

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Europe

### Council workers in Scotland strike over pay dispute

Up to 150,000 Scottish council workers staged a 24-hour strike on August 20. The workers, members of the GMB, Unite and Unison trade unions, are in dispute with local authority employers over pay. The staff recently voted to reject a 2.5 percent pay deal over three years.

The action affected many council services including schools, refuse collections, libraries, day care centres and ferry crossings. Teachers were not involved in the industrial action, but many schools were still forced to close. School bus services, school dinners and meals on wheels provision were also affected in some local authorities.

Due to strike action by Argyll and Bute council workers, ferry operator Caledonian MacBrayne cancelled sailings from Rothesay and Dunoon piers.

During the day, council workers attended a rally held in George Square, Glasgow.

On the same day, 5,000 council workers, members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) trade union, also held strike action in Scotland in a separate dispute. The PCS members struck to oppose the imposition of a 2 percent pay increase. This amounts to a pay cut as inflation has risen above 5 percent.

PCS members in Scotland have been participating in a ban on overtime and a work-to-rule protest since July 31 against the 2 percent imposition.

### Russian dockworkers strike Black Sea port

Some 280 Russian dockworkers employed at the Tuapse Trading Seaport, a hub on the Black Sea controlled by Novolipetsk Steel, have been involved in strike action since August 13.

The dockworkers have refused to work since the Tuapse City Court ruled that workers had not been paid properly

for night shifts, over a 15-year period up to November 2007.

The ruling affects 800 workers and amounts to an average of 6,000 rubles per worker a year, or 72 million rubles (US\$2.9 million) in total.

Port employers have condemned the strike action and said that it violates labour law.

### Half day strike at Nortel telecoms factory

Up to 150 test technicians and shop floor workers employed at Nortel telecoms plant at Monkstown in Newtownabbey, Republic of Ireland, held a half-day strike on August 19 in a pay dispute.

The strike follows a breakdown in negotiations between management and the union. The employees are members of the Unite trade union, which is calling for a pay increase of 4.6 percent. The company has proposed an increase of 3.75 percent.

The industrial action began at midday, when workers set up a picket line at the plant.

The union called the strike reluctantly. Unite regional organiser Terry Collins said of the strike, "We have been working closely with the company over the past 18 months on 'lean manufacturing' and have made £3 million in savings at the Monkstown plant. Now is the time our members are paid back for all their efforts. Unite members will be staging a half-day strike each Monday from now on. The last time a dispute occurred at the telecoms manufacturing plant was 16 years ago."

About 625 workers are employed at the Monkstown site, which supplies Nortel's operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

### London Underground station staff set to strike

Up to 200 station staff on the London Underground are set to strike for 24 hours on August 22 to protest alleged harassment by management and the dismissal of two colleagues. The walkout is set to commence at 4:30 a.m. on August 22.

The workers are members of the Rail, Maritime and

Transport Workers union and are employed at stations on the District and Northern Lines. The Northern Line strike is the second the workers have held during the dispute.

### **Middle East**

#### **Kuwaiti police arrest striking migrant workers**

On August 17, a demonstration of several hundred striking Bangladeshi workers was broken up by Kuwaiti police, and scores of demonstrators were arrested. The protest was the latest by overseas workers over pay and conditions. A demonstration in July was similarly repressed.

According to the *Arab Times*, about 6,000 workers from two cleaning companies are on strike over non-payment of wages and unlawful deductions from their pay. One striker said he and his colleagues had not been paid for more than two months, and the company was using pressure tactics to make them pay insurance and residency fees. According to the *Daily Star*, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has issued orders to security authorities to gear up and be ready to face further demonstrations by Bangladeshi workers in the country.

Meanwhile, the *Kuwait Times* reported that the Kuwaiti ministry has information that a number of Bangladeshi workers employed at security and safety companies as well as taxi drivers are now planning strikes. A number of Bangladeshis working at Kuwait's National Assembly also went on strike August 17. Staff claim the company employing them does not pay the agreed salary and also forces them to work 12 hours a day.

A number of workers deported by the Kuwaiti authorities said they had tortured them and thrown them out of the country though they had not taken part in any demonstrations.

### **Africa**

#### **Doctors strike over low pay in DR Congo**

Hospital doctors in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been on indefinite strike since August 18 in protest against low pay. In order to get the doctors to end a previous strike in January, the government had promised an extra US\$3.6 million, but the money has not been forthcoming, and as a result the doctors have become increasingly angry. They had expected that their salaries would be increased in July.

The doctors are currently earning around US\$216 a month inclusive of bonuses. They are demanding that this be increased to 320,000 Congolese francs (US\$749) plus a risk bonus. They are also demanding that temporary staff be made into permanent employees.

In the capital, Kinshasa, the strike was solid according

to the union, the DR Congo National Union of Doctors (SYNAMED). Kinshasa's 8 million inhabitants have only 12 public hospitals and 2,700 doctors.

#### **Nigerian telecom workers set to strike**

Nigerian telecom workers employed by MTel are expected to strike on August 20. Their grievances include the fact that staff pension, taxes and National Housing Fund deductions have not been sent on to the appropriate agencies. In addition, the employees have not received their salaries for several months; in the case of the security staff, it is 10 months.

The president of the Senior Staff Association of Communication, Transport and Corporations (SSACTAC) complained that "Every month, we struggle to get paid. This year, we were owed four months before an agreement was reached with management. Statutory deductions...should be remitted regularly. They have not been remitted in the last two years. They agreed to remit them by June, but now, nothing has been done."

#### **Lecturers strike at Nigerian polytechnic institute**

Lecturers at the Kwara State Polytechnic remain on strike after two months in protest at the state government's non-implementation of the Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Structure (CONTISS). This means they receive lower pay than those in other states where CONTISS has been implemented.

The response of the Polytechnic authorities to the strike was to dismiss 500 of the staff, including academics. They have since stated that those dismissed could be reinstated if they stop striking and return to work without receiving the CONTISS payments.



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