

National public transport strike across Italy to demand improved collective agreement; protests continue across Iran against worsening conditions; health workers on indefinite strike in Kaduna state, Nigeria over outstanding pay award

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 October 2024

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

### National public transport strike in Italy for new collective agreement

Transport workers throughout Italy joined a 24-hour strike on Saturday called by the Autonomous and Grassroots Trade Union Organisation (ORSA).

ORSA is calling for improvements to workloads, real wages and safety in the workplace, during negotiations over the renewal of the national collective agreement for the transport sector. It also called for more funding, saying, “It is not acceptable that a sector such as that of Local Public Transport... does not have the necessary resources to guarantee adequate services and safety for Citizens and Workers,” *ADN* reported.

Workers on buses, trams and metro systems in cities throughout Italy joined the walkout. In most places a minimum service was imposed, limiting the number of workers who could strike during morning and afternoon peak hours. In Milan, the strike was banned by the province’s prefect, who issued an injunction based on a Serie A football match and a pro-Palestine demonstration taking place in the city that day.

Rail workers in Bologna also held a two-hour strike in each shift on Tuesday, after the death of a colleague on October 4. According to *ANSA*, Attilio Franzini, a 47-year-old technician, was hit by a train in a fatal incident. The prosecutors’ office has opened a manslaughter case, although it is not yet known against whom. The unions called a walkout in the rail, construction and metalworking sectors in Bologna, denouncing a callous system “where deaths at work are a ‘calculated risk’.”

### Support workers’ strike over pay and conditions closes most schools in Portugal

School support workers in Portugal walked out on a major one-day strike over working conditions on October 4, closing the “vast majority of schools,” according to the National Federation of Public and Social

Service Workers’ Unions (FNSTFPS). Around 85 percent of workers joined the stoppage.

*Lusa* reported that hundreds joined a rally in Lisbon with slogans such as, “Minimum wage for life? No, thank you.” One worker told the news agency, “I am very proud of my profession, but very unhappy with my salary. I earn 821 euros” in a month. Others explained they earn only the minimum wage after 30 years’ service.

As well as higher pay, FNSTFPS members demand a review of staffing ratios, more secure contracts and a reversal of the “decentralisation” of hiring from several years ago, which transferred responsibility for recruiting support workers from the Ministry of Education to local authorities.

### Potential privatisation of infrastructure triggers strike in Corsica, France

Last week, workers at ports and airports in Corsica stopped work for around 24 hours, paralysing almost all passenger ferries and flights from the French island.

The strike was called by the Corsican Workers’ Union (STC) and other unions, in response to the threat that management of Corsica’s ports and airports will be privatised.

Two new bodies are being set up to manage ports and airports on the island, and it was expected that these would re-award the tender to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), a state-owned body. On October 3, the Secretary General for Corsican Affairs said they could “not circumvent the call for tenders,” *The Local* reported, and workers walked out later that day.

The French Confederation of Management-General Confederation of Executives (CFE-CGC) note that the CCI has managed Corsican ports since 1920. Local unions and politicians raised the risk to hundreds of jobs if privatisation took place.

On October 4, the unions declared an end to the strike after reaching an agreement for an “exceptional extension of the current plan, the time strictly indispensable for the validation and implementation of the new model.”

## **Unions accept job losses at ExxonMobil in northern France after months-long strike**

The CFE-CGC and French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) unions signed a deal with American oil giant ExxonMobil last week, accepting its proposal for major job cuts at its refinery in Port-Jérôme-sur-Seine.

Workers at the site in northern France have been on strike since May, *Reuters* reported, opposing a total of 677 job cuts. Exxon plans to end chemical production at the refinery, and the unions have not called workers in oil production at the same site to join the strike. The CFE-CGC and CFDT between them represent most workers at the site.

The deal reportedly only reduced the number of job losses to 608. The Force Ouvrière and General Confederation of Labour (CGT) unions refused to sign the deal, but told *Reuters* there was no plan to extend the strike to oil processing. A CGT delegate told *France TV Info* they rejected the deal, as that “leaves us more room to manoeuvre to be able to challenge the dismissals in court.”

## **Greek court bans national rail strike for safety measures**

A court ruled Wednesday that a 24-hour national strike by Greek rail workers planned for Thursday was illegal, banning any walkout. This followed another stoppage two weeks ago.

Hellenic Rail, the national rail operator privatised by the SYRIZA government in 2017, had gone to court to seek an injunction on both occasions, but September’s strike was ruled legal.

Rail workers are calling for increased safety measures, including modern control and signalling systems, investment in new rolling stock and maintenance of the rail network, *ef.syn* reported. The strikes took place almost a year and a half after the disaster at Tempe in February 2023, where 57 people were killed in a train crash.

## **Workers protest closure of food plant in Valladolid, Spain**

More than 600 people protested in Valladolid, Spain on Saturday and held a 24-hour strike Thursday to oppose the closure of the Bimbo Group’s factory, with the loss of 166 direct jobs and threatening around 40 jobs at suppliers and contractors, *El Español* reported.

The Mexican multinational food company has hired consultants to put together a “reindustrialisation plan” which may reopen the plant if new investors can be found, but has not committed to keeping the plant open. A further eight days of strikes are planned throughout October.

## **Bus drivers strike over unpaid wages in Pyt-Yakh, Russia**

On September 30, bus drivers in the Russian town of Pyt-Yakh wrote mass resignation letters following a strike over unpaid wages on September 20, *Kommersant* reported.

The company which operates the town’s buses, ZapSibAvto, told the paper the next week the issue had been resolved and drivers had returned to work.

However, ZapSibAvto has given notice that it plans to file for bankruptcy, and the town’s administration says it is looking for a new company to take over the service.

## **Travel payments dispute continues at construction sites across Ireland**

Workers in construction sites across Ireland held a new 24-hour strike on Monday, in a dispute between the Unite union and Mechanical Engineering and Building Services Contractors’ Association.

Plumbers, fitters, welders and apprentices have held several stoppages, and this week picketed the factory of US tech company Intel in Leixlip, Kildare.

The Unite members are calling for the restoration of payments for up to an hour’s travel time, which were cut after the 2008 financial crash.

## **Stoppage at Irish medical device factory against 200 job losses**

On October 3, workers at the Becton Dickinson medical devices factory in the Irish town of Drogheda walked out for an hour to protest the announced closure of the site.

The American multinational plans to close the factory by September 2026 with the loss of more than 200 jobs, the *Irish Times* reported.

The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) said it had “sought to work with management on alternatives that could maintain [the plant] in operation,” but Becton Dickinson “has still failed to engage with our union in a manner that could resolve the dispute.” According to the *Irish Times*, SIPTU and other unions are seeking redundancy terms in line with those offered in voluntary layoffs 20 years ago.

## **Students at University of Manchester, England occupy building to protest ties with Israel**

Students in pro-Palestinian Manchester Leftist Action at the University of Manchester, England occupied the Samuel Alexander building October 4.

They are demanding the administration ends its ties with Israel, condemning the university’s “deep complicity in Israeli crimes, working with BAE systems who produce parts of the F35 fighter jets used to bomb civilians in Gaza and partnering with Hebrew University of Jerusalem which is built on illegally occupied land, and Tel Aviv University which produced the Dahiya doctrine—the military strategy that calls for the destruction of civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals.”

Students call for an end to the partnership with BAE Systems and ties with the Israeli universities, and no disciplinary action against student protesters.

## **St Andrews university students in Scotland protest slaughter in Gaza and Lebanon**

Around 350 students at Scottish university St Andrews staged a lobby outside the administration offices October 2, as term began. They demand the university divest, under the banner “All out for Palestine and Lebanon.”

During the last academic year, students marched and protested against the Gaza genocide. The university has investment in companies complicit in the genocide, including Barclays, and academic partnerships with Israel. Last year, the elected student Stella Maris was removed from the post of rector on the governing body for accusing Israel of genocide and apartheid.

### **Teachers at three schools in Northumberland, England facing redundancy strike**

Teachers at three schools in Northumberland, England walked out October 7 for seven days after 100 redundancy notices were issued, according to their union.

The 142 NASUWT members at Glendale, Tweedmouth and Berwick work at middle schools, which Conservative-run Northumberland County Council wants to close as part of a move to a two-tier primary and secondary system.

### **Strikes by workers at UK Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office in Scotland over pay and conditions continue**

Eleven catering and cleaning staff employed by outsourcing company OCS at the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office in East Kilbride, Scotland walked out Tuesday and Thursday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members want a pay increase, an increase in leave and a company sick pay scheme. They have taken strike days since September, walking out on the previous Tuesday and Thursday. They plan further walkouts on October 15, 17, 22 and 24.

### **Access workers at Sellafield nuclear power plant walk out over pay**

About a dozen access and maintenance staff at the Fellside site of UK power plant Sellafield, Cumbria walked out on October 10 over pay.

The strike by Unite members Altrad Services is planned until October 15, followed by strikes October 17-22 and 24-29. The company rowed back on an agreed pay rise of 11.3 percent, paying 7.3 percent.

The Fellside site produces steam for the main site.

### **Protests and strikes against worsening conditions continue across Iran**

Protests and strikes are ongoing across Iran against worsening social conditions and collapsing living standards. They have often been met by violent crackdowns from the authoritarian regime.

Workers at the South Pars Gas Complex in Bushehr held their tenth consecutive weekly protest in the face of efforts by security forces to

prevent it. Their demands for better wages, job security, an end to industry corruption and the implementation of long-promised labour rights are ongoing. These are widespread concerns. Workers at the Tazarah Mine in Damghan protested last week over job insecurity and poor safety.

Medical sciences students held a rally in front of the Health Ministry in Tehran, protesting new employment rules undermining job security of future graduates. Teachers this week protested outside the Department of Education in Nasim Shahr over the lack of transportation for educators in rural areas. Budget cuts have left many teachers who travel to remote villages without transport services.

Bushehr Province is critical in Iran’s energy sector, and the protests there highlight the anger among workers that has been building over the last two years. Last week, workers went on strike at the Tenth South Pars Gas Refinery in Asaluyeh, demanding removal of salary caps, proper retirement benefits and an end to government interference in their pension funds. On October 7, workers rallied at Site 1 of the South Pars Gas Company complex, with similar protests being held at the Fajr Gas Refinery. Strikers are frustrated at the government’s failure to respond to their demands after months of protests.

That day, workers at the Argavan Petrochemical Plant in Ilam also protested in front of the Judiciary Headquarters, demanding the release of arrested coworkers. Many of the petrochemical workers have been unemployed for months. As an example of the desperate character of the situation, two workers, one the father of a detained colleague, attempted self-immolation.

The following day saw protests over unpaid wages by municipal workers and their families in Marivan, Kurdistan Province. Workers from the Lamerd Cement Company in Fars Province protested delayed wages at the company’s headquarters, while bus drivers in Isfahan protested reductions in their diesel rations. Fuel shortages in Sistan and Baluchestan are leaving many drivers unable to work, and there had previously been a rally of truck drivers in Zabol against low fuel rations and the four-month blocking of their fuel cards.

The social crisis is seen in the ongoing national protests by retirees in many industries against low pensions and mismanagement of pension funds. This week saw coordinated protests in multiple cities, including Tehran, Kermanshah, Ilam, Rasht and Tabriz, by retirees of the Telecommunications Company of Iran. Protesters chanted slogans like “Our tables are empty, enough with the promises!” demanding an increase in their pensions and accusing the government of ignoring their demands.

Public sector retirees including teachers protested outside the National Retirement Fund office in Kermanshah October 8, demanding better pensions and an end to corruption. Chanting slogans like “My prosperous Iran, what happened to you?”, they called for the release of imprisoned workers, for free education and the fair distribution of wealth.

Similar demands were made by retirees of the Social Security Organisation two days earlier at protests in Shush and Ahvaz, and there were other protests by retirees in Mashhad and Rasht. Security forces attacked a peaceful protest by steel industry retirees in Tehran, injuring and arresting several demonstrators. Protesters chanted “Both the government and parliament are oppressing people,” a chant reported from several protests around the country.

Housing protests this week show another aspect of the social crisis. In Zanjan, there was a protest outside the Governor’s Office over delays in delivering the M-Shesh housing project. Across the country, many Iranians have paid into government-backed construction schemes and been left without homes due to failure to complete the project. Applicants for the Ershad New Town project protested at the Supreme Court in Tehran, demanding the government meet its obligation to provide the homes promised years ago.

In Bandar Lengeh, Lamzan residents protested exploitative economic policies more generally. Local resources have been drained by

government corruption, leaving communities struggling to survive.

The situation, exacerbated by US sanctions, is worsening as the US and Israel escalate war preparations against Iran.

### **Health workers in Kaduna State, Nigeria down tools over broken promises**

Health workers in Kaduna State, Nigeria began indefinite strike action on October 8, after months of broken promises by the state government.

The state government had promised implementation of the outstanding 30 percent of the 2009 CONHESS (Consolidated Health Salary Structure for health workers in the Ministry of Health and the State Primary Health Care Board), as well as the 2021 hazard allowance.

In a joint statement, the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, the Association of Hospital and Administrative Pharmacists of Nigeria, and the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria said, “Despite suspending our warning strike two months ago in good faith, our members have yet to see any tangible benefits from that action.”

### **Protests in major cities in South Africa against low pay and unemployment on World Day for Decent Work**

Hundreds of workers in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, South Africa stopped work and took part in protest marches on Monday as part of the annual World Day for Decent Work.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions and Federation of Unions of South Africa members are demanding action from the government on unemployment, low pay and funding cuts.

Unemployment in South Africa is currently at 33.5 percent, with 8,384 million people out of work.

### **Partial stoppage by staff at Makerere University in Uganda over unfair salaries**

Some staff at Makerere University, in Kampala, Uganda began strike action on October 7, to protest their employers’ refusal to address salaries lower than those paid their counterparts at other universities.

Dr Robert Kakuru, chair of Makerere University Academic Staff Association, said the strike would continue until their members’ demands are met. To explain the uneven staff response to the strike call, Kakuru said some members were not informed about the strike: “We are informing them that all staff are on strike and [they] should honour this resolution.”

### **Workers at Nigerian food and drug agency hold strike over staff welfare issues**

Workers at the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) began indefinite strike action over promotions, salaries and general welfare issues.

A communiqué from the Senior Staff Association of Statutory Corporations and Government-Owned Companies stated, “[N]o one, no matter the rank or cadre, will be allowed entry into any NAFDAC Office during the strike period.”



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