

Thousands of car workers at Mercedes factories and car dealerships in Germany walk out to protest job cuts; oil and gas contractors' strike in Iran over pay and conditions spreads; Nigerian health workers on seven-day warning strike in Oyo state over non-payment of allowance

## 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 and protests against sale of car dealerships by Mercedes in Germany

Workers at Mercedes factories and car dealerships in Germany stopped work on Tuesday, and 25,000 protested a plan to sell 80 car dealerships, *Automobilwoche* reported.

Around 8,000 workers will be affected by the sales, as the new owners are not bound by existing collective agreements.

An agreement between Mercedes and the works council guaranteed there would be no closures or job cuts until 2030, but these jobs would be at risk in any site that was sold. According to *Automobilwoche*, the union works council is seeking either preservation of the collective agreements or "reasonable financial compensation."

The works council based itself on a corporatist perspective of protecting Mercedes' profits, as well as aligning itself with the European Union's trade war measures against China, saying, "If there is a Mercedes in the car dealership, there shouldn't be a [Chinese electric car brand] BYD next to it."

### National 48-hour strike over pay dispute in Dutch metal and technology sector

Several thousand workers joined a 48-hour national strike in the Netherlands last week, following months of shorter regional stoppages in the metal and technology sector.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) calls for a 10.1 percent pay rise in one year, the Christian National Trade Union Federation (CNV) for a 12.5 percent increase over two years. Both rejected the

Federation of Technology Employers' previous pay offer of 9.2 percent over 22 months, equivalent to less than 5 percent annually.

According to *De Telegraaf*, the FWT, which represents smaller companies employing more than 300,000 people in total, made a new offer this week equivalent to 12.7 percent over 24 months.

### Transport workers in Portugal strike against low pay

On June 28, workers at Comboios de Portugal (CP), the state-owned rail company, joined a one-day strike over low pay.

An official from the Fectrans union told *Lusa* that starting salaries were "very close to the national minimum wage" and monthly salaries for experienced workers were only about 100 euros more. The strike stopped almost all train services, except for the quarter included in a minimum service requirement by the court.

National Union of Portuguese Railway Machinists (SMAQ) members were to continue the strike until July 14, but SMAQ announced a return to work on Saturday after reaching an agreement with CP over pay.

Workers in local transport services also held strikes, with bus drivers at Transportes Sul do Tejo (TST), which operates services in the Setúbal region near Lisbon, stopping work June 25 and due to walk out again Friday.

According to *The Portugal News*, TST workers are calling for a monthly increase of 80 euros, but TST claims it can only afford 60 euros. Since 2022, TST has been owned by the Israeli Dan Group, which acquired all of Arriva's Portuguese operations.

Next week, workers at Carris, the state-owned company that operates buses and trams in Lisbon, will also walk out for 24 hours for a 100 euro pay rise, an increase in the meal allowance, and a 35-hour working week, *The Portugal News* reported.

### Strike against "financial rationalisation" of *Avgi* newspaper by

## **SYRIZA in Greece**

Journalists and other workers at *Avgi*, a newspaper whose largest shareholder is the pseudo-left party Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), held a 48-hour strike on Wednesday, against the ending of daily publication. This followed several 24-hour stoppages last week.

Workers at the SYRIZA-owned radio station Sto Kokkino also held a 24-hour strike on Friday in support of the *Avgi* strikers.

*Alfavitá* reported a statement from the paper's board of directors that, "given the difficult financial situation of the company," it had decided "in consultation with the main shareholder [SYRIZA], to suspend the publication of the daily sheet... in order to upgrade the Sunday edition and the 'avgí.gr' website." It did not commit to saving jobs, and said it had a plan for "the optimal utilisation of the company's human resources."

SYRIZA owns around 40 percent of the shares in *Avgi*, according to *Keep Talking Greece*. The president of SYRIZA, businessman Stefanos Kasselakis, claims he offered to give the party's shares in *Avgi* to the workers, but at a mass meeting, the workers called this a lie, *ef.syn* reported.

## **Hundreds of chrome miners begin pay strike in Turkey**

Around 600 miners at the chrome mine owned by the YILDIRIM Group near the Turkish city of Elaz?? walked out on Monday after the company did not meet their pay demands, *Evrensel* reported.

Miners told the paper they would continue the strike until they achieve their demand for bonuses, as well as an increase in salaries and overtime payments.

## **Early years workers fight for stable contracts and recognition as educators in Asturias, Spain**

Early years educators in the Spanish autonomous community of Asturias, responsible for children 0-3 years old, held a two-day strike June 27 and 28, joined by more than 90 percent of workers.

Strikers are calling for stable contracts and recognition of their role as educators, with associated teaching resources. One worker told *La Nueva España*, "We don't just put nappies [on the children], we are not nurseries, we are schools."

The unions said the Asturian Ministry of Education's proposal for stable contracts after a "merit assessment" was "an important but insufficient advance."

## **Healthcare workers in Andalusia, Spain, strike against understaffing**

On June 26, healthcare workers joined a three-hour strike across the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia, demanding an increase in staffing levels and adherence to collective agreements.

According to *Europa Press*, the Satsé union said thousands of graduating nurses and physiotherapists were unable to register with the community's Temporary Employment Pool system, so they were "forced to look for job opportunities, on many occasions, outside Andalusia."

A high minimum service requirement was imposed, with hospitals and the ambulance service required to provide the same level of care as on a public holiday, *ABC* reported. The unions said that "in many services, there will be even more staff on the day of strikes than on any holiday or weekend, in which sick leave is usually left unreplaced."

## **French security guards strike over salaries and overtime ahead of Olympics**

On June 28, security guards in France joined a one-day strike, calling for a pay rise as well as an increase in overtime bonuses to 25 percent at night and 50 percent on Sundays ahead of the Olympics Games.

According to *Le Figaro*, there are still 1,000 fewer private security guards hired than planned for the Olympics, which begin on July 26.

The French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) announced, "[t]he presence of security agents at the Olympic Games is not unconditional." It said more strikes would follow on July 21 and nine more dates during the Olympics and Paralympics.

## **Journalists at France's Marianne magazine oppose sale to far-right billionaire**

On June 27, the Society of Editors of *Marianne* (SRM), which organises editorial staff at the French magazine *Marianne*, voted by 80 percent for an indefinite strike against the acquisition of the magazine by billionaire Pierre-Edouard Stérin.

A report in *Le Monde* exposed Stérin's links to the neo-fascist National Rally (RN).

CMI France, the media group owned by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky which owns *Marianne*, announced the following day it had suspended negotiations with Stérin, but would meet again on July 21.

A member of the SRM told *AFP* they were calling for a "total halt to negotiations" over the sale and feared the "suspension" was simply to postpone the decision "to a time when the political context will be calmer, and the sale will make less noise."

The *Le Monde* exposé accused Stérin of using his Common Good Fund "charity" to support several candidates from the faction of the right-wing The Republicans party, which supports an electoral alliance with the RN.

## **Hospital pharmacists protest understaffing in Limassol, Cyprus**

Last week, pharmacists at the state hospital in Limassol, Cyprus' second most populous city, held a two-hour warning strike to oppose understaffing.

The Isotita union told the *Cyprus Mail* they would call more warning strikes if staffing levels were not increased.

A planned national two-day strike by public hospital doctors over a lack of overtime payments was also called off this week after a meeting between doctors' unions and the State Health Services Organisation (OKYPY). According to *RIK*, the unions agreed to have the financial situation of OKYPY assessed by an auditor whose decisions would be binding.

### **Further strikes by job centre security staff in England over pay**

Around 1,500 staff employed by security firm G4S to provide security at Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre offices in England began a week-long walkout on Monday.

The majority of the GMB members are paid the minimum wage rate of £11.44 an hour. They are demanding a pay rise and an increase in pay grade differential rates. Currently, supervisors are paid only 1p an hour more.

They held previous stoppages in May and June. Further week-long stoppages are scheduled for July 15 and 29.

Around 200 of the G4S security staff at DWP job centres belong to the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union. They took joint action with GMB members in June and are due to join the GMB members Thursday striking until July 7. The PCS members are also scheduled to walk out July 15-21 and again from July 29 to August 4.

The previous strikes of security staff led to the closure of some job centres.

### **Refuse workers in London borough walk out over working conditions**

UK refuse collectors employed by Redbridge Civic Services (RCS) Ltd began a week-long stoppage Monday. RCS is a wholly owned subsidiary of the east London Labour-run borough of Redbridge.

The Unite union members are protesting late starts and finishing because of vehicles breaking down due to poor maintenance, and working an extra hour each day which according to their contract should only happen in "exceptional circumstances."

They are also coming under pressure to work overtime each weekend, impacting their work/life balance. The increased work pressure is leading to increased levels of sickness and yet they are only entitled to 10 days of sick pay, unlike directly employed workers, who get up to six months sick pay.

The RCS employed workers' working conditions are inferior to those of workers directly employed by the borough council.

### **UK health care staff at Merseyside hospital trust walk out over pay levels**

UK health care workers at the Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral, Merseyside began a week-long stoppage Monday.

The Unite union members work as recovery theatre practitioners caring for patients after serious operations. They are protesting not being paid the rate commensurate with their responsibilities. They are seeking a pay regrading and say they are losing up to £8,000 a year because they are on a lower grade.

They held four tranches of stoppages in April, May and June over the issue.

### **UK packaging workers in Winsford strike over pay and conditions**

Around 50 UK workers employed by the Jiffy packaging company plant

in Winsford, Cheshire, walked out on Monday. They plan to be out until July 13. One of the products produced is the Jiffy padded envelope.

The Unite union members rejected a 1.5 percent pay increase, backdated to April 1. This represents a cut in real terms. The workers are demanding an 8 percent pay rise and an increase in sick pay to 12 weeks from the current eight. They are also demanding a restoration of breaks and changes to bank holiday working arrangements.

The firm's latest profit figures were around £6 million.

### **Teachers at academy schools in Brighton, UK strike over funding**

Teachers and support staff from the Burgess Hill Academy, Hastings Academy, St Leonards Academy, Robsack Wood Academy and the Baird Academy schools in the Brighton area, England, walked out on Monday and Tuesday.

The National Education Union members were protesting the funding of the five University of Brighton Academy Trust (Ubat) schools. Normal practice is for trusts to take around 5-8 percent of annual funding grants to pay for central services. For Ubat, it is around 15 percent, leaving the schools underfunded. Across 2021-23, nearly £3 million was withheld from the Burgess Hill Academy.

### **Stagecoach bus drivers in Merseyside, England set for further stoppage over pay**

Around 500 bus drivers employed by on Merseyside in England are set to begin a four-day stoppage Friday.

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.

They already held a two-day stoppage begun June 24. A further stoppage is planned July 12-15.

### **Unite union calls off planned steel strike over job cuts in South Wales**

The Unite union has called off a planned strike by around 1,500 of its members at the Tata Steel company in Newport Llanwern and Port Talbot, Wales.

The planned strike was to begin July 8. It was in response to Tata Steel's intension to close two blast furnaces and replace them with an electric arc furnace. This would require a smaller workforce, leading to the loss of around 3,000 jobs. Unite also called off the overtime ban begun mid-June.

Tata had planned to close one of the blast furnaces this week and the other in September. In response to the strike threat, it said it would close them both this week.

Announcing their decision to call off the strike, Unite said it, "follows confirmation from Tata, arising from high level talks throughout the weekend, that it was now prepared to enter into negotiations about future investment for its operations and not just redundancies, in South Wales, including at Port Talbot and Llanwern."

Community union members at the site voted to walk out but the union has not called any action.

## **Unite union calls off strike of tramway engineers in UK capital in pay parity dispute, as workers accept pay offer**

The Unite union has ended the strike of tram maintenance engineers employed on London Trams (formerly known as Croydon Tramslink) begun Sunday. London Trams is part of the Transport for London (TfL) body coordinating transport across the capital.

The Unite union members were in dispute because they are paid up to £10,000 a year less than maintenance engineers employed on the London Underground rail system. They argue they are similarly qualified and perform the same role yet are paid much less. They held a previous walkout in March.

In a ballot, the maintenance engineers accepted a pay increase of up to 20 percent and improved holiday pay and contractual agreements.

## **Growing strike of oil and gas contract workers in Iran**

The strike by oil and gas contractor workers in Iran is continuing to grow. Begun June 20, it now involves around 30,000 workers across nearly 120 oil and gas companies.

The workers demand elimination of the contractors, who cream off money from the workers, as well as increased pay. In addition, they are demanding improved working conditions, including better quality food and dormitory accommodation.

Contractors tried to break the strikes by attempting to hire scabs on higher pay, but according to reports no one is taking up the offered posts.

## **Ongoing strikes and protests across Iran over worsening living conditions**

Monday saw protests by telecommunication retirees over the failure of their pensions to keep up with rising living costs. They have been holding regular Monday protests since 2023. This week protests took place in Tabriz and Bijar.

In Tehran, workers from the Ahvaz Steel company protested outside the parliament building over the dismissal of Ahvaz Steel workers after a previous protest calling for higher pay and improved living conditions.

There were also strikes by workers at the Petro Kimia Arvin trading company and the Kaveh Sodium Carbonate company in Firouzabad in Fars province.

Tuesday saw protests by road construction companies and machine operators outside the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad governorate offices over the lack of fuel.

Wednesday marked the third day of a strike by workers at the Karun Bozord Irrigation Project. They were protesting the failure of the project to give around 35 contract workers permanent status.

The same day saw protests by steel retirees in several cities across Iran including Ahvaz, Isfahan and Tehran against their inadequate pension provision.

Inflation is at 35 percent, and the economy is in freefall, exacerbated by US sanctions. Popular support for Iran's bourgeois nationalist regime is collapsing, with low voter turnout in the current presidential election and

mass disaffection from both conservative and "reform" factions of the establishment.

Iran is in the crosshairs of NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, the Ukraine against Russia and the war plans against China.

## **Protest by Israeli afterschool care workers in Holon against privatisation plans**

Dozens of afterschool care workers in the industrial city of Holon, Israel held a protest outside Holon city hall on June 25.

Organised by the Histadrut trade union body, they were protesting plans to privatise afterschool provision, which they say will lead to the loss of hundreds of posts.

## **Health workers in Oyo State, Nigeria hold seven-day warning strike over pay**

Workers in the hospitals of Oyo State, Nigeria began a seven-day "warning" strike on June 24 to protest non-payment of their hazard allowance.

The action follows an indefinite strike by nurses and midwives last month. Media sources blamed the strikes for the outbreak of cholera in the region, but cholera is the result of the rundown of the health service against which workers are taking action.

Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria chairman John Fabunmi said, "If the government fails to respond to the strike by next Monday when the warning strike will be over, we will then embark on an indefinite strike till our demands are met."

Also in Oyo State, police fired teargas and live ammunition at striking food workers, who were protesting. At least one of the strikers, named as Mr Phillips, was killed by the police. The number injured has not yet been reported.

## **Municipal workers in Msunduzi, South Africa stop work in protest over pay and conditions**

Over 400 waste collection and other employees at the Msunduzi municipality in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa walked out June 25 over non-payment of wages and poor working conditions.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members blocked workplace entrances with garbage and brought services to a halt.

## **South African workers at Johannesburg factory strike for higher wages**

Around 100 workers at Ribas condiment and sauce manufacturers in Johannesburg, South Africa went on continuous strike June 28 in protest over pay.

The General Industries Union of South Africa members want an increase of R4 an hour compared with the offered R1.75 from the

employer.

### **Truck drivers strike over “fire and rehire” at South African logistics giant Grindrod**

Road haulage workers at Grindrod in Durban, South Africa, took strike action June 21, after 85 were made redundant as part of a casualisation process.

The Transport and Services Workers Union members say the company dismisses workers and recruits substitutes on temporary contracts via labour brokers and subcontractors. The replacement casual workers have lower pay, less job security and fewer rights.

### **Unemployed teachers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa protest for jobs**

Around 50 jobless qualified teachers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa conducted a sit-in outside the main education office in Pietermaritzburg, insisting they be employed in the province’s schools.

The teachers are part of the KwaZulu-Natal United Unemployed Educators group, which numbers 6,000 jobless teachers overall. They demand answers from the Member of the Executive Council for education on why vacancies are being left empty or filled by teaching assistants instead of qualified teachers.

### **Unpaid workers blockade roads in Soweto, South Africa**

Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers in Gauteng province, South Africa protested against non-payment of wages June 27, blocking roads into their Soweto hospital workplace.

The 17 workers, some not paid for a year, accuse the municipality of corruption and demand answers from the provincial Department of Health.

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector but without the salary or benefits afforded to direct employ.

### **Liberian health workers’ go-slow at Tellewoyan Hospital in Lofa County**

Over 400 Liberian health workers at Tellewoyan Hospital in Lofa County mounted a go-slow protest June 24 for three days in response to the appointment of Dr. Raphael Ombeni Shamavu as County Health Officer.

The protest, including nurses, registrars, technicians and cleaners, was in response to his toxic leadership at Kolahun Hospital as Medical Director and other hospitals in Lofa County.

The Health Minister intervened to replace Shamavu with Dr Weidehgar to end the dispute.



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