

Walkout by students across Spain to oppose genocide in Gaza; protests in Iran by oil workers over pay and conditions; unofficial action by Tshwane bus workers in South Africa continues

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 October 2023

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

Spanish students walk out of classes to oppose genocide in Gaza

On Thursday, students in Spanish high schools, vocational colleges and universities joined a strike called by the Students' Union, walking out of classes to join protests in 23 cities against the brutal Israeli war on the Palestinian people.

The Students' Union, in a statement calling for the strike, denounced the Israeli government for "unleashing a new genocide" in Gaza, and the US, EU and Spanish governments for "label[ing] the entire Palestinian population as 'terrorists'" while "allow[ing] a savage military occupation and systematic violations of human rights."

Public sector workers hold one-day general strike in Basque Country, Spain

Workers in the public sector throughout the Basque Country autonomous region in Spain joined a one-day general strike on Wednesday demanding improvements in pay, job security and investment in public services, *EFE* reported.

The organisers said that more than 30,000 workers joined demonstrations in three major cities, and 150,000 were called to join the strike.

Participation levels were 41.4 percent in education, according to the unions, although the government claimed 12 percent, and very high in transport as well. The unions accused the Basque government of imposing "abusive" minimum service requirements and said the requirements were higher than before the pandemic.

The Basque government refused to meet the demands of striking workers, calling the demands "very maximalist positions", and saying that a pay rise is "not in the hands of the Basque Government."

Firefighters protest for regional collective agreement in Galicia, Spain, face violent police confrontation

Around 200 firefighters protested in the city of Ourense on October 20, in the Spanish autonomous community of Galicia, as part of a long-running dispute.

In an incident widely covered by the Spanish media, protesting firefighters outside the Provincial Council of Ourense building were confronted by heavily armed riot police. An altercation began during which a burst of flames was directed over heads of police and police broke the nasal septum of one firefighter, sending him to hospital.

The Galician government, led by the right-wing People's Party, lined up to denounce the firefighters, writing in a statement: "No demand, however legitimate, justifies the use of violent episodes," and a man has been arrested for using a "device similar to a flamethrower," *Europa Press* reported.

The firefighters' strike committee denounced the police for failing to follow "regulatory procedures," and "striking forcefully at the height of the protestors' heads." Video of the incident shows police swinging their batons at head height even before the flames were produced.

Firefighters have been holding strikes and protests since June to call for a single collective agreement covering all of Galicia and increases in pay and staffing levels. More protests are planned for this Friday and next week.

Tens of thousands of Icelandic women join national strike against pay inequality

On Tuesday, tens of thousands of women in Iceland joined a one-day strike called by several organisations to protest pay inequality between men and women, as well as violence against women.

According to *Iceland Monitor*, the organisers estimated that around a quarter of the whole country's population, around 94,000 people, protested in Reykjavík, and schools and crèches across the country closed for the day.

Al Jazeera reported on data from Statistics Iceland which showed women's earnings were 10.2 percent lower in 2021, as they were more likely to work in underpaid jobs in sectors such as teaching and healthcare

and take less overtime. This points to the class issues behind pay inequality, ignored by most of the world's media which focussed instead on the PR stunt by prime minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir who announced she would join the strike.

Jakobsdóttir, who admitted to having “answered a few emails” when she was supposedly on strike, told *mbl.is*, “[W]e are somehow all part of the equality fight, no matter what position we hold in society.” She claimed climate change, war and other issues caused by the capitalist system—arose because women are “not in the conversation at the table where decisions are made.”

Thousands protest state of kindergartens in Vienna, Austria

Workers in kindergartens in Vienna joined a strike and large demonstration on Tuesday, reportedly closing almost all of the kindergartens in the Austrian capital.

According to the *Kleine Zeitung*, the kindergarten workers have repeatedly held protests and strikes since 2021 to call for increased staffing levels to allow more time with individual children. The unions organising the protest say more than 12,000 people joined.

Wildcat postal strike spreads across Serbia

A wildcat strike which broke out on Tuesday at Postekspres, the courier service of the Serbian state-owned postal service Pošta Srbije, has spread across the country.

On Tuesday, 90 percent of couriers in the city of Novi Sad stopped work, *021* reported, and one union official told the news site that no unions were involved in the walkout. On Wednesday, many colleagues in Belgrade and other cities, at both Postekspres and Pošta Srbije, joined the stoppage.

The striking workers said their salaries are half the national average, and demanded a 30 percent pay rise, a share of last year's profits, and the hiring of more staff. They also demanded an end to “silent discrimination,” in which they say routes are reassigned as a form of intimidation.

Social workers protest in Berlin, Germany, against underfunding

On Saturday, around 1,200 people protested in Berlin against underfunding of social services, including many social workers who called for real pay rises instead of one-off payments, *taz* reported.

The protest was called during collective bargaining negotiations in the public sector, in which social workers are calling for increased pay and staffing levels, as they are barely left with enough time for their caseloads.

Warning strike on privatised German rail lines over pay and working hours

Rail workers on privately operated lines in Germany held a warning

strike on October 21, called by the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) during a dispute with French multinational Transdev.

The strike, between the early morning and 2.30pm, reportedly had a very large impact, with practically all services cancelled near the major cities of Hanover and Bremen, and many other regions experiencing widespread cancellations.

Rail workers are opposed to Transdev's offer to increase pay by 11 percent over two years, and the GDL demanded a monthly pay rise of 555 euros and a one-year contract. It also called for weekly working time to be reduced to 35 hours as new staff would not be recruited except by “making shift work and the burdens on railway workers attractive and worthwhile,” reported *Junge Welt*.

Strike against understaffing at crèches in Liège, Belgium

On October 20, childcare workers at crèches in the Belgian city of Liège held a one-day strike to denounce chronic understaffing, which has led to poor conditions for staff and children.

Speaking to *RTBF*, one worker with 20 years' experience said, “We do things in a bit of a hurry and the children feel it. It affects their mood.” A colleague agreed: “We work more or less like an assembly line.”

The same issues face childcare workers across Belgium. In the city of La Louvière, they held a 10-day strike earlier this month over staffing levels.

National strike in the Dutch timber industry

Workers in timber companies throughout the Netherlands held a 24-hour national strike on Tuesday, during collective bargaining negotiations for the industry.

RD reported that more than 400 workers stopped work for the day. The FNV and Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) previously called separate regional strikes of a few hours each throughout October.

The unions are calling for a pay increase of 10 percent. The Association of Dutch Timber Companies offered what it said was a 9.2 percent pay rise, but the CNV said this was “not true,” since some of it was a one-off payment, and the offer is not retroactive to April, when the previous collective agreement expired, according to *Houtwereld*.

Strike by rail infrastructure parts manufacturing workers in Scunthorpe, UK over pay

UK workers at Vossloh in Scunthorpe held a one-day strike on October 20, and are set to walk out again Friday. German-based Vossloh manufactures parts and components used by Network Rail, the UK rail infrastructure company.

The GMB members voted by a 90 percent majority to walk out after rejecting a below inflation pay offer. RPI inflation stands at 6.9 percent. A further 14 days of strikes are planned from October 31. Vossloh made £2.3 million in profits last year.

Strike by health staff in Wirral, UK over pay grading back pay

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 began a five-day stoppage on Monday.

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 were paid at the lower end of the band 2 pay scale. However, they routinely carried out tasks such as blood monitoring and inserting cannulas which count as band 3 pay scale work, for which they should have been earning around £2,000 a year more.

The WUTH NHS Foundation has now agreed to pay the CSWs on band 3 but is refusing to backdate this to 2018, so the CSWs are continuing their fight. Seven other health trusts in the northwest of England agreed to put CSWs on the band 3 pay scale and backdate their pay to April 2018.

The current action is the fourth in their programme of stoppages. They are due to walk out again from November 6 until November 20.

Teachers strike at Wales school over pupil behaviour problems

Teachers at Caldicot comprehensive school in Monmouthshire, Wales held a one-day stoppage on Wednesday.

The NASUWT and National Education Union members are concerned over the failure of the school management to deal with disruptive behaviour by some of the 1,300 pupils at the school. Teachers say this is leading to stress for many teachers and disruption of pupils' education.

It has been a long-standing concern for teachers. The NASUWT members at the school held strikes on September 21 and 28 over the issue.

UK construction engineers vote to walk out over pay offer

Thousands of construction engineers under the National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) voted to strike after rejecting a pay offer.

The GMB and Unite union members, who work at oil refineries and power stations, including 1,000 at Sellafield nuclear power station, turned down the pay offer of an 8.5 percent increase for 2024 and 3.5 percent for 2025.

No dates have been set for any stoppages, but Unite and GMB union representatives were due to meet to discuss what action to take.

Scottish ancillary school staff at four councils to strike as part of rolling programme of strikes

Scottish school ancillary staff at four Scottish councils, Glasgow City, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde will walk out on November 1.

The action is part of a rolling programme of strikes by around 20,000 Unison members who voted by a near 90 percent majority to reject the latest pay offer from the employers' body, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla).

School ancillary staff, who work as caterers, cleaners, janitors and support workers, want £15 an hour pay. Further stoppages at other Scottish councils will take place over the next few weeks as part of the action.

They previously held a three-day stoppage beginning September 26. They were due to be joined by GMB and Unite union members, but the unions cancelled the strikes while their members voted on the offer rejected by the Unison members. The GMB and Unite union members accepted Cosla's offer.

Lecturers at Glasgow, Scotland renew mandate for strikes over redundancies

Teaching staff at the City of Glasgow College, Scotland voted by over 80 percent to renew their strike mandate.

The Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA) held a series of walkouts up to September, over plans to cut around 100 teaching posts and the unmanageable workloads of lecturers. The EIS-FELA has yet to announce dates for the renewed action.

Traffic wardens at Wiltshire County Council, UK to strike over plans to cut wages

Traffic wardens working for Wiltshire County Council in England are set to walk out on November 4 over resurrected plans by the council to cut their wages by up to 20 percent.

The GMB union members took 10 days of stoppages in 2022, when the council first announced plans to cut unsocial hours payment by between 10 and 20 percent. The council shelved the plans but has now revived them.

High-end online fashion retail workers in London to strike over inadequate pay offer

Around 200 workers employed by Italian high end online fashion retailer Yoox Net-a-Porter at their London Charlton distribution centre are to strike.

The GMB union members voted in September by a 91 percent majority to strike over an inadequate pay offer from the company. Twenty-two days of stoppages have been announced in the busy run up to Christmas period. Workers will walk out November 7-11, November 20-25 and December 4-16. The items on the Yoox Net-a-Porter site are priced in hundreds and even thousands of pounds.

Car parts workers in Stoke-on-Trent, England to walk out over sick pay scheme

Workers at Klarius Products Ltd in Stoke-on-Trent, England will hold further stoppages over the company's attempts to impose an inferior sick

pay scheme.

The Unite union members have held 16 days of stoppages since September over the issue. Under the scheme, workers' sick pay would be reduced from five to two weeks over three years.

The workers will strike each week Monday to Friday from November 6 to December 1. Klarius manufactures exhaust systems and other car parts for the auto industry. Its latest profit figures were nearly £8 million.

Further stoppage planned by support staff at UK government departments

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 are to begin a 36-day strike on November 1.

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 workers held 10 days of stoppages in September and October.

UK development and poverty charity workers balloted to strike over pay

UK office staff and retail workers at charity Oxfam are balloting over pay. The Unite union members rejected a pay offer from the charity of £1,750 or 6 percent, whichever is the greater, plus a £1,000 one-off payment. Unite says Oxfam workers have suffered a 21 percent pay cut in real terms over the last five years.

The charity employs around 1,800 staff in the UK. Its income for the financial year ending March 2022 was £373 million. A recent survey of 150 Oxfam workers revealed that over the last year 8 percent had to use a foodbank, more than a fifth were unable to pay their rent and a third had to choose between eating and heating.

The ballot closes November 16. If they vote to strike, it will be the first stoppage in Oxfam's 81-year existence.

Unite union at Go North East bus company puts substandard offer to the ballot

Around 1,300 UK bus drivers employed by Go North East were to begin an all-out continuous stoppage from Saturday. The company, however, has made a new substandard offer. According to ITV, Unite is to ballot its members on the offer.

The drivers, who rejected a below-inflation pay offer, walked out September 30 to October 6, and again October 14-20. The depots involved are at Consett, Gateshead, Hexham, Percy Main, Sunderland and Washington. Parent company the Go-Ahead Group reported profits of £85 million last year. According to Unite, Go North East drivers are among the lowest paid in the country with the average driver on £12.83 an hour.

The Go North East web site states the offer would mean drivers were paid £14.15 an hour, claiming this represents a 10.3 percent pay increase.

PCS union suspends strike of UK parliament security staff

The PCS union postponed a strike by around 250 security staff at the UK parliament's House of Commons. The four-day strike would have covered the period of the state opening of parliament by King Charles on November 7.

The 95 percent majority vote in favour of the stoppage was in response to staff being told they must work extra night shifts because of staff shortages, impacting their work/life balance.

The PCS is in negotiations over the new roster but said it will announce new dates for stoppages if no progress is made.

Protests by Iranian oil workers over pay and conditions

Last week, official (not contracted) oil workers at the Aghajari Oil and Gas Exploration Company held a rally to protest pay and conditions.

They are protesting low wages, excessive taxation and limiting their pension benefits to 30 years even if they have worked longer and paid in more contributions. Following the rally, the workers pledged to hold daily protests until their demands are met.

Iran has been hit by workers' strikes and protests by pensioners over the rising cost of living, as well as the suppression of democratic rights and violence by the authorities. Economic problems were exacerbated by US sanctions, plunging 60 percent of the population into poverty. The US is lining up Iran as its next possible target in its expanding wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Tshwane bus workers in South Africa continue unofficial action over pay

Bus workers in Tshwane Gauteng, South Africa, on unofficial strike for three months over pay, returned to work Monday but most refused to drive. It was widely reported that a number also rang in sick or were absent for personal reasons. Only 36 out of 160 shifts went ahead.

One month ago, the strikers had a permanent interdict against strike action served against them by the Labour Court.

The stoppage was for an unpaid pay increase of 5.4 percent granted in 2021. More than 120 workers have been sacked for taking unofficial action.

Four workers were arrested on Monday for malicious damage to property and intimidation after stoning three buses. According to *Pretoria Rekord*, the metro spokesperson Bokaba said, "The arrests were a result of a multidisciplinary operation undertaken jointly by the SAPS Dog Unit and TMPD, aimed at curbing criminality that has characterised the unlawful and unprotected strike by some employees of the city."

Food workers at Fry's Family Food in Durban, South Africa strike over wages and conditions

Food workers at Fry's Family Food in Durban began strike action on Wednesday to demand 190 hours a month and a R2.90 per hour pay increase backdated to 1 July.

The South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) members produce vegan and halal food. Currently the workers are on short hours and do not receive medical aid, which is also being demanded.

In an interview with *Power Zone*, SACCAWU Regional Secretary Mathews Ndlovu explained that the strike is for three days, after which the company intends to lock the workers out.

Malawian truck drivers' strike over pay

Truck drivers in Malawi began a walkout on October 16, causing shortages of petrol and diesel. The drivers are demanding salary increases to offset rising living costs, and cuts to passport renewal fees.

The Truck Drivers Union of Malawi is reported to be in negotiation with the Ministry of Labour, while trucks are parked at Kanengo, an industrial area within the capital Lilongwe.

Ethiopian state workers strike over unpaid salaries

Government-employed workers in the East Badawacho district of the Hadiya Zone in Ethiopia began strike action the second week of October. They are demanding three months' or more unpaid salaries.

Press cited a teacher from Shone town, who had not been paid since June. Many teachers are struggling to meet their basic needs, forcing them to take on manual labour in addition to their teaching posts. Unable to send their children to school, they are increasingly concerned about their futures.

Thirteen districts of the Hadiya Zone and three city administrations reported delayed salary payments, which authorities blamed on financial problems caused by hikes in fertiliser costs.



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