

Walkouts by teachers and school cleaners across Greece over pay and conditions; protests continue in Iran over collapse in living standards as NATO escalates war preparations; sacked public works scheme workers in eThekweni, South Africa picket to demand permanent jobs

## 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.*

### Teachers across Greece strike for pay increase and better working conditions

Infant and primary school teachers in Athens and throughout Greece stopped work Wednesday, demonstrating against intolerable conditions in schools and for pay improvements.

The Teaching Federation of Greece (ILO) members complain that they are on the verge of collapse due to punitive assessment regimes, poor school infrastructure and chronic staff shortages. They also demand real terms pay increases, parity between permanent and substitute teachers and improved maternity leave.

### Greek school cleaners in national strike over pay and conditions

Cleaners in Greek schools began a 48-hour strike Thursday, demanding to be recognised as essential to children's education and treated accordingly.

The Federation of Associations of Employees in the Services members want permanent full-time employment, future payments to be on time and the opportunity to qualify for professional certificates in cleaning skills and safety.

### Ferry sailors and other port workers in Piraeus, Greece strike for better pay and conditions

Merchant seamen on ferries working out of the Athens port of Piraeus, Greece went on a 48-hour strike Tuesday, affecting all routes. Engineers, other onboard workers and dockworkers also came out in solidarity.

The Panhellenic Seamen's Federation (PNO) members demand a 12 percent rise for 2025. The employers have offered 3 percent. The workers are also heavily affected financially by varying seasonal employment.

### Millions of German auto workers threaten strikes over pay

Up to four million auto and other industrial workers in Germany are threatening to strike October 29 to protest a pay offer of 3.6 percent over 27 months from the employers' body Nordmetall, acting on behalf of Mercedes, BMW and Siemens.

The IG Metall union members demand a 7 percent rise. Workers at car maker Volkswagen are also threatening strikes over pay and possible plant closures in their separate negotiations, which begin October 30.

### Security staff halt flights at Charleroi Airport, Belgium

Departures from Charleroi Airport, near Brussels, Belgium were cancelled Wednesday as security staff went on strike at short notice. Two other wildcat strikes by airport staff occurred last month due to poor working conditions, staff shortages and heavy-handed management at the airport.

### Tugboat workers in Saint-Nazaire, France strike for improved pay

Tugboat officers of the Boluda Towing Company at Saint-Nazaire port, France began an indefinite strike October 17 after pay negotiations stalled.

Fourteen ships are waiting to be escorted into the harbour, leading to a shortage of crude oil and animal feed.

### **March by food production workers in Spalding, UK on strike over pay**

Hundreds of striking food production workers employed by Bakkavor at their plant in Spalding, England, held a march on Tuesday through the town centre.

Around 700 workers at the plant have been on strike since September 27.

The walkout comes after the Unite union members overwhelmingly rejected a 6 percent pay rise offer made in May, with over 92 percent voting to strike. Unite represents about half the workforce at the site.

Bakkavor produces food products such as bread, desserts, pizzas and salads for UK supermarket chains including Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Waitrose. It recently announced profits of £55 million for the first half of this year. According to Unite, the stoppage is beginning to impact stocks of Bakkavor products in supermarkets.

### **Job centre security guards in England continue stoppages over pay**

Around 600 security guards at job centres in England are continuing their stoppages over pay after 41 days of strikes.

The 600 Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members, employed by outsourced company G4S on the minimum wage of £11.44 an hour, turned down the latest offer from G4S of 32p an hour. In a ballot they rejected the offer by 84 percent and voted by an 89 percent majority for a new round of stoppages.

Following two days of strikes last week, they were on strike Monday. Further stoppages will take place on Friday, then on October 27-28 and November 1, 3, 4, 8, and 10-11.

Around 1,000 GMB union members working as security guards for G4S at job centres also took strike action over the same issue, including holding joint walkouts with PCS members. However, they voted to accept the 32p-an-hour increase offer by a 65 percent majority.

### **School support staff at Perth and Kinross council, Scotland begin two-week stoppage over pay**

Around 1,000 education support staff working for Perth and Kinross council in Scotland began a two-week walkout Monday. They work in administration, catering, cleaning and as teaching assistants.

The action closed all primary schools and two secondary schools. Early learning and childcare (ELC) and Intensive Support Provision (ISP) services were also impacted. The Perth and Kinross council area includes the constituency of Scottish First Minister, John Swinney.

The action by Unison union members follows a rejection by 86 percent of Unison members across Scotland of a pay offer of £1,292 a year or 3.6 percent, whichever is the highest. Many other public sector staff were offered 5.5 percent. The offer from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was accepted by Unite and GMB members.

Unison is sitting on a mandate for strikes over the pay claim in waste,

recycling and street cleaning at around a dozen councils across Scotland as well as in schools and early years—as at Perth and Kinross—at Angus, East Renfrewshire, Orkney and Shetland.

### **NASUWT teaching union suspends strike over job losses at schools in Northumberland, UK**

Teachers at Berwick, Glendale and Tweedmouth middle schools in Northumberland were on strike Tuesday and Wednesday this week. A planned stoppage for Thursday was suspended by the NASUWT teaching union after the union cited “good progress” in talks with Northumberland County Council.

The teachers took action to protest plans by Northumberland County Council to close the three schools as part of a restructuring programme to move to a two-tier model of primary and secondary schools. The planned closure of the schools would put around 140 jobs at risk.

The NASUWT members walked out for four days earlier this month, on top of action in June. Following talks with the council this week, NASUWT suspended Thursday’s action, saying an agreement was reached over ring-fencing jobs for affected staff.

The *Northumberland Gazette* reported NASUWT executive member John Hall saying, “We are pleased with the good progress made this week and getting a unanimous agreement for the statement in relation to ring-fencing jobs is a positive first step.

“There is still a lot of work to do as the reorganisation programme continues and further meetings have been arranged for after half term. Hopefully, this work will be conducted without us having to resort to industrial action.”

### **Further strikes by hundreds of hospital ancillary staff at three hospitals in eastern England against privatisation plans**

Hundreds of UK ancillary staff at Colchester Hospital, Ipswich Hospital and Aldeburgh Community Hospital held a 48-hour stoppage from Monday. The hospitals are run by the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust (ESNEFT).

The Unison union members, who work as caterers, cleaners, housekeepers and porters, are protesting plans by ESNEFT to privatise the ancillary services they provide. A final decision on the privatisation plans is due November.

The workers have held 16 days of stoppages since August. Unison accused the trust of drafting in strike-breakers from as far away as Newcastle during the dispute. It said the trust accommodated them in hotels and bussed them to the hospital sites, paying them £27 an hour on the night shift and £17 on the day shift.

Ancillary staff working for ESNEFT at Ipswich Hospital are already employed by private contractor OCS on inferior conditions. They have less annual leave and lower sick pay than directly employed NHS staff.

Unison has announced further walkouts on November 5, 7 and 8.

### **Gas supply engineers at UK company strike over pay**

Around 150 gas engineers employed by TVS Supply Chain Solutions

under contract to British Gas are set to begin a further four-day stoppage Friday. They previously walked out October 18-21.

The GMB union members are based at sites in Leicester and Coventry. They voted to strike by a 90 percent majority, rejecting the company's inadequate pay offer. Negotiations over 10 months failed to resolve the issue of pay. They have endured a three-year pay freeze.

The workers were previously employed by British Gas but were transferred to TVS via the TUPE process in 2023.

### **Continuing protests in Iran over collapsing living standards**

Widespread protests by various groups of workers are continuing in Iran in response to the deteriorating social conditions.

Saturday saw protests by students at the Azad University in Tehran. They rallied in front of the parliament building against a sudden steep increase in tuition fees. Students in medical sciences saw a threefold rise.

The same day, nurses in Zanjan held a further protest against low pay, long hours, including excessive overtime demands, and poor working conditions.

On October 18, oil workers in the Siri region of Hormozgan province protested over pay, job security and working conditions.

Tuesday saw protests in Tehran outside the Iranian parliament in opposition to the death penalty. Retired government employees protested in Tehran and Kermanshah, demanding higher pensions and improved living conditions.

Contract oil workers at the South Pars Gas Company held their twelfth consecutive "Tuesday Protest," demanding improved pay and working conditions. Oil and gas workers in Asaluyeh, Kharg Island and Mahshar also held protests over low pay and excessive hours.

The collapse in living conditions, exacerbated by US sanctions, is worsening as the US and Israel escalate war preparations against Iran.

### **Protests in southern Iraq over arrests of activists**

Last week, protests took place in the city of Nasiriyah in southern Iraq's Dhi Qar province. The protests, which peaked on October 18, demanded the dismissal of the recently appointed chief of police, Najah Al-Abadi.

The protestors accuse the police chief of carrying out widespread mass arrests over the last two weeks, targeting activists from the Tishreen movement.

The Tishreen movement held nationwide protests between 2019 and 2021 demanding jobs, improved welfare and an end to corruption.

Nasiriyah had been a stronghold of the movement. Civil organisations estimate around 180 protestors were killed and over 5,000 injured in Dhi Qar in 2019 as the movement was repressed.

### **Public works scheme workers in eThekweni, South Africa picket for permanent jobs**

Public works scheme workers from the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in eThekweni municipality, South Africa, staged a picket October 17 and through the night outside Durban city hall.

The Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa members,

whose contracts ended in July, are demanding permanent jobs.

The EPWP was set up in 2003, supposedly to help the unemployed develop skills and find work. Workers paid minimum wage are employed as cheap labour in areas like environment and culture, social support and infrastructure projects. Many were on six or twelve-month contracts, repeatedly renewed for 10 years.

The municipality slashed its budget for 2014/15, reducing recruitment from 4,000 a year to 1,276 and limiting the age of employees to 18-35. The unemployment rate in South Africa rose to 33.5 percent in the second quarter of 2024.

### **Striking Nigerian Food and Drug control workers refuse to buckle**

Workers employed by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control in Nigeria have been on indefinite strike since October 7 over lack of promotion and other issues.

The Director General of the NAFDAC, Professor Mojisola Adeyeye pleaded for an end to the strike, while claiming she is constrained by lack of funds. Adeyeye appealed to the "dedication, diligence and hard work" of the angry workers.

The chairman of the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN), NAFDAC Branch Adetoboye Ayodeji said, "The issues in the agreement were supposed to be settled in December 2022, but to date none of the agreements have been complied with."

### **Ghanaian public sector workers on strike over non-payment**

Services at many public sector institutions in Ghana ground to a halt due to an ongoing strike by Public Services Workers Union members. The workers walked out due to non-payment of two allowances they rely on: the Government Support Services Allowance and Public Services Administration and Equity Allowance.

### **Liberian youth project workers in Monrovia protest to demand unpaid wages**

On October 21, dozens of Temporary Employment for Community Youth project workers protested at the Capitol Building in Monrovia, Liberia, blocking access to Vice President Jeremiah Kpan Koung's office to demand their outstanding wages.

The workers are demanding full payment of the 13 months' wages they are owed, but the government is only offering one month. A similar protest took place on September 30, blocking some major roads.



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