

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.

Finnish paper mill workers strike over job losses

Around 5,000 workers at Finnish papermaker UPM-Kymmene mounted a one-day strike September 16 over plans to cut 1,600 jobs.

Employees walked out in six towns around Finland. The only UPM workers who did not participate were at the plants in Kajaani and Valkeakoski, which are slated for closure later this year.

According to *Thompson Financial News*, UPM and its Finnish rival, Stora Enso, Europe's leading paper and cardboard maker, last week announced plans to cut a total of 3,300 jobs as the paper and forestry industries face shrinking demand and surging costs. This is linked in part to neighbouring Russia's decision to significantly hike its wood export duties.

Strikes announced by UK baggage handlers

Three more days of strike action by workers who scan luggage at Stansted airport in Essex have been announced. According to the BBC, the General and Municipal Boilermakers (GMB) union said its members will walk out on September 19, 22 and 25 in protest at a 2 percent pay offer.

Strike over pay looms among UK ship-repairers

Workers employed by Northwestern Ship-repairers in Birkenhead have given notice of industrial action following the breakdown of talks at the arbitration organisation, ACAS, on the 2008 pay review.

According to the GMB union, 100 of its members employed in this former Cammel Laird yard rejected a pay offer of 2.8 percent and voted for industrial action earlier this month. Action short of a full strike will start on September 19 and discontinuous strike action will commence on September 26.

Workers strike at Israeli airport

On September 15, around 20 flights were cancelled or

delayed due to a labour slowdown by hundreds of employees of the ground services company Aerohandling at Ben-Gurion International Airport to protest working conditions. The flight attendants and ground services employees say Aerohandling is not paying them for holidays or night hours, as required by law. They say they are forced to work 14- or 15-hour shifts, sometimes for 10 consecutive days.

South African Woolworth's workers strike for union recognition

Woolworth's workers belonging to the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union have been taking regional strike action to demand union recognition from their employers.

Strikes took place in Johannesburg August 21, in Durban August 29 and in Cape Town on September 12. On each occasion the strikers held marches ending at a Woolworth store to push their claim.

On September 16, strike action hit the Klerk Street branch of Woolworth's in Johannesburg and thousands of strikers marched to the store in the city centre.

According to *Business Report*, Woolworth's claims that because only 15 percent of its employees belong to the union, recognition is not justified. SACCAWU claims a membership of over 50 percent. The union will be meeting next week to plan national strike action.

Zimbabwe teachers strike for higher pay

Zimbabwe schools were closed from the beginning of term, on September 2, when members of the country's leading teachers' unions, the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) and the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), began industrial action in support of a demand for higher salaries. PTUZ Secretary General Raymond Majongwe said teachers were demanding a minimum salary equivalent to US\$797.

Leaders of ZIMTA denied that their members were actually on strike. A spokesperson said, “The teachers cannot simply afford to go to work. You can’t call that a strike. They have no capacity to report for duty. They cannot even access basic commodities.”

With inflation at over 11 million percent, the Zimbabwe currency is worthless.

Nigerian medical workers set to strike

Unions representing nurses, midwives, teaching hospital staff, pharmacists and other medical workers held a Joint Health Sector Union emergency meeting at Nigeria Labour Congress House on September 8. They issued a statement threatening strike action to begin September 30 in pursuit of arrears of pay.

A communiqué issued by the unions accused the government of dragging its feet over paying arrears for the period October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2005.

Other demands include the reinstatement of medical workers sacked from the Ido Ekiti federal medical centre and for a examination of minimum pay rates due to be reviewed this year.



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