

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.

Strike by French energy workers cuts nuclear power capacity

Workers in the French energy sector went on a 24-hour strike October 7, which cut 1,000 megawatts (MW) or 1.58 percent of national nuclear power capacity, a CGT spokesman said. Over 5 percent of the workforce was involved in the action.

The French energy corporation, EDF, said its nuclear capacity was unchanged. A CGT union spokesman said power capacity cuts took place at the 3,600-MW Cruas plant in Southeast France. The 900-MW reactors 2 and 3 at Cruas were already offline for maintenance.

German musicians' strike silences concert halls

Thousands of Germany's top musicians have gone on strike over a pay dispute. The action has affected concert halls and opera houses across the country.

According to Reuters, over 4,000 musicians have so far joined the action. The stoppage is spreading and more than 70 orchestras may have to cancel rehearsals and performances, the German Orchestra Association (DOV) said October 8.

The musicians have contracts with the Deutscher Buehnenverein, an employers' group representing around 430 operas, theatres and concert halls around the country.

Greek state transport workers in 24-hour strike

According to the Associated Press October 8, Greek state transport workers launched a 24-hour strike that day, in protest at government plans to privatise Olympic Airlines. Hundreds of strikers demonstrated in Athens and marched to the parliament buildings.

Workers in the public utilities and post offices also joined the strike. Hospital workers and journalists walked off the job for several hours. The action caused traffic chaos across the capital, affecting subway and intercity rail services, and led to the cancellation or disruption to around 100 domestic and international flights.

Olympic Airlines has accumulated losses of about €2.7 billion (US\$3.87 billion). Last month, the European Union approved the Greek government's plan to break up and fully privatize the airline by the end of 2009, but said it must pay back state subsidies worth €850 million (US\$1.22 billion).

The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) has also called a nationwide general strike for October 21 in protest at the conservative governments' draft budget submitted this week.

Irish nursing home workers vote to strike

Nursing home workers at Coral Haven Residential Nursing Home in Galway have voted to take industrial action, according to SIPTU union.

The strike call follows a pay dispute that was brought to a head by the refusal of management to attend a Labour Court hearing in July to which they had originally agreed.

Paul Hardy, of SIPTU, said, "It cannot be right for people involved in this physically and emotionally demanding work to be forced into working second jobs to pay the bills. It is shocking that, in 2008, Galway

health workers are being forced into industrial action to get a living wage and a sick pay scheme at what is a highly successful nursing home."

Aer Lingus staff to ballot for strike action over cuts

Employees at the Irish airline, Aer Lingus, are to ballot for all-out industrial action in protest at a €74 million cost-saving plan put forward by management.

According to the Irish Times, the plan would involve 1,500 job cuts through outsourcing or redundancy, as well as a pay freeze and new contracts for staff.

The company lost €22 million in the first six months of the year and has forecast a bigger loss for next year. It says it wants an agreement in place by the end of November.

Under the proposals the airline would eliminate its in-house ground operation (check-in and baggage handling), cargo and catering divisions at Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports. Staff would be offered a transfer to a new service provider or forced to take a voluntary redundancy package.

Aer Lingus said that the proposed staff cuts would generate savings of €50 million. It also wants to save €14 million in advertising and distribution costs, as well as a reduction in professional fees and airport charges. The airline said that reducing the number of long-haul aircraft from nine to eight would generate a further €10 million in savings.

UK rail strike

Industrial action by 450 members of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union severely disrupted rail services during the first 24-hour walkout on October 7. The dispute concerns rota changes and compulsory safety assessments.

Train operator First ScotRail said it tried to run as many services as possible during the walkout. A limited timetable was operating between Glasgow and Edinburgh and in the central belt. No trains were running north of Perth during the stoppages because the larger number of smaller signal boxes makes the area harder to cover using contingency staff.

Virgin Trains cancelled two cross-border early morning trains. Some services from England to Scotland were also cancelled or diverted.

The RMT insists employers have failed to move on its demand to stop last-minute changes to rotas, according to the BBC. Network Rail said it had made concessions on that issue but safety assessments remained the "sticking point."

Management and the unions met at the arbitration service, Acas, offices in Glasgow October 8 but were unable to reach agreement as they sought to avert a second possible strike.

UK Ministry of Defence workers take action against low pay

Employees for Landmarc Support Services, who service firing ranges used by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), took industrial action October 6 in a pay dispute.

The workers, members of Unite, are involved in an overtime ban at all firing ranges. This is to be accompanied by a series of national demonstrations. Hundreds of workers voted overwhelmingly to reject a below inflation pay offer of 3 percent with the possibility of additional earnings "with strings."

The Landmarc SS workers carry out various roles including tracking, plotting, continuous observation of all maritime vessels and maintaining the safety of the MoD firing ranges around the UK.

According to the Unite web site, its members are paid only £14,000 per annum.

Strike on UK post

Over 800 engineering staff belonging to the Communication Workers Union (CWU) across the country staged a one-day strike October 5 in a dispute over attendance patterns. They mounted picket lines outside Royal Mail offices across the country. Hundreds of postal workers in Liverpool refused to cross the picket lines.

The engineering workers are employed by Romec, which carries out building, maintenance and electrical repair work for the Royal Mail network, including a building in parliament, where the protest was being held.

The union's assistant secretary, Ray Ellis, said the proposals, including scrapping current travel-to-work arrangements, would "significantly" increase the working week. The workers held a strike last month and a number of meetings have been held at the conciliation service Acas.

Welsh refuse workers plan strike action

Cardiff refuse collectors have voted to strike over plans to bring in new shift patterns. According to the BBC, the GMB union said 90 of its 100 members in the city voted to stop work on October 13 in protest at council plans that could see them working until 10 p.m.

The latest move follows the introduction of new weekly food waste collections. The council wants workers to work two new shifts from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., with the new shifts set to accommodate the council's new weekly collections of raw and cooked food, tea bags and dairy products for composting from 140,000 homes. The workers currently work a single shift pattern from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The refuse workers were balloted about strike action and will walk out on the same day the council's food waste collections are due to start. The union said it had asked for negotiations in a bid to bring the dispute to a close and prevent the strike going ahead.

London fire authority workers in strike threat

There is the possibility of strike action at the London fire authority after news emerged of the cutting of 40 support jobs.

The GMB union, which represents hundreds of staff, said it would hold a ballot for industrial action unless the threat of redundancy was removed.

Israeli teachers strike over pay

According to the Jerusalem Post, secondary school teachers are to hold a second consecutive strike for one hour on October 14 to protest against a reduction in teachers and teachers' salaries.

The Secondary Schools Teachers Association (SSTA) is scheduled to meet with Finance Ministry representatives to discuss the pay cut to 750 teachers' salaries. On Monday classes also started an hour late due to an SSTA strike.

Zimbabwean NGO workers strike over tax dispute

Employees at Care International are refusing to work due to a dispute over tax. The dispute broke out at a time when Care International, an NGO, was about to resume food distribution after the Zimbabwean government recently lifted a ban on the operations of NGOs in the country.

The strikers are demanding that their employers stop deducting tax at a rate of 47 percent, and refund the tax paid over the past few months. They claim that Care International was instructed to make the 47 percent deduction by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (Zimra), an instruction that has since been reversed.

One worker told the Zimbabwe Standard, "We went on strike after we had a dispute with the company. The company was taxing us 47 percent and

we learnt that it was illegal and engaged our lawyers and successfully won the case at the labour court, but they are still reluctant to refund us and want to continue taxing us."

There are desperate food shortages throughout Zimbabwe, especially in the semi-arid areas of Matabeleland. Over 5 million people are in urgent need of food aid and the number is expected to rise in coming months as families run out of staple foods such as maize and maize-meal.

According to the BBC the annual rate of inflation in Zimbabwe is over 2 million percent.

Mozambican food workers agree to suspend strike

Food processing workers employed by Matola Industrial Company (CIM) took indefinite strike action on September 29 to demand higher wages and better working conditions, which included issues concerning overtime and the company's career structure.

After a hasty meeting with representatives of the Maputo provincial directorates of labour and of industry and trade, a return to work took place the following day while negotiations continued.

The minimum wage was previously set at 2,100 meticaís (US\$87) a month. The workers initially demanded an increase of over 100 percent, but they have since lowered their demands.

Education workers' action likely in Namibia and Tanzania

On October 3, lecturers at four Namibian colleges issued a statement declaring they would take strike action if the government failed to meet their demands on grading and promotion. They are demanding that their grading be put on a par with other tertiary institutions. In response to the threat, the government informed the Namibian Teachers' Union that they were prepared to open negotiations immediately.

The Namibian (Windhoek) has pointed out that the lecturers held pickets and demonstrations outside their colleges on the same issues five months ago. At that time the government promised that it would address the issues and the teachers went back to their classes.

Maria Katjaita, a lecturer at the Windhoek College of Education, told the Namibian that if the negotiations are fruitless, they will still go on strike. "We will not call off anything, unless we are sure something positive comes out," she said.

Teachers in Tanzania are reported to be preparing all-out national strike action due to begin on October 15. According to the Citizen (Dar es Salaam), a teachers strike is now "virtually inevitable."

For years, the government has refused to address the teachers' demands for a pay increase and payment of arrears.



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