montenegro protested outside the Ministry of Education in Podgorica, demanding shorter working hours. According to *RTCG*, the Association of Teaching Assistants is calling for a maximum of six hours in the classroom each day, and salary increases.

A school psychologist at the protest told *RTCG* they supported the teaching assistants because “it is impossible to work for more than six hours if we think about the quality that an assistant should provide to a child.”

Teachers in Berlin began a three-day strike on Tuesday, as part of a long-running campaign over class sizes in the German capital. The Education and Science Union (GEW) is calling for an upper limit of 20 pupils in primary school classes, and 25 in high schools. According to *rbb24*, there are currently up to 29 children in a primary school class and 35 in one high school class.

Childcare workers in the Belgian city of La Louvière are also on an indefinite strike, which they began last week to oppose staff shortages. Only one of the city’s four daycare centres has been able to stay open during the strike, with only two workers, *RTL* reported. The General Union of Public Services called for the city to create “a team of flying childcare workers who could be assigned to sites in need,” particularly when workers are off sick.

On October 16, teachers in Serbia will begin an indefinite national partial strike, shortening every class to 30 minutes. The strike was called by all four unions representing teachers, who demand the salary of workers in schools be raised to the national average. The government offered to do this by 2025, but the unions criticised the proposal for not explaining how it will be implemented, *Danas* reported.

One-day national strike set for Friday in France against austerity

On Friday, workers in France will join a one-day national strike against austerity, and to call for higher wages and equal pay for women. Workers in public transport, schools, healthcare, air traffic controllers and other sectors will stop work and join demonstrations.

The day of protests comes a few days before the trade unions join a “social conference” with prime minister Elisabeth Borne to discuss low wages.

Millions of workers mobilised this year against the Macron government’s pension reform, which was eventually forced through without a parliamentary majority using an anti-democratic article in the constitution. This was only possible with the complicity of the unions,

who strangled and demobilised workers' opposition.

The unions have dropped all opposition to the pension reform. The head of the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) told *Le Monde*, "[W]e have no revenge to take on the government" over pensions. *Ouest France* reported that in the Pays de Lorient region, the General Confederation of Labour, CFDT, Solidaires and other trade unions did not issue a joint leaflet with the Force Ouvrière (FO) union because the latter insisted on including a demand for the repeal of the pension reform although this is a pro forma demand which FO has not seriously fought for.

Self-employed GPs also called a walkout for the same day, shutting their practices to demand increased consultation fees, and to oppose a bill due to be examined by the senate which would make it compulsory to be near-permanently on-call, *La Montagne* reported. The stoppage was called by the unions representing GPs, and the "Doctors for Tomorrow" collective, which was formed as a Facebook group to call strikes outside of the unions.

Final week of strikes against Finnish government's attack on working conditions and right to strike

Workers in Finland continue strikes this week against the Finnish government's programme of austerity and attacks on the right to strike. Students are also holding protests and occupations against the plans.

This is the last of the three weeks of walkouts and demonstrations called by the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, which deliberately limited the scale of the protests.

Despite the walkouts being limited to a few hours in select locations, they had a large impact. *YLE* reported that on Wednesday, Finland's largest cargo port, the Port of Hamina-Kotka, was brought to a standstill by an eight-hour strike of 20 workers at the rail yards serving the port.

The coalition government, led by the right-wing National Coalition Party and far-right Finns Party, announced sweeping attacks on housing benefits, unemployment support, migrants' rights, and the introduction of unpaid sick leave.

It will also restrict the right to strike, including restricting sympathy and political strikes to one day, with fines of 10,000-15,000 euros for a union and 200 euros for individual workers if a court rules a strike "illegal."

Bus drivers hold unofficial strike against new roster in Limerick, Ireland

On October 1-2, bus drivers in Limerick, Ireland stopped work in an unofficial strike against a new roster introduced by state-owned Bus Éireann for part-time "spare" drivers who cover colleagues on leave.

The roster came into effect on October 1, at the end of a process Bus Éireann says was agreed with the National Bus and Rail Workers Union (NBRU). The NBRU distanced itself from the stoppage but denied agreeing to the new roster, *RTÉ* reported.

One of the striking "spare" drivers told *RTÉ* that most drivers stayed in the depot without being asked by the picketing spare drivers "because every driver in this depot is fed up of being tread on and worth nothing. And that's what we are, we are worth nothing."

On October 2, the second day of the stoppage, the NBRU convinced the striking drivers to return to work, agreeing to a binding review of the roster arrangements at the government's Workplace Relations

Commission. Bus Éireann denounced the "unofficial, illegal action" and said the new roster was binding.

Warning strike at clinics in Berlin, Germany, over pay dispute

On Wednesday, workers at the three DRK (German Red Cross) clinics in Berlin joined a one-day warning strike called by the United Services Union (Verdi) in a dispute over pay.

Verdi is calling for a pay rise of 15 percent or 500 euros, whichever is higher, and a 12-month contract. The clinics offered a pay increase of 10.84 percent with a minimum of 260 euros, and additional compensation for inflation, but spread over a 27-month contract, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported.

Warning strike over pay in the Port of Adria, Montenegro

Dock workers at the Port of Adria, Montenegro's main seaport, held a one-hour warning strike on Thursday morning to demand a 40 percent pay increase, as wages at the port are lower than average wages in Montenegro.

Adria quoted one union representative saying that since the port was privatised in 2014, "they haven't even raised our salary, and in 2019 and 2020, during the pandemic, they reduced it by some 11 or 12 percent."

Support staff at UK government departments strike over pay

Around 100 support staff including cleaning and security workers at the UK government's Whitehall Departments of Energy Security and Net Zero, Business and Trade and Science, Innovation and Technology began a five-day strike Monday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members, who work for outsourcing company ISS, demand an improved pay offer. ISS offered them a 2.2 percent rise. The RPI inflation rate is currently 9.1 percent. This week's stoppage follows a five-day walkout at the beginning of September. Monday saw a well-attended lively picket on Victoria Street in central London.

A ballot of PCS members working as security staff at the UK parliament's House of Commons returned a near 95 percent majority of staff prepared to take strike action. The ballot was in response to being told they must work extra night shifts because of staff shortages.

Further stoppages by UK Amazon workers announced over pay

Amazon workers at UK Coventry fulfilment centre are to hold further strikes in their long-running dispute over pay, demanding £15 an hour.

Around 1,000 GMB members will walk out on November 7, 8 and 9, and Black Friday, November 24. The announcement of the stoppages comes after Amazon said it was raising minimum pay from £11 an hour to £11.80 an hour on October 15, and then to £12.30 an hour from April 2024.

Workers on the next pay tier of £12 an hour will see their pay rise by 50p next week, and to £13 an hour in April. The proposed actions will bring the total stoppages by GMB members at Amazon UK to around 30.

January this year saw the first official strike of Amazon workers at the Coventry site. Unofficial action was taken previously in August 2022 at around a dozen UK Amazon sites, in response to a pay rise of between 35p and 50p an hour from the company.

Workers at IAC car parts manufacturer in Solihull, UK to walk out over pay

Around 250 UK workers employed by IAC in Solihull were set to walk out on October 13 on indefinite strike, after rejecting a 6 percent pay offer.

For most of the workers currently on the minimum wage, a 6 percent rise would mean only being paid £11.11 an hour. Other workers on slightly higher pay rejected staggered offers of 6, 7 and 8 percent.

American-owned IAC had global revenues of £2.4 billion in 2021, £221 million of which was generated in the UK. IAC makes car parts including dashboards, boot and roof interiors for major companies including JLR and BMW.

Bus drivers in north-east England to hold further strike over pay

Around 1,300 UK bus drivers employed by the Go North East bus company, who have already held a week's strike, will begin a further one-week stoppage on October 14.

The Unite union members rejected a below-inflation pay offer. The depots set to take part are at Consett, Gateshead, Hexham, Percy Main, Sunderland and Washington. Parent company the Go-Ahead Group reported profits of £85 million last year.

Further strikes by housing repair workers at London council

Around 130 housing repair workers employed by the London borough of Haringey are to hold further walkouts over pay.

The Unite union members already held stoppages on September 25 and October 2. They are to walk out November 1-3, November 15-17 and December 18-24.

They are demanding an increase on the nationally imposed flat rate increase of £1,925, a real terms pay cut. The council is refusing to increase the London weighting allowance. A Haringey council director admits they are losing staff to neighbouring London councils offering higher rates of pay.

Support staff at special needs school in Leicester, UK announce escalation of strikes over pay

Around 90 UK support staff at the Ash Field Academy, Leicester, for children aged 4 to 19 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), announced a further round of stoppages.

The Unison members have been in dispute with their employer since April 23, and have held 30 days of walkouts since then. The staff at the government-funded but privately run academy school include teaching assistants, administration workers and residential staff.

The newly announced dates for stoppages are Wednesday to Friday this week, October 23-25, every working day in November and December 1.

Their demands are for a £3,000 pay increase to bring them into line with other SEND schools run by Leicester local authority, introduction of a pay scale to align them with workers performing comparable roles and a pay supplement for staff taking on additional medical responsibilities.

The workers renewed their mandate for strike action in September. On a 67 percent turnout they voted by an 85 percent majority to continue strike action.

Health Care Assistants at UK Mid-Cheshire hospitals trust to strike over pay grade

Around 450 health care and imaging assistants working for the Mid-Cheshire hospitals trust in England will walk out over pay grading.

The Unison union members are based at the Elmhurst Centre, Winsford, Victoria Infirmary in Northwich and Crewe's Leighton hospital. They voted by a 99 percent majority to walk out, saying they are paid up to £2,000 a year less than they should be given the roles and tasks they perform. Their 75-hour stoppage is due to begin on October 16.

Health staff in Wirral, UK to hold further stoppages over pay grading

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 will strike October 23-27. It follows stoppages in September and August.

The Unison 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.

Outsourced health staff at Croydon, UK vote to strike for parity with NHS staff

Cleaners and porters working for outsourcer G4S at Croydon University Hospital in south London have voted to strike.

The GMB union members are seeking parity on pay and conditions with directly employed NHS staff. The union has not yet announced dates for any proposed walkouts. According to the GMB, G4S is not filling vacancies or offering overtime, increasing the pressure on the workforce.

Outsourced health workers in Dudley, UK ballot over non-payment of COVID bonus

Around 70 UK workers employed by outsourcer Mitie at the Dudley group of hospitals in the West Midlands are balloting for strike action.

The Unite union members, who had previously been directly employed by the NHS, are angry they did not receive a £1,600 lump sum payment paid as part of this year's pay award to NHS staff. Some other outsourced health companies paid their staff the lump sum.

The Mitie workers are employed in estate management roles at Russell Hall, Corbett and Dudley Guest hospitals. The ballot closes October 23, and any industrial action will begin in November.

Library staff in London borough vote to walk out over pay and zero hours contracts

Library staff in the London borough of Bromley voted by an 86 percent majority to walk out over low pay and zero-hour contracts.

The Unite union members are employed by social enterprise Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL). GLL refuses to recognise or meet with trade union representatives. Unite has not set any dates for walkouts.

Public transport workers in Northern Ireland in consultative ballot over pay

Around 2,000 staff working for Translink in Northern Ireland are taking part in a consultative ballot this week. Translink, which operates public transport across the province, includes NI Railways, Ulsterbus and Metro.

The Unite union members were informed by Translink that there will be no pay increase for the year 2023-24. It also refuses to schedule any dates for pay negotiations.

The GMB and Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union members working for Translink will also ballot over the same issue.

Postal workers in northern Scotland pushing for strikes over excessive workloads

Postal workers in northern Scotland are pushing for strike action over excessive workloads. Households across the region report delays in receiving mail.

A report in the online *pressandjournal* dated October 6 noted, "The CWU (Communication Workers Union) says four delivery offices in the Highland branch's area have asked for a remit for strike action due to the 'poor organisation' of the Royal Mail locally. The request remains under consideration and the union says it will not reveal the locations until the request for a ballot has been granted."

The excessive workloads are the result of the sell-out by the CWU leadership of the more than one-year UK-wide dispute and strikes

Iranian oil workers' protests at Abadan oil refinery continue over

pay and conditions

Petrochemical and oil refinery workers in the overhaul department (maintenance) at Iran's Abadan oil refinery held strikes and protests on October 4 and 5. They are protesting the non-payment of wages and insurance contributions for over five months.

On Monday, unofficial workers at the Abadan oil refinery protested over their insecure status as temporary contract workers. The workers claim around 4,000 of them work as contractors at the site. Their main demand is for the elimination of the contractor companies and to have job security, along with pay increases.

Also on Monday, official (directly employed) oil workers at Abu Dhar oil platforms and in the Khark region protested against a salary cap, heavy taxes and non-implementation of the right to retirement after 30 years' employment.

Protesting Iranian steel workers sentenced to lashing

Seventeen steel workers employed by the Iran National Steel Industrial Group were sentenced to over 70 lashes for taking part in a recent protest at the plant.

They were protesting arrears of wage and mismanagement at the plant. They were originally sentenced to three months in prison, but this was reduced to a 25 million Iranian rials (\$50) fine.

Further protests by Iranian pensioners over cost of living

Pensioners took to the streets of several Iranian cities including Ahvaz, Arak, Kermanshah, Shush and Tehran from Sunday to Tuesday.

They were protesting the impact inflation is wreaking on their state pensions. They accuse the Iranian government of corruptly plundering state finances set aside to pay pensions. The Iranian economy is suffering the stranglehold of economic sanctions imposed by the US government.

Houthi militia in Yemen kidnap teachers' union strike leader

On Sunday, Houthi militia in Yemen kidnapped the leader of the Yemeni Teachers Club union, Abu Zaid Al-Kumaim. Teachers in Houthi-controlled areas have been on months-long strikes protesting the non-payment of salaries since 2016.

Houthi authorities replaced striking teachers with those loyal to their regime. The Teachers' union demanded the release of Al-Kumaim and payment of wage arrears to public sector workers.

Polytechnic workers in Abeokuta, Nigeria begin indefinite pay strike

Polytechnic workers at the Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Ogun State in Nigeria began an indefinite strike on October 5, over non-payment of salaries and allowances for three months. Other issues include

the lack of implementation of appointments in 2019 and promotion of staff members in 2020.

The Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics and Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnics and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions said they wrote to management on the need to prioritise staff welfare.

Hotel workers protest salary arrears in Katsina State, Nigeria

Workers from Katsina State Hotels in Nigeria held a peaceful protest on October 9, over four-month salary arrears and other allowances owed to them by management. Protestors gathered outside the Government House in Katsina.

One of the protesters from Katsina Motel, Ibrahim Isa, explained the hardship staff are suffering, including their children being excluded from school over unpaid fees: “Our children are at home because we can no longer pay their school fees. The future of our children should not be gambled with. Our wives have left us because we can’t provide food for them...”

South African food workers in Gauteng strike over transport deductions

More than 200 workers at food manufacturer Simba’s factories in Isando and Elandsfontein, South Africa stopped work on Wednesday. This was to protest the deduction of transport costs from their wages, which they claim should be free, as part of an earlier agreement.

The workers are supported by the Simunye Workers’ Forum (SWF) and the Casual Workers’ Advice Office.

The SWF said in a statement, “Workers discovered that Simba was deducting R16 per day from each worker for the transport, instead of providing it for free. These deductions were not even listed on the pay slip. The workers have been in a long-standing battle to have this money returned and free transport reinstated.” SWF also state that Simba offered a one-off payment of R30,000 if they agree to accept this as a full and final settlement.

GroundUp reported that workers were prevented from protesting outside the gates, which were locked to keep them on-site. They held placards inside the gates of the premises, singing protest songs and asking to be allowed outside to protest on the streets. The gates remained locked for some time.

One worker said, “They deduct up to R2,000 from my salary every month. On top of that, they deduct money for uniforms and medical aid, which means that we are left with nothing. The company should own up to its promise of providing us with transport.”

Simba, which makes potato-based snacks, is one of the largest crisp manufacturers in South Africa. It has now issued a strike interdict against workers at the factories in Isando and Elandsfontein.

ANC employees in South Africa protest over pay

South African workers employed by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) are holding protests and pickets outside ANC

headquarters calling for an 8 percent pay increase, among other demands.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) members say they will step up their action, as the salary increases have not been paid.

According to *the Star*, NEHAWU filed court papers to force payment of outstanding salaries, but the ANC failed to respond to at least 10 letters. They also claim there is a backlog of wages due from 2022 and 2023, affecting workers in Gauteng and nationally, impacting on their ability to pay rent and housing costs.

Protestors against rising cost of living in Angola met with police repression

Crowds of protestors who gathered on October 9 in the eastern Lunda Sul province of Angola to protest the rising cost of living and official corruption were met with police repression. Over a hundred were arrested and detained, including women and the elderly.

Authorities accused demonstrators of being in “rebellion,” throwing stones and other objects that damaged two police vehicles. “As a result of unruly behaviour... 132 individuals were detained, including 92 men, aged between 18 and 78 years and 45 women, aged between 19 and 58 years.”

Angola has been rocked by a wave of protests since the government cut fuel subsidies in June. Human Rights Watch said Angolan police had killed at least a dozen activists between January and August.



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