

Swedish nurses denounce union's sellout contract over working hours; strikes and protests over collapsing living standards continue across Iran during presidential election; state employees in Ghana begin national walkout over pay

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 July 2024

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

Swedish nurses denounce sellout of major strike over working hours

Swedish nurses reacted with hostility when the Healthcare Association union signed an agreement at the end of June calling off their dispute with the Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR) and Sobona employers' associations over working hours.

More than 60,000 nurses began an overtime ban in April, and several thousand walked out on strike from June 4 to demand a reduction of the working day by 15 minutes.

According to *TT*, the deal signed by the union reduces working hours for only around 6,000-7,000 of the 78,000 nurses covered by the collective agreement. One nurse told the news agency, "I don't have a single colleague who is affected" by the reduction. The union's main defence of the deal is that it only lasts six months, so they can supposedly negotiate a better agreement next time.

The Healthcare Association's Facebook page was flooded with hostile comments from members. The union bureaucracy were denounced as "traitors who did not continue the fight for better working conditions in this contract movement when you had the opportunity to do so," and described as "just as useless at seeing our importance as politicians."

One nurse wrote, "I don't know who you have negotiated for, but certainly it is not for us members." Another comment called the deal an "unconditional surrender." Many pointed out that the 3 percent pay rise included in the deal was a real-terms pay cut.

Two-day national strike for new contract in Italian ports

Port workers in Italy joined a 48-hour national strike from July 4, calling for a new collective agreement with pay rises at least as high as inflation. This followed a total of four days of strikes in April.

The unions are also calling for more training and safety measures in the

ports, *ANSA* reported, and said the pay offer from the employers' association was "a slap in the face of workers."

Portuguese nurses strike over career progression and working conditions

Strikes by nurses in Portugal for better working conditions and pay progression took place this week and last.

On July 4, Portuguese Nurses Union (SEP) members at local healthcare centres in Lisbon held a one-day strike, which the union said involved 82 percent of nurses. According to *The Portugal News*, the SEP called for improvements in promotions and pay rises and demanded that taking maternity leave should not delay promotion to specialist status.

This week, nurses in private hospitals also stopped work. There was a strike in southern and central districts on Tuesday, and in the north on Wednesday. The SEP said it had not received any response from the Portuguese Association of Private Hospitalisation since sending a counter-proposal during negotiations in January.

According to *Lusa*, the SEP said 4,200 nurses in private hospitals do not receive compensation for working difficult hours and called for overtime and working hours to be included in the next collective agreement.

Waste collection strikes continue in A Coruña, Spain over staff shortages

Waste collection workers in the Spanish city of A Coruña have been holding intermittent strikes since June 23, in a dispute between the STL union and private operator PreZero. They stopped work on Monday and Tuesday, and plan a stoppage Saturday.

STL accuses the company of a "lack of recruitment and staffing," *Quincemil* reported. PreZero is part of the Schwarz Group, a German multinational which owns the Lidl supermarket chain.

A very high minimum service requirement was imposed by the city council, requiring 95 percent of workers to remain at work, according to

STL. The mayor, Inés Rey of the Socialist Party, accused workers of “taking hostage all the citizens of A Coruña” and threatened to take “all ordinary and extraordinary measures” to break the strike.

Week-long strike over staffing at kindergartens in Berlin, Germany

Following shorter warning strikes in June, workers at the 280 municipally owned kindergartens in Berlin began a five-day strike on Monday.

Around 3,000 United Services Union (Verdi) members reportedly stopped work to demand increased staffing levels in the capital’s kindergartens. The Berlin Senate continues to insist it is unable to make any changes as they must be agreed by the Tariff Association of German States, which includes most federal states.

According to *RBB24*, annual staff turnover is nearly 10 percent, while it is predicted that 2,500 new workers will need to be recruited by 2027 on top of replacing those who leave. The broadcaster also reported that both the Christian Democratic Union and Social Democratic Party suggested ending free daycare, making parents pay for the cost of necessary staffing levels.

Warning strikes continue in wage dispute at German ports

Workers in the German ports of Hamburg and Bremerhaven walked out on a 48-hour strike on Tuesday, as part of the pay dispute between Verdi and the Central Association of German Seaport Companies (ZDS).

There were several shorter warning strikes in June, while negotiations over pay for around 11,000 workers continue.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Verdi is demanding a three euro increase in hourly wages, while the ZDS has offered only 2.9 percent, or at least 80 cents per hour.

Strike at online gambling company in Georgia after abusive management comments leaked

Around 5,000 workers at online gambling services company Evolution Georgia in Georgia will walk out on Friday.

The LABOR union said that it had been negotiating over pay and working conditions with the Georgian subsidiary of the Swedish multinational for two years, and called for an end to “sexist, racist and discriminatory statements and treatment,” *OC Media* reported.

Last week, *Mautskebeli* published screenshots of bigoted and insulting chat posts about workers sent by members of Evolution management, which LABOR said also reflected the company’s attitude during negotiations.

Work-to-rule over pay and conditions by several groups of workers at Antalya Airport, Turkey

Workers in baggage handling and air traffic controllers at Antalya

Airport in Turkey are reportedly protesting overwork and calling for pay rises by working strictly to rule, having a major impact on traffic.

The Association of Tour Operators of Russia, which reported major delays to tourists, said that baggage handling workers were suffering increased workloads during this summer’s tourist season and demanded a pay rise and increase in staffing levels.

Air traffic controllers accused the government of withholding benefits they should be paid under an agreement with European aviation regulator Eurocontrol.

Long-running strike by Slovenian public administration workers ends with new agreement

On July 5, the unions representing workers in Slovenian public administration offices who issue residence permits, driving licenses and other documents, signed an agreement ending the strikes over pay and staffing begun in March.

Initially there were work stoppages every Wednesday. On May 15, workers at 34 of the 58 offices began an all-out strike which continued until last week.

The Union of State Authorities of Slovenia said it signed the agreement with “slightly gritted teeth,” claiming it “cannot deny citizens some rights” through continuing the strike, *RTV SLO* reported.

As part of the deal to end the strike, the government introduced new legislation to simplify the system of issuing work permits to immigrant workers. According to the *Slovenia Times*, the agreement also provides bonuses for higher workloads, reduction of the backlog of work, and wages paid for strike days. Since very high minimum service requirements were imposed throughout the strike, many workers officially on strike were forced to work as normal.

Further strike by nurses at two London hospitals 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 extended their strike by walking out on Tuesday. They previously walked out on June 27 and July 2.

The Unite union members are protesting the extension of their working shift to 9 p.m. and having to work Saturdays. Shifts were already extended by an hour until 8 p.m. The nurses say the extended shifts, 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. The newly elected Labour government is planning to use such practices to clear a nationally accumulated backlog of patients needing surgery.

Ongoing strike by mental health social workers in Barnet, London over retention payments

Around 20 mental health social workers in the north and south mental health teams at Labour-controlled Barnet council in the UK capital are in the last week of a continuous stoppage begun May 13. It is due to end Friday.

The Unison union members have been in a ten-month-long dispute over pay and staff retention leading to staff shortages since September. They have held walkouts of various lengths, culminating in the continuous action. When the current action finishes on Friday they will have held over 80 days of stoppages.

They are paid 25 percent less than staff who work with children. The mental health social work teams have suffered an ongoing turnover of staff, with around 25 staff leaving in the last two years. Although there have been replacements, the high turnover has led to a lack of experience within the teams. Unison had called for a 20 percent retention payment across three mental health teams to address this turnover but reduced this to 10 percent.

On Tuesday evening, the strikers and supporters held a lobby of Barnet Council.

Hospital ancillary workers at west London hospital to strike over pay and conditions

Hundreds of ancillary workers employed by contractor Medirest at Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow, west London are to begin several days of strikes Friday.

The GMB members voted by a 97 percent majority for the stoppage. They work as caterers, porters and ward hosts. They demand to be paid the £1,300 lump sum paid to directly employed National Health Service (NHS) staff as part of last year's pay settlement.

They also demand parity of conditions with directly employed NHS staff who carry out the same roles as the Medirest-employed staff. Medirest, an international company, recorded profits of £20 million last year.

The dates for stoppages are July 12-13, July 15-17, July 19-20 and July 22-23.

UK hospital ancillary workers in Nottinghamshire hold week-long stoppage over terms and conditions

Around 300 hospital ancillary workers employed by contractor Medirest at Sherwood Forest Hospital Trust, England began a week-long walkout Monday.

The GMB union members based at Newark Community Hospital, King's Mill Hospital and Mansfield Community Hospital work as porters, cleaners, security staff, catering workers and in reception. They are seeking parity of terms and conditions with staff directly employed by the NHS at the three hospital sites.

The workers held stoppages earlier in the year over the same issue.

Health care assistants at south-east England hospital trust strike over pay banding

Around 350 UK health care assistants working for Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust walked out Tuesday and Wednesday. Three hospitals are involved, East Surrey hospital in Redhill, Crawley and Horsham.

The Unison union members voted by a 98 percent majority to take the

action. They argued they should be paid at band 3 rather than the lower band 2 level. Those on band 2 are expected to undertake personal care of patients, such as bathing. However, they also perform duties such as taking blood samples and carrying out ECG tests, for which they should be paid at band 3 level.

While the Trust accepted they should be paid on band 3, there is a dispute over how far back payments should be made. There have been several similar disputes nationally and, in some cases, payments have been backdated to 2018.

Further stoppages are scheduled for July 25-26.

Further stoppages by teachers at academy schools in Brighton, UK 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 Brighton, England, began a three-day stoppage Tuesday. It follows a two-day walkout last week.

The National Education Union (NEU) members were protesting the funding of the five University of Brighton Academy Trust (Ubat) schools. They voted by over 90 percent for the action.

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.

To mark the beginning of this week's action, a rally of strikers was held at the Burgess Hill Academy picket line.

Teachers at Leeds, UK school stage further walkout over contract dispute

Around 60 teachers at the Oulton Academy in Leeds, England walked out Monday and Tuesday. It follows a one-day stoppage on June 28.

The NEU members accuse the school of failing to agree to incorporate national terms and conditions in new and future contracts for teaching staff. The NEU states that following a meeting with the CEO of Carlton Academy Trust, which operates the school, the June 28 strike failed to reach agreement, so this week's stoppage went ahead. Further stoppages are planned for next week.

Further strikes by UK teachers at Lincoln school over bullying claims

Teachers and administrative staff at the Sir Francis Hill Community Primary School in Lincoln, England walked out on Wednesday and Thursday this week.

The action by NEU, NASUWT and Unison members follows previous action. They accuse the school manager of bullying. They previously walked out in May over the same issue.

Further strikes planned for June were suspended after the school governors proposed an independent review into a collective grievance. However, progress stalled, and school staff walked out again. Stoppages are also planned for July 15-16.

UK teachers at Derbyshire school trust strike over delay in pay rise for support staff

Teachers at the City of Derby Academy, the Chellaston Academy in Derby and the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Ashbourne, England began a three-day stoppage Tuesday. The schools are all run by the QEGSMAT trust.

The NEU members are striking over a five-month delay in a pay rise due to support staff at the trust. The stoppage went ahead after recent talks broke down.

Further stoppages by UK education union staff over poor industrial relations

Around 200 UK staff working for the University and College Union (UCU) were on strike Wednesday and Thursday, following stoppages on July 1 and 3.

The Unite union members have a series of issues over poor working relationships. These include failure to adhere to UCU procedure for organisational change, breaches of the agreement on recognition between Unite and the UCU, heavy-handed disciplinary measures and failure to agree a hybrid working policy.

The Unite members voted back in May for industrial action by over 75 percent and held previous stoppages including on May 30 during UCU's annual conference.

Unite union suspends scheduled strike by Stagecoach bus drivers in Merseyside, England as employer makes new offer

The Unite union suspended a four-day planned strike by around 500 bus drivers at Stagecoach on Merseyside in England, due to have begun Friday.

The Unite union members, angry over the pay disparity between them and drivers working for other bus companies on Merseyside, were on strike July 5-8. They are paid £1.40 an hour less, equating to around £3,000 a year. Stagecoach has made an offer to settle the dispute and Unite is balloting its members.

They previously held a two-day stoppage begun June 24.

Ongoing strikes and protests by Iranian workers continue as Iranians vote in new president

The strike of Iranian informal oil workers is now in its third week. It involves over 20,000 workers across around 120 companies. Their demands include a 35 percent pay increase, implementation of a 14-day work/14-day rest cycle, and elimination of the role of contractors who skim off money from workers' pay.

Sunday saw protests and strikes in various industries across the country, including rallies by social security retirees in Ahvaz, Kermanshah, Shush and Tehran protesting inadequate pension levels.

Steel industry retirees in cities including Isfahan and Tehran, retired coal miners in Kerman and unemployed petrochemical project workers in Ilam

protested against overdue wages and benefits.

Sunday marked the twelfth day on strike of water and sewage workers in the city of Rudbar, who are demanding eight months' arrears of wages.

In the city of Rafsanjan, tractor owners held a rally to protest cuts to diesel rations which are impacting their ability to earn a livelihood. They demanded the reversal of the cuts.

Inflation is at 35 percent and the economy is collapsing, exacerbated by US sanctions. The winner of the recent presidential election, "reform" candidate Masoud Pezeshkian, favours rapprochement with the US. Voter turnout was only 49.8 percent. None of the competing factions can answer US war plans against Iran as part of NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, against Russia in the Ukraine and ultimately China.

Protests by Israeli bus company drivers over dividend and bonus payments

Bus drivers working for the Egged bus company held a protest outside the offices of the Keystone Fund in the Israeli city of Givatayim last week.

The Egged union members were protesting the plans by Keystone Fund, which owns Egged, to distribute \$172 in dividends as well as bonuses to Egged management but no pay increase to the drivers. The chair of the Histadrut Transport Workers Union wrote a letter to the Egged CEO saying the workers also deserved a bonus payment.

Ghanaian state employees in nationwide strike over unpaid allowances and salary structure

State employees in Ghana began a nationwide strike on July 3 to protest the government's refusal to agree a new salary structure. The new salary structure was due for implementation in January 2023, but the government delayed it a year and a half.

The Civil and Local Government Staff Association of Ghana members' stoppage included workers at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Railways Development, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, and the Ministry of Works and Housing.

National Service Scheme employees in the Concerned National Service Scheme Personnel Association of Ghana are also on strike as of July 3. Most of the strikers are owed five months' allowances, while university graduates are owed three months.

Rail workers in Gauteng, South Africa strike for pay increase and other benefits

Three hundred rail workers on the Gautrain service which transports 40,000 commuters a day between Johannesburg and Tshwane in Gauteng province, South Africa, began a strike on Monday.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members are demanding a 13 percent increase, later reduced by the union leadership to 9 percent, a housing allowance and medical benefits.

Employer, the Bombela Operating Company, offered workers 5.6 percent, with inflation currently at 5.2 percent, and refuses to pay

overtime rates for extra hours worked.

Health workers in Kaduna, Nigeria told by union to return to work

Health workers in Kaduna, Nigeria who began a walkout June 8 have been told by the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) to return to work after the union signed an agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) with the state government. The strike was to demand an improvement in their welfare package.

NANNM secretary Nassa Yashi issued a statement saying, “The strike is hereby suspended, and the workers are expected to resume their normal duties immediately.”

The details of the agreement have not yet been made public. The union claimed it would restart the strike if the state government failed to meet its terms.

Workers at Namibia Industrial Development Agency walk out to demand better pay and conditions

Workers at the Namibia Industrial Development Agency (NIDA) went on strike July 3, demanding salary increments and better working conditions.

The Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (Nafau) members complained the agency has money to hire new managers but refuses to increase workers’ pay.

Nafau spokesperson, Jacob Penda, said, “The lowest-earning workers of this company receive as little as N\$3,000 to pay their rent, buy food and support their families.”



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