

# 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.*

## UK civil servants to ballot on strike action

Civil servants are to be balloted on whether to take industrial action, according to the BBC.

The 270,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) nationwide are to vote this month on a three-month rolling programme of strike action against the government policy of limiting public sector pay rises to 2 percent.

In April, 100,000 civil servants walked out over below-inflation pay caps.

Voting will begin later this month. Strike action has already been held this year by coastguards, immigration officers, driving test examiners, and passport and jobcentre staff.

## Workers to strike UK nuclear facility

Workers employed at the Sellafield nuclear plant have voted in two ballots to take industrial action in a dispute over the 2008 pay review.

The industrial grades voted by 81.5 percent to take strike action and the non-industrial grades were in support by 55 percent.

The dispute is over the 2008 pay offer, which was overwhelmingly rejected by more than 95 percent of General and Municipal Boilerworkers members. The offer was for a 2 percent increase in pay and a possible 2.5 percent on an efficiency bonus.

There is to be a meeting between union officials this week to determine what form the strike action will take.

## UK machinists strike over wages deal

According to the *Shields Gazette*, scores of workers at one of South Tyneside's biggest employers joined a picket line September 8 in a protest against poor pay and working conditions.

More than 100 machinists and floor workers took part in the one-day strike at Barbour in Shaftesbury Avenue, South Shields. They are expected to strike every Monday for the next four weeks, or until conditions change.

In June, workers at the world-renowned clothing

manufacturer were offered an 18-month deal, which would see their wages increase by 22 pence per hour in the first 12 months and then 8 pence for the remaining six months. The majority of employees, who are on the minimum wage of £5.52 per hour, rejected this.

One machinist with more than 20 years' service said, "Last year we got a £1.87 increase per week, which worked out at less than 10 pence per hour, but they never changed the flat rates on our wage slips, instead they put it in as an 'adjustment.'

"And now this new wage will incorporate the adjustment, so really, we're getting an even worse increase than they're saying. All we want is a minimum of £6 per hour, it's not that much, really."

The workers claim their targets are up from previous years and bonuses are now harder to achieve. On a daily basis, two machinists between them make between 700 and 800 jackets.

The workers also complain that they are fined if they take a day off and that they can only leave the premises at lunchtime.

## Greek workers protest against economic reforms

More than 10,000 workers demonstrated in the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki September 6 to protest against a series of governmental changes that would affect wages and pensions.

Greece's largest unions have listed several demands that include pay increases, pension reforms and an overhaul of labour rights.

According to the *International Herald Tribune*, the recent protest was largely peaceful, but a small group of demonstrators damaged a bank with a gasoline bomb and smashed a nearby storefront, police said. Police fired tear gas into the protesters. Authorities said 10 demonstrators were arrested.

Police deployed around 2,000 officers to keep protesters away from an international trade fair, where Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis was due to speak on the state of Greece's economy.

Police and firefighting associations were also due to stage

rallies, with their members protesting in uniform.

### **Egyptian hospital workers stage sit-in**

Staff at the Banha University Hospital, Egypt, staged a sit-in September 4 to protest not receiving the Ramadan bonus of half a month's pay. The bonus had recently been approved by the university president, Dr. Hossam el-Attar.

One nurse, Samia Mahmoud, told *Almasry Alyoum*, "We have complained to the hospital director but he said the money was delayed."

Another employee, Kamal Abdel Rehim, said, "The university hospital makes no less than 150 thousand pounds everyday. Where does this money go?"

### **Railway workers' strike in Namibia**

On September 3, around 2,000 Namibian railway workers employed by TransNamib began an all-out national strike. The action was in response to the effective suspension of CEO Titus Haimbili on charges of corruption. The unions involved were the Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU) and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW).

Evilastus Kaaronda, general secretary of the NUNW, told the *Namibian Economist* that Haimbili had been suspended from his post on August 14, whilst the board of TransNib investigated allegations of corruption against him. When the strike began, he had not been the subject of any specific charges.

The unions maintained that Haimbili was the victim of a frame-up. They demanded his reinstatement and the firing of the TransNamib Board, including its chairman, Festus Lameck.

David Tjombe, president of NATAU, who is a TransNamib employee, told *New Era*, "Our fight is an economic one, for sustainable development. We do not want our railway to be taken over by people through privatisation. We want to control our own railway network."

The strike disrupted the delivery of fuel, coal and crucial industrial materials needed for the mining industry. It also halted the delivery of minerals to the ports. Some operations at Shell Oil, BP, Total and Rössing Uranium were brought to a complete standstill.

On September 6, the courts stepped in and declared the strike illegal. Minister of Works and Transport Helmut Angula told *New Era* that the government held the leadership of the unions and organisers of the strike fully responsible and accountable for "destroying" the economy of the country. He accused the unions of economic sabotage," which he said was a serious threat to the national security of the country. NATAU insisted that the strike was legal and that it had gone through all the necessary procedures to ensure this.

On September 8, NATAU General Secretary John Kwedhi

was reported in the *Namibian* to have said that the union had agreed in principle to a suspension of the strike while negotiations continue. The strikers returned to work on September 10 after Festus Lameck, Trans-Namib board chairperson, agreed to recuse himself from all board activities until the allegations against Haimbili had been investigated.

### **Guinean medical workers on strike over low pay**

Almost all the government healthcare workers in Conakry, capital of Guinea, began all-out strike action on September 8. They are demanding a pay increase, payment of arrears, and promotions. The strike paralysed nearly all medical services in the area of the capital. A strike last month over the same issues had a similar effect.

According to the IRIN (part of the UN), a surgeon said, "To show our determination, we refused to collect our August earnings yesterday morning [September 8]."

Union leader Pierrette Tolno stated that the strike would continue until the government improves the workers' conditions, which had been unchanged since 1999.

### **Resident doctors strike in Nigeria**

Resident doctors at the Ebonyi State University Teaching Hospital (EB-SUTH), Lagos, have begun indefinite strike action over the state government's refusal to implement the Consolidated Tertiary Institutions' Salary Structure.

Doctors complain that the teaching hospital is the only tertiary institution in the state that has not received the salary structure and that, as a result, their pay is significantly lower than elsewhere.

### **Zimbabwean teachers on "work boycott"**

Teachers in Zimbabwe have embarked on a "work boycott" to demand salary increases in line with the huge increases in inflation. There are suggestions that this would require an increase of 7,000 percent.

Takavafira Zhou, president of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, said that teachers are "simmering in poverty," and that the education system was in severe crisis as more and more teachers left the profession. Some 8,000 teachers left the country last year, and 25,000 have already gone this year.



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