

Workplace deaths provoke walkouts in Italy; 20,000 oil contract workers on national strike in Iran over pay and conditions; Nigerian health workers in Oyo State to walk out over pay, staff shortages and funding

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.

Strikes in Italy after latest horrific workplace deaths

Two horrific incidents recently provoked major walkouts by workers in Italy, opposing the dangerous working conditions that remain widespread.

Last week, 31-year-old Satnam Singh, an undocumented agricultural labourer, died in hospital after his arm was severed by a piece of machinery. Singh was reportedly left lying outside, and there is currently a legal inquiry into whether his life could have been saved if his employer had called an ambulance immediately.

The CGIL union called a one-day strike on Monday for all agricultural workers in the province of Latina, where Singh worked. According to ANSA, a demonstration and march towards the Piazza della Libertà in Rome was joined by Indian workers from across the Lazio region.

Metal workers in the northern province of South Tyrol also joined a four-hour strike on Monday after an explosion at an aluminium factory in the provincial capital Bolzano on Saturday night. Bocar Diallo, a 31-year-old refugee from Senegal who worked at the factory, died in a Verona hospital from severe burns. Five more workers were seriously injured.

French energy workers strike over wages at EDF and job cuts in ExxonMobil

Workers at the French state-owned energy company EDF held a one-day strike on June 20. They are opposing changes to the salary scales which the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) union said would lead to the “individualisation of salaries.”

EDF intends to reduce the minimum individual pay increase from 2.3 percent to 1.5 percent and make decisions on higher raises on a personal basis, *Le Figaro* reported.

Around 200 workers at petrol producer ExxonMobil’s refinery in Gravenchon, Normandy, walked out June 21 against a partial closure of

the site, *Reuters* reported, and have continued picketing since. Exxon threatened that if the pickets were not lifted, “we may have no choice but to suspend production,” effectively a lockout.

France Bleu reported that bailiffs were sent to the homes of two union representatives, summoning them to court hearings. Exxon were alleging that pickets “would slow down the intervention of emergency services in the event of a security incident” and “do not make it possible to guarantee the supply of products essential to the smooth running of the refinery.”

Postal workers across France oppose workload surge during elections

Postal workers in regions across France organised strikes against the massive surge in workload caused by having to deliver election statements and 47 million ballot papers for the snap elections called from June 30.

The strikes have been called locally, but the issues faced by workers at state-owned La Poste are the same nationwide. Workers are calling for additional staffing and a bonus to compensate for the increased workload.

In the department of Mayenne, postal workers began an indefinite strike to call for an “exceptional bonus” to recognise the extra weight in their bags, but the CGT union called it off on Tuesday after further negotiations, telling *France Bleu* “we are not moving forward with the claim for this exceptional bonus.” Around 30 postal workers in Le Mans held a sit-in in their sorting centre to call for a 500 euro bonus for the first round of the presidential elections, and 600 euros for the second round, *France Bleu* reported.

Postal workers in Loiret are also striking for a 500 euro bonus. In Pyrénées-Orientales, the Solidaires union is calling for a 1,000 euro bonus for the whole elections and has filed an indefinite strike notice. A Solidaires official in Occitania told France TV Info, “I remember a time when we received €700 more per election round” and called for “negotiations” over their 500 euro demand.

Long-running strike at Acerinox steel plant in Spain ends after threat of mass layoffs

Last week, workers at the Acerinox stainless steel plant in Cádiz, Spain, voted by 61 percent to return to work with the same offer they rejected by 70 percent in May, *EFE* reported.

The deal, ending a four-and-a-half-month-long strike by 1,800 workers, includes a pay rise of 3.1 percent for 2023, below that year's average inflation rate of 3.5 percent, and increases in subsequent years below the current 3.6 percent inflation.

Acerinox threatened that if the deal was not accepted, it would close two of the five shifts at the factory, costing between 475 and 550 jobs. The strike committee told *Europa Press* workers "are obviously going to lose some rights... we have not achieved the salary increase," but insisted "they still have dignity."

Spain's largest unions, the Workers' Commissions and General Workers' Union, both celebrated the end of the strike, saying in pro-company press statements that "sanity prevailed" and hailing the "good sense demonstrated by the staff."

Danish postal workers walk out in wildcat strike against job losses, following abolition of universal service obligation

Last week, workers at the Danish postal service PostNord's centre in the Copenhagen suburb of Taastrup held a one-day wildcat strike, walking out on Wednesday evening and resuming work on Thursday afternoon, *Jydske Vestkysten* reported.

Strikers told the *Ritzau* news agency, "We need to know whether we will have a job in a year and a half," after the government abolished PostNord's universal service obligation.

A new postal law came into force in January, removing the requirement for PostNord, jointly owned by the Swedish and Danish states, to deliver letters everywhere in Denmark and opening delivery to the market. It also imposes VAT on letters, magazine and parcel deliveries, driving up prices. PostNord is planning to remove 1,000 post boxes nationwide, writing on its website "it is no longer an economically sustainable business in itself to deliver letters to the whole of Denmark."

The 3F union opposed the walkout, issuing a patronising statement to the media, "We have informed [the workers] that this is not the way we communicate" and claiming it would intervene with the government and PostNord on their behalf.

Ireland-based Aer Lingus pilots to strike in bitter pay dispute

Pilots at Aer Lingus will hold an eight-hour strike on Saturday, and began an indefinite work-to-rule on Wednesday in an increasingly bitter pay dispute with the formerly state-owned Irish airline, fully privatised in 2015.

Members of the Irish Airline Pilots' Association (IALPA) are calling for a 24 percent pay rise, to compensate for inflation since their last pay rise in 2019, *RTÉ* reported. IALPA members voted to reject an offer of 9.25 percent by the national Labour Court.

IALPA said Aer Lingus earned 255 million euros in profits last year, but the airline claims any pay rise above 12.25 percent would be "based upon reaching agreement on improvements in productivity and flexibility."

The airline responded to the strike with repeated threats of legal action. IALPA organised a paper ballot over the weekend, which returned a 99 percent vote in favour of strikes, after Aer Lingus sent a legal letter challenging the previous electronic ballot. According to *The Irish Times*,

every member of the IALPA executive committee was individually threatened with a lawsuit "for alleged unlawful conduct regarding an alleged increase in pilot absences due to illness."

Serbian auto parts workers end strike against brutal working conditions

On Wednesday, the strike committee at the Jura auto parts factory in Leskovac, Serbia, announced it was ending strikes against unbearable working conditions and low wages, claiming they were "deceived by people from the Ministry of Labour" who offered mediation.

The unions two weeks ago reduced the all-out strike to walkouts of only one hour per day, but on Tuesday all-day strikes began again, according to *Nova*.

Workers denounced unhygienic toilets in the factory, bullying by management, and a punitive bonus policy, which penalises workers for using their sick leave. One worker told *NI* that when she came back to work after taking leave, she was detained in the company's office and only allowed to leave after she began to call the police.

The workers also called for a 20 percent pay rise, which *Resetka* reported should have already taken place as a condition of receiving state subsidies.

Junior doctors in England begin five-day strike over pay

Around 25,000 junior doctors throughout England began a five-day stoppage on Thursday. Their last stoppage was in February this year.

It marked the eleventh tranche of action by the British Medical Association (BMA) members in their long-running dispute over pay, begun March 2023. To date they have held 39 days of strikes in their campaign for a 35 percent pay rise to restore pay levels to those of 2008.

The junior doctors have carried out a long, determined struggle, and in their latest re-ballot for industrial action in March they voted by a 98 percent majority to continue.

The first day of the latest round of stoppages saw picket lines at hospitals in major cities across England. A protest was planned to take place outside the Friarage hospital in North Yorkshire, in the constituency of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Striking doctors held a rally outside Sunak's Downing Street residence in London on Thursday afternoon.

Last year, the other health unions, including the Royal College of Nurses, Unite, Unison and the GMB called off action and accepted below-inflation pay deals, isolating the doctors' struggle. As a result of decades of cuts and not even a promise of more funding from the Labour Party and the Tories during the general election campaign, the National Health Service is near collapse.

Bus drivers in northwest England walk out over pay

Around 500 bus drivers employed by Stagecoach on Merseyside in England were on strike Monday and Tuesday.

The Unite union members are angry over the pay disparity between them and drivers working for other bus companies on Merseyside. They are paid £1.40 an hour less, equating to around £3,000 a year.

Monday saw a lively picket line at Stagecoach's Gillmoss depot on the East Lancashire Road. Stagecoach was able to run a much-reduced scab bus service using Stagecoach managers from around its country-wide companies. Police were on hand to ensure the scab buses had unrestricted exit from the depot.

Further stoppages are planned for July 5-8 and 12-15.

Further strike by UK Royal Fleet Auxiliary seafarers over pay

Around 500 UK seafarers working for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) held a 24-hour strike Tuesday. The seafarers are civilians but supply logistical and operational support to the UK's Royal Navy.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have a 4.5 percent pay rise implemented by the RFA and are pushing for an increased offer. They previously held a 24-hour stoppage on May 19, which impacted ships and ports worldwide.

The RMT—which refers to its members on RFA vessels as being involved in “humanitarian operations”—has made no attempt to mobilise its full RFA membership providing support to Royal Navy operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea facilitating Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Further walkouts by teachers at school in Hessle, England over new pay scheme

Around 70 UK teachers at St Anne's School and Sixth Form College in Hessle, Yorkshire began a four-day stoppage Tuesday. It follows five days of strikes in April and May.

The NEU members are protesting the replacement of an existing pay scheme with one that does not give extra payments for dealing with pupils with special educational needs. The school provides teaching and residential care for children with severe and complex educational needs.

Further stoppages are planned for July 8-11 and 15-18.

Teachers at school in Manchester, UK walkout over threat to sack union representative

UK teaching staff at William Hulme's Grammar School, Whalley Range in Manchester walked out Tuesday. It was the first of eleven days of planned stoppages.

The NASUWT members were protesting the school's plan to make the NASUWT representative redundant. The teachers are also dissatisfied with the school's handling of staff absences and use of support plans.

A NASUWT press release of June 24 stated, “We believe that the redundancy has only arisen as a result of the mismanagement of staffing by the employer—we dispute that there is even a need to cut staff numbers as the school is oversubscribed and workload has not diminished in any way.

“Despite a vacancy opening up in another department, the school is refusing to explore the retraining and redeployment of the affected member of staff, despite the cost of retraining being far less than the cost of the redundancy or the cost of recruiting an extra member of staff.”

Further strikes by teachers at London school in response to attack on pensions

Teachers at St Benedict's Independent Catholic school, Ealing in the UK capital were on strike again this week on Wednesday and Thursday. They held a two-day stoppage last week.

The NASUWT union members are protesting plans by the school to take them out of the teachers' pension scheme (TPS) and enrol them in an inferior scheme paying reduced benefits in retirement. Those teachers refusing to leave the TPS will have their pay cut.

Further stoppages are planned for September 3-5.

Nurses at two London hospitals to strike over enforced increase in working hours

Around 50 nurses working as day surgery nurses at London's Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Trust hospitals are to walk out Thursday and again on July 2.

The Unite union members are protesting the extension of their working shift to 9pm and having to work Saturdays. Their shifts were already extended by an hour until 8pm. The nurses say the extended shifts, which have been introduced to clear backlogs in surgery lists, are leading to burnout.

The Guy's and St Thomas' Trust in central London is one of the UK's busiest, with 2.6 million patient throughputs a year.

Rail facility workers in Doncaster, UK to strike over pay and conditions

UK workers employed by Bespoke Facilities Management at Hitachi Rail in Doncaster are due to begin a four-day strike Monday.

The RMT union members want improved pay and working conditions.

Ongoing protests in Iran over pay, pensions and living conditions

Sunday marked the fifth day of a national strike of over 20,000 oil contract workers, begun June 19.

Known as the 14-14 campaign, the oil workers from across 75 companies are demanding a revised work rota of 14 days on, 14 days off. They also demand an end to the contract system and improved working conditions.

There has been an increasing use of contract workers in the oil and gas industries in Iran to replace regular employees, with contractors creaming off money and imposing worse pay and conditions.

Retired Social Security workers in Rasht and Kermanshah also protested over inadequate pension provision, while in Isfahan retired steel workers protested over the same issue. Striking municipal workers in Abadan protested outside the municipal building, seeking improved pay and conditions.

Tuesday saw repeated “No to Executions Tuesdays” protests in prisons for the twenty-second week. They began in February with a hunger strike to protest the high numbers of capital punishments. Tuesday's protests

took place in 12 wards (wings) at seven prisons.

With inflation currently at 35 percent and the economy in freefall due to US sanctions, Iran is in the crosshairs of NATO's widening wars in the Middle East against and in Ukraine against Russia and the war plans against China.

Health workers in Oyo State, Nigeria to hold seven-day warning strike

Health workers in Oyo State, Nigeria, are set to begin a seven-day warning strike starting July 1.

The Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) said the strike was necessary because the state government persistently neglects their grievances. Their main demand is the reinstatement of members removed from the Consolidated Health Salary Structure. The strike will include all MHWUN members in the state.

The strike is part of a wider struggle over Nigeria's healthcare system, which has been affected by a lack of resources and an exodus of highly trained members of staff.

University academics in Nasarawa, Nigeria, stop lectures to protest non-payment of allowance

University academics at Nasarawa State University in Nigeria walked out from lectures on June 26. They are protesting over N600,000,000 of the Earned Academic Allowance being withheld by the state government. The protest disrupted usual activities.

Walking out in unison, the academics gathered in the university's assembly hall. They then marched to the main gate displaying placards with slogans including, "We Say No to Enslavement, Education is a right that MUST be protected", "Revitalisation is Key to the Survival of the Nigerian Universities" and "Save the Ivory Towers from Total Collapse."

Liberian rubber workers in Margibi County on go-slow

Around 500 Liberian workers at Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC), Margibi County were on go-slow last week until June 21.

They were protesting management's labour practices over three years and appalling work conditions. Most are on temporary contracts and unable to hold an effective strike.

The Salala Agricultural Workers Union presented a 13-point list of demands to SRC managers, including: renovation of housing facilities, currently in a deplorable condition; provision of suitable tapping tools, which should be replaced every three months; proper medical treatment and coverage of medical bills; subsidies for a 50kg bag of rice of US\$12 plus a 50kg bag of rice at low cost; transportation for workers and their dependents not living at the plantation; bonuses differentiated from daily wages, with the target reduced from 1700kg to 300kg.





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