

Health workers strike in Greece and Portugal; protests continue across Iran over collapsing living standards; doctors and nurses in Morocco strike over pay

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 July 2024

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

### Health workers in Greece walk out as government plans to privatise mental health and drug services

Mental health service workers, doctors and workers at drug rehabilitation centres held stoppages across Greece and a rally in Syntagma Square, near parliament in Athens on Wednesday.

The Association of Doctors of Athens Hospitals-Piraeus members and the Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Workers were protesting as the conservative New Democracy (ND) government's Social Affairs Committee discussed a draft law which will further privatise mental health services. Workers are demanding free healthcare.

On the same day, PSNA union members in rehab agencies rallied in the evening. They plan to walk out the day the bill is passed in parliament.

The bill proposes the closure of two of the country's three remaining psychiatric hospitals, Attica Psychiatric Hospital and Thessaloniki Psychiatric Hospital as well as drug Prevention Centres, reported *efsyn*.

Psychiatrist Roulas Georgiadis from the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki was recently sacked for an "administrative omission" after addressing a strike rally July 16 opposing the bill.

The ND government has just introduced a six-day working week after over a decade of austerity including that implement by Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) which was in power from 2015-19.

### Doctors walk out in Portugal for higher pay

Doctors in Portugal went on a 48-hour national strike from July 23 over pay and conditions. They are implementing an overtime ban in primary healthcare until August 31.

The National Federation of Doctors members, among the worst paid in Europe, want the 35-hour week reinstated, a revised pay scale and restoration of 25 days annual leave with pay.

The government has postponed negotiations until 2025 and refuses to address the shortage of doctors. Waiting times in emergency department

are interminable, and as paediatric and obstetric emergency rooms are often closed, patients must travel many kilometres to get treatment.

### French unions firefighting industrial unrest ahead of Olympic Games

Strikes over pay, conditions and bonuses continue to threaten the Paris 2024 Olympic Games which open this week, despite conciliatory efforts by unions. The Games Organising Committee (Cojo) has called for a social truce.

The CGT union's Sophie Binet warned of the need for negotiations "to avoid strikes," while Marylise Léon of the CFDT told media the union would not use the Games to get "things it would not have had otherwise." Spokesperson Pascal Lagrue insisted Force Ouvrière (FO) was not observing an Olympic truce, before admitting that there were no calls for striking at an inter-union level.

The result has been firefighting by the unions to call off actions even while admitting the settlements "could have been better," as in the "majority agreement" at Aeroports de Paris (ADP) last week. The CFDT, CFE-CGC and CGT unions all agreed to a uniform 300 euro bonus to be paid to all ADP employees in September.

FO subsequently issued a strike call for its members at ADP, demanding the bonus be raised to 1,000 euros and other wage concessions.

Emergency workers at Georges-Pompidou Hospital are on a rolling strike, demanding a 2,000 euro weekly bonus for all mobilised workers whatever their status.

The SFA-CGT union has called off a proposed strike over pay and conditions by performers at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games on July 26. The strike would also have affected rehearsals for the opening ceremony of the Paralympics on August 28. Some 3,000 dancers, musicians and actors are involved in the Olympics opening ceremony. Dancers staged a protest during the dress rehearsal on Monday 22, freezing mid-pose with fists raised.

The strike was called over what the union called the "shameful" employment conditions of some dancers. The union called off the strike having won what it admits was "not a total" victory.

This saw an increase in the associated rights paid to the dancers because of the television broadcast of the event. This was revised to match the fee, which was not increased. Category 2 dancers, who do not appear very much will now be paid 200 euros gross pay and 200 euros in associated

rights, up from 40 euros. The more central Category 1 dancers will receive 300 euros gross pay and 300 euros in associated rights, up from 60 euros.

The settlement does not address the question of travel and accommodation costs for artists from outside the Paris area, which was noted as one of the main issues in their exploitation.

While some bonuses have been obtained for workers in Paris, workers elsewhere have not benefited. Firefighters in Lyon, where the Olympic football matches will be held, began a strike July 24, to run until the end of the Games on August 11. They are demanding “real compensation” for their work during the Games. They have been offered an insulting flat-rate bonus of 200 euros and have been told to book only two weeks’ holiday rather than their usual three.

Rémy Chabbouh of the union representing firefighters in Rhône and Lyon said that workers in five départements outside Paris are in the same situation. Firefighters in Seine-et-Marne, Nord and Pas-de-Calais are also considering strike action. Firefighters in Paris will receive a 1,600 euro bonus, while Paris area police will get 1,900.

The demand for bonuses equivalent to those received in Paris has also seen strike action on Lyon transport systems. On July 24, the city’s tram network was at a standstill to target the football stadium.

### **Workers at Istanbul food factory strike in defence of colleagues sacked for joining union**

Workers at the Polonez factory in Çatalca, Istanbul are striking in defence of 25 colleagues sacked for joining the Tekg?da-?? union.

The company has attempted to prevent unionisation of workers with 10 years’ seniority by offering salary increases and bonuses. Workers were dismissed on what one called “disgraceful slanders,” including theft. Some were also told the company was downsizing.

Polonez, which produces meat products for chains like CarrefourSA and Migros, hired subcontracted untrained labour to replace the victimised workers. One sacked worker, Nuh Kaya, told press the company had “hired 150 unregistered workers who did not know the job and had no hygiene training.”

The workers also say the factory is not inspected, and the conditions mean the meat in the factory “smells and turns green.”

### **24-hour strike by transport workers in Antwerp, Belgium**

A 24-hour strike saw only half the bus and tram services running in the region of Antwerp, Belgium. Workers took the action on July 11 in protest at proposed changes by De Lijn to working conditions and the journeys drivers must undertake. A De Lijn spokesman dismissed these as purely practical concerns.

### **Fertiliser workers’ strike in Amsterdam called off after new offer**

A strike at ICL Fertilizers in Amsterdam over pay and safety conditions has been called off following a new offer from the company.

Around 100 workers, members of the CNV union, were demanding an improved agreement, calling for an increase of 6.5 percent and a fixed raise of 100 euros per month.

They were also using the strike to denounce pressure of work and dangerous conditions in the factory. A warehouse roof collapsed at the factory recently. “Fortunately there were no casualties,” said CNV’s Alptekin Akdogan, “but management refuses to put that in writing.”

The company offered only 4.5 percent and refused to commit to investment. The workers, said Akdogan, “were completely done with it” and began weeks of action. After a 24-hour strike in June, they came out for two days a fortnight ago.

The company has now revised its offer, with a 4.5 percent increase backdated to March 1 and a further 1.5 percent from January 1, 2025. There will also be an option of reduced hours for older workers, as well as 8 million euros invested in safety.

Akdogan claimed this as “a very important victory” for the workers, but this year ICL will only pay their original offer. The union is citing the combined offer as 6 percent, but this is still below the workers’ initial demand.

### **Garbage workers in month-long pay strike in A Coruna, Spain**

After a month-long strike by garbage workers in A Coruna, Spain, mayor Ines Rey declared a health emergency. The workers walked out to demand “fair increase” in salaries.

The council will hire a different company to shift the huge piles of rubbish accumulating, the stipulation being it must have 13 vehicles and 32 operators.

Firefighters were called to extinguish fires in containers. The STL union denied their members were to blame, reported *Galici@Press*.

### **Gardeners at Vigo City Council in Spain continue indefinite strike over index-linked pay rise**

Gardeners employed by outsourced company Green Zones UTE on behalf of Vigo City Council in Spain are continuing their pay strike, begun July 15.

Of the 110 workforce, 90 percent are out. The workers say the company reneged on a recent agreement to give them a pay rise in line with the consumer price index, *Europa Press* reports.

As garbage begins to mount in green areas and on the beach, the Popular Party of Vigo urged mayor Abel Caballero to mediate between the company and workforce, fearing the strike will impact tourism.

### **State daycare workers’ dispute continues in Berlin, Germany over staff shortages but unions delay strike ballot**

After 13 days of warning strikes, including a week-long stoppage, the state daycare workers’ dispute in Berlin over staff shortages continues.

Workers are demanding an end to staff shortages and better staff training to improve quality of care and end high staff turnover. The Verdi and GEW union, however, have deferred a ballot for strike action, which requires 75 percent to go ahead, until the beginning of September.

The state-run daycare centres, which have 35,000 children in their charge, comprise ten percent or about 290 of the 2,900 daycare centres in Berlin.

## **Academic staff at Goldsmiths University, London strike over redundancy threat**

Academic staff at Goldsmiths University in the UK capital began a week-long strike Monday.

The University and College Union (UCU) members oppose plans by the university to impose redundancies, including its Black British literature course. Originally 130 posts were due to go, since reduced to 97.

UCU members are also imposing a marking boycott, begun June 3, and are asking academics not to apply for posts at the university, give lectures there or take part in conferences arranged at the university.

Universities throughout England are planning redundancies as they respond to a major funding crisis, with a third said to be in difficulty—due to Brexit and restrictions preventing overseas students from bringing their partners and children.

While some universities may have to close, Labour Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said they should manage their own budgets and not look for a taxpayer bailout.

## **Strike of bus workers in southwest England over pay**

Over 300 bus workers employed by First South West in England began a 48-hour strike Tuesday morning.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members rejected a derisory pay offer for drivers. Other grades including cleaners, clerical staff, engineers and supervisors were offered no rise. Also, the proposed rise for drivers was dependent on trading terms and conditions.

Picket lines were set up at bus depots and bus stations across the First South West area, including Falmouth, Penzance, Taunton, Truro and Yeovil.

Further stoppages are planned for August 9 and 12, with an overtime ban to follow this week's walkout until those in August.

According to the RMT, the parent First Group company's latest pre-tax profits were £139 million, up by a third on the previous year. Its proposed dividends for this year are up by nearly 50 percent.

## **Strike by veterinary staff over pay in South Wales enters second week**

The strike by around 100 veterinary staff working for Valley Vets in South Wales, begun July 16, has entered its second week. Valley Vets is part of the VetPartners group.

The British Veterinary Union (BVU) members rejected a derisory pay deal, effective from April 2024. The BVU is a branch of the Unite union. They are employed as veterinary surgeons, nurses, animal care assistants and receptionists.

The stoppage is the first by veterinary workers employed in private practice. The strikers are providing emergency cover throughout the stoppage.

Announcing the strike, Unite noted, "Valley Vets has offered its lowest paid staff a derisory pay rise that takes them to slightly above the minimum wage. This is despite 80 per cent reporting that they regularly borrow money to meet basic living costs and five per cent reporting

having to use food banks.

"Meanwhile, higher paid workers have been offered increases of between one and 1.5 per cent from April 2024. The offer is a real terms pay cut as the RPI rate of inflation was 3.3 per cent when the deal was due to be implemented."

Unite said VetPartners made gross profits of over £550 million in 2023, an increase of over £100 million on the previous year. VetPartners acquired around 100 practices in the last financial year. It is owned by private equity company BC Partners, which has a North American and European wide portfolio worth £138 billion.

With the increasing gobbling up of small and independent vet practices by big corporate entities, the BVU has become the fastest growing Unite union branch.

## **Unite union calls off planned strike by light rail system workers in Manchester, England pushing through pay offer workers previously rejected**

A three-day stoppage by around 600 UK workers employed by the Manchester Metrolink light rail system due to begin Thursday has been called off by the Unite union.

Workers accepted a new pay offer negotiated by the union. While the deal was sold by the union as a "substantial" rise, 14 percent over three years, this is just 4.46 percent a year. The workers, employed in business support, customer service, drivers and engineer, had rejected a previous 4.5 percent pay offer, arguing it did not make up for years of below-inflation pay rises.

A Unite press release outlined the offer: "Customer service representatives at the bottom of the pay scales will see a minimum pay increase of 14 per cent over the next three years and those at the top of their pay scales will receive a minimum of nine per cent."

As a sweetener, drivers will be able to move up to the top of the pay scale within three years rather than the current four years.

Saturday saw protests by nurses at the Moheb Kausar hospital in Iran's capital Tehran against the firing of nurses. The same day medics protested outside the Governorate office in the Kurdish city of Ilam. They were protesting arrears of wages and benefits.

The wave of protests over working and social conditions is continuing. On Tuesday, Tehran saw a demonstration by residents of the city outside the city council building. They were protesting ongoing encroachments of the city's parks with trees being uprooted.

Women prisoners in Karaj and Tehran protested that day as part of ongoing "No to Execution Tuesday" demonstrations against the death penalty and torture. Prisoners at another 16 prisons joined in with hunger strikes.

Also on Tuesday, the city of Yasuj in the southwest of the country saw women from surrounding villages protesting the ongoing water outages.

In Tabriz in northwest Iran, Shaskam Telecommunications Company employees held protests over wage arrears the same day. In Pars Abad Moghan Agro-Industrial workers protested the running of the company and called for the resignation of the CEO.

In Shiraz in central Iran, university medical students protested over being used as cheap labour and at poor education standards.

The economy is collapsing, exacerbated by US sanctions, with an inflation rate of 35 percent. President Masoud Pezeshkian favours rapprochement with the US. None of the competing factions, however, can answer US war plans against Iran, part of NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, against Russia in the Ukraine and ultimately China.

### **Moroccan doctors and nurses strike at government-run hospitals**

Moroccan doctors and nurses belonging to eight different unions at government-run hospitals began a five-day strike on July 22.

Police previously dispersed a July 10 protest held by doctors and nurses demanding a pay rise in front of the parliament building in the capital, Rabat.

Last week, the government announced a monthly increase to the wages of health sector workers, but this did not make up for the rising cost of living.

Morocco is suffering from rising inflation, high unemployment and is highly indebted.

### **Hundreds of casual municipal workers in Durban, South Africa protest for permanent contracts**

More than 300 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers with the eThekweni municipality, South Africa have been demonstrating daily outside Durban city hall since July 19 in protest at summary redundancies and to demand permanent employment.

The Municipal and Allied Trade Union of South Africa workers are employed on month-to-month rolling contracts, some for more than 10 years, but now their contracts will not be renewed even though the municipality is hiring other people to do their work.

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme in which previously unemployed people are exploited in temporary public sector jobs but without the salary or benefits given to permanent employees.

### **South African government employees strike over pay and employment changes**

Two hundred workers employed by the South African Bureau of Standards went on indefinite strike Monday, holding demonstrations daily outside the statutory body's headquarters in Pretoria.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union members are responsible for testing the safety, quality, and reliability of products and services across the country. They walked out when management made changes to their pay and employment structure without consultation.

### **Union ends doctors' strike over unpaid salaries at teaching hospital in Nigeria**

Doctors at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital in Zaria, Nigeria walked out on Monday over the non-payment of salaries.

The National Association of Resident Doctors ended the strike after one day, citing only "a serious commitment from the part of the management to address the [union's] demands."

### **College students in Lagos, Nigeria protest poor living conditions**

On Monday, hundreds of Nigerian students from the Federal College of Education in Akoka, Lagos, protested the dilapidated buildings used as medical facilities, sports amenities and hostels.

The protesters complained that students pay exorbitant fees of N50,000 for the services year after year but none of the money is spent on relieving the atrocious conditions in their hostels, which they likened to "abandoned slums."



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