

# 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.*

## French postal workers protest against privatisation

Tens of thousands of French postal workers struck September 23 to protest against plans to open the country's mail network to private companies, post office operator *La Poste* said.

The operator employs around 300,000 in total and reported that 25 percent of employees took part in the one-day protest. Postal unions said that allowing private capital in would be the first step toward privatisation.

A survey published in the Stalinist daily *L'Humanité* revealed 61 percent of respondents oppose the move, and 57 percent support the striking employees.

## Scottish council workers to repeat action after 24-hour strike

Around 150,000 local government workers across Scotland took part in a 24-hour walkout September 24 against a below-inflation pay offer.

The following day, unions set a date for further strike action. Unison, which represents 100,000 local government workers in Scotland, said the latest action would begin on October 6.

According to the BBC, a Unison spokesman said the forthcoming action would target particular services and would involve lower numbers of workers than previous strikes. He declined to give any indication of how long it would last.

Unison Scottish Secretary Matt Smith said strike action was "only taken with the greatest of reluctance" and said he hoped the union and management could come to a "negotiated settlement."

## Staff at UK industrial-arbitration body go on strike

Hundreds of workers at the conciliation service Acas, which acts to mediate in industrial disputes, staged a one-hour strike in a dispute over pay.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union took the action in protest at a 2 percent pay offer, complaining it was well below the rate of inflation, following a 10-month hold-up to last year's pay increase.

Around 270,000 PCS members from across the civil and public services are currently voting on a programme of national industrial action over the government's policy to cap public sector pay to a below-inflation level.

According to the *Press Association*, workers will be asked to

back plans for a national civil service-wide strike followed by a programme of targeted industrial action that will extend into the new year.

## Scottish rail strike planned

Industrial action looms on Scotland's rail network after hundreds of signallers voted to stage two 24-hour strikes.

According to the BBC, almost 450 members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union will walk out from noon on October 7 and again from noon on October 9.

The union said the move was the result of a breakdown in industrial relations.

A ban on overtime and rest-day working will also start on October 7, the union confirmed.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said, "Our reps have spent the last two years trying to get Network Rail in Scotland to abide by agreements on transfers and rostering and our members have made it clear that they have had enough."

## London Underground ballot for maintenance staff

London Tube workers are to be balloted for strike action in protest at the suspension of a safety representative.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union said 2,500 members working for maintenance firm Metronet are to vote on whether to take industrial action. Its member Andy Littlechild was suspended earlier this month for not wearing a hard hat.

Metronet is responsible for the maintenance of two-thirds of the London Underground lines.

The RMT also warned that Metronet signals staff could be balloted in a dispute over proposed cuts in signals maintenance and changes to working rosters.

## Greek journalists strike against attacks on pensions

Journalists across Greece went on a 24-hour strike October 1 to protest the government's plans to alter the pension system.

All radio and television news broadcasts were cancelled for 24 hours. Greek news web sites were not being updated and no major newspapers were printed October 2.

The strike also affected government press offices, which are mainly staffed by journalists.

According to the BBC, "The government says the unpopular reforms, which merge lucrative pension funds with financially troubled ones, are essential and without them the country's pension system could collapse within a decade."

Journalists fear the proposed changes will cut pensions and

related health benefits and increase financial pressure on retired workers. The plans have already led to several general strikes this year involving, among others, doctors, lawyers, telecom workers and bank staff.

### **Polish security workers stage art exhibit protest outside parliament**

According to *Uni Global Union* September 23, security staff in Poland used children's art during their protest to send the message that because of their working conditions, most security workers have little or no time to spend with their families.

The protest and exhibition in front of the Sejm, a chamber of the Polish parliament, was organised by the union Solidarnosc and entitled "Fathers return home: Our children need their fathers."

The majority of security guards and other security staff in Poland earn only 5-6 zlotych per hour (US\$2-2.50) and are required to work multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. This often means working more than 300 hours per month, doing back-to-back shifts of 12 hours. Workers move from job to job and are away from their homes for days and weeks at a time.

Under Polish law, public institutions are obliged to choose those security contractors that offer the lowest price, exerting downward pressure on wages and conditions for workers in the industry.

### **Latvian doctors, teachers and police protest low wages**

According to the *Baltic Times* September 26, Latvian medical workers and teachers took to the streets that day to demand higher wages.

According to police estimates, around 1,500 medical workers and teachers took part in the first protest, which took place outside the parliament building at about 10 a.m.

The protest sought to pressure the government to reverse its plans to freeze all public sector wages in 2009. Later that day, around 200 police officers gathered outside the interior ministry to protest low wages. Police plan a larger protest on October 4.

### **Israeli union body approves strike at airports**

The coordination committee of the union federation Histadrut approved an industrial dispute September 22 at the Israel Civil Aviation Authority, which means that a strike can go ahead after a two-week cooling-off period.

According to the business web site *Globes online*, Histadrut has threatened to call a strike at Ben Gurion Airport during the Sukkot holiday, one of the periods of heaviest passenger traffic.

The calling of the dispute follows the Ministry of Finance's refusal to approve the labour agreement recently reached between the Civil Aviation Authority's management and workers' committees.

### **Food processing workers take strike action in Mozambique**

Over 400 workers employed by Matola Industrial Company (CIM), Mozambique's largest food processing company, went out on strike September 29. They are demanding an increase in wages and improved working conditions.

The strikers' spokesperson said that their grievances were longstanding and had been brought before their employers many times without any result. "The wages we are earning here are very low and do not correspond to the effort we make ... the minimum wage in the company is 2,100 meticais (US\$87) a month, and any chance to get some more depends on one's friendship with the chief."

While picketing the strikers were confronted by police and security guards, who shot into the air in an effort to disperse them. The police arrested one of the strikers, but later released him.

The local union committee held a meeting with management and agreed to call for a return to work, so as to allow the company to meet its current commitments. However, when this was presented to the strikers it was rejected. The strikers decided that they would continue with the strike until their demands had been met.

### **Liberian distillery workers to return to work after strike**

Around 200 workers at the NICOM Distillery Company have been on strike to demand payment of their salaries for August and September and an expected pay increase.

The workers' spokesman, Nanue King, said that NICOM management had ignored their complaints about lack of payment. She continued, "And so, as workers, we are left with no other alternative but to stage a strike action to compel the management settle our salaries."

The government Labour Ministry intervened in the dispute, leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between management and the workers. On the basis of the MOU, the workers are now expected to return to work.

### **Medical workers on strike in Nigeria**

Medical workers in Adamawa state, Nigeria walked out on an indefinite strike September 26 as a result of non-payment of their salary increase. It was the second such strike within one month. The expected increase was between 24 and 34 percent, and had been agreed earlier between the union and the state's executive council.



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