

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 July 2006

Europe

Italian taxi drivers hold nationwide strike

Taxi drivers throughout Italy took strike action on July 3 to protest deregulation plans being implemented by Prime Minister Romano Prodi. The measures are part of a range of policies justified by the new government in the name of fostering competition.

The strike had a widespread impact, particularly at airports, where travellers were left stranded and flights were delayed as taxi drivers blocked roads and refused to accept passengers.

Bus drivers in northeast England in pay dispute

Bus drivers employed by Arriva North East in England staged a 24-hour strike on July 3 in a pay dispute. More than 800 drivers, members of the Transport and General Workers Union, participated in the stoppage, which affected public transport across County Durham and Teesside.

Electricity workers in Norway begin industrial action

On July 3, 650 staff employed by Hafslund ASA in Oslo began strike action following a breakdown in negotiations between the Norwegian Electricity Industry Association (EBL), the electricians and the Trade Union Federation.

The industrial action affected several business areas within Hafslund, including customer services and security.

Outsourced BBC staff in London strike to protest relocation

Staff employed by the outsourcing company Capita in west London held a one-day strike after the company threatened to move them onto non-BBC work when a centralised call centre opens in Belfast.

The staff, who are members of the BECTU broadcasting trade union, voted by a 73 percent majority to support industrial action in departments

such as recruitment and human resources that the BBC outsourced to Capita in April.

Over the next 18 months, Capita plans to move the Human Resources department of the BBC to a new site in Belfast, Northern Ireland. BECTU's negotiator, Luke Crawley, said: "Capita should understand that members want to work for the BBC, directly or indirectly. They did not ask to be outsourced, and redundancy should be an option if BBC work cannot be guaranteed to them."

Middle East

Israeli municipal workers protest

The Israeli border town of Kiryat Shmona was virtually shut down June 30 as municipal workers protested that they had not received their wages again this month. Kiryat Shmona is located close to the border of Lebanon in the far north of Israel.

Most municipal services in the town were closed, while a protest march on July 1 from the city's basketball arena to Tel Hai stopped traffic in the town.

UAE workers protest for better living conditions

Workers for a Dubai-based construction company blocked the Emirates Road near Sonapur on June 27 for about 10 minutes to draw attention to their appalling living conditions.

The Egyptian workers from Al Huda construction company, who were shifted from their accommodation following a fight with Indian colleagues over the use of cold water, had to spend the night outdoors in one of the company's accommodations in Sonapur.

A police official told *Gulf News* that some of the 250 workers had slept in a parking lot outside one of the labour accommodations. They had taken to the streets in protest, after which they were put on company buses and escorted by police to new living quarters.

The protest was one of a number by foreign workers in Dubai. On July 4, hundreds of workers at the Arabtec

Construction Company protested the lack of water in their living accommodation and reportedly attacked company property.

Workers said they had been suffering from a water shortage for a month and that on one occasion they had been without water for an entire day.

Africa

Kenyan export processing workers protest layoffs

Some 1,600 clothing workers, employees and former employees from Kenya's Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Athi River, brought the busy highway between Athi River and Mombasa to a halt for more than three hours on July 3. The action was called in protest at the lack of terminal payments for those who have lost their jobs.

More than 10,000 workers still employed at the EPZ went out on strike in solidarity with those laid off. Police used tear gas to disperse the angry demonstrators.

South African government threatens public sector strikers

Members of the Public Servants Association (PSA) in South Africa who walked out on strike are being threatened with disciplinary action.

The strike was called to protest the decision by their employers at the Department of Labour to phase out an incentive bonus scheme. Members of the PSA held a demonstration on July 4 and handed over a petition calling for the decision to be reviewed.

Nigerian lecturers strike after government breaks its promises

Lecturers at several universities in Nigeria started strike action on June 28 after the government failed to implement its side of an agreement signed in 2001.

The University of Ado-Ekiti, Lagos State University, the University of Ibadan and several others were affected when members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) refused to give lectures until the agreement was honoured. Another issue behind the strike is the continued refusal of the University of Ilorin to reinstate 49 lecturers in spite of a court ruling in their favour.



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