

# 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 on ferries between UK and France**

Port control officers in France carried out part of a 24-hour strike over pay on ferries between Dover and Calais on October 14.

Calais was closed with both SeaFrance and P&O halting services due to the action.

Lorries were still queuing on the UK's M20 motorway for some time after the suspension of strike action, as part of Operation Stack to clear the backlog of freight traffic.

## **UK records bureau staff work to rule**

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) has urged its members to refuse to work overtime and not to exceed targets for processing criminal record checks, according to the BBC.

The work-to-rule begins in the final week of voting by all 270,000 members of the union for strikes over the government's public sector pay policy.

A series of strikes over a public sector pay cap has already hit job centres, passports, coastguards and other government departments and agencies.

## **UK National Gallery staff in second strike over pay**

Specialist heritage workers took strike action at the National Gallery on Tuesday in protest at the imposition of a "late and inadequate" pay offer that will "compound problems of low morale, recruitment and retention," their union Prospect stated.

The 24-hour strike is the second undertaken by Prospect members this year and follows a series of actions short of a strike.

Conservators, curators, information assistants, librarians, information systems staff, photographers, and designers at the Gallery were all angered by the fact that the Treasury was almost 12 months late in agreeing to their 2007 pay remit.

Prospect also says that, as well as the imposition of a two-year deal that covers both 2007 and 2008, members are deeply unhappy over the lack of any action to improve progress through pay bands (it currently takes 18 years to reach the top) and the miserly increase to pay band ceilings that will impact future earnings and result in smaller pensions.

## **Rail workers in Wales ballot in pay dispute**

More than 1,000 railway workers are to be balloted for industrial action in a dispute over pay.

The BBC said that two unions claimed lower-paid workers at Arriva Trains Wales were being asked to "swallow" a two-year pay offer that was smaller than that for other staff.

There was a 24-hour strike by train managers in south and west Wales last month.

The Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) announced the ballot October 13.

They said the proposed pay deal of 4.75 percent this year and the rate of inflation plus 0.75 percent in 2009 to non-driving grades was worse than a pay rise given to other employees at the company.

In September, Valley Lines services and those in west Wales were severely disrupted by a 24-hour official strike by train managers at Arriva Trains Wales, which some train crews supported.

## **Council workers in UK's second city in strike ballot**

Around 17,000 Birmingham City Council workers could strike over plans to switch their pay from weekly to monthly, according to the *Birmingham Post*, October 15.

Officials from the Unite union are balloting for industrial action after claiming that council bosses are refusing to negotiate.

The changes, which will cut the cost of paying wages, are part of a controversial pay and grading review imposed on staff earlier in the year.

Union leaders say thousands of low-paid mainly female workers, including cleaners, classroom assistants and dinner ladies, will have reduced pay when the new system is introduced next month.

## **Protest by workers for Olympic Airlines hits Athens flights**

According to Reuters, in a protest against the state carrier's planned privatisation, Greece's Olympic Airlines workers blocked the runways of Athens airport on October 14, causing flight diversions and delays.

Olympic Airlines technicians' union member Kleantis Giatras told Reuters, "We don't want to lose our jobs. We oppose the government's plan. We will continue our protest, because the terms are not satisfactory."

Authorities said hundreds of protesters blocked two runways at Athens airport for about 20 minutes, forcing the diversion of three flights--from London, Copenhagen and Amsterdam--to Thessaloniki airport.

The Greek private sector umbrella union, the General Confederation of Employees of Greece (GSEE), which represents around 2 million workers, has called a nationwide strike for October 21 to stop the carrier's sale as well as to rally opposition to the 2009 state budget and other proposed measures.

## **Iranian tyre workers protest outside Tehran Labour Ministry**

Hundreds of workers employed at Alborz Lastic protested in front of the Labour Ministry in Tehran October 5, according to the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network.

Around 1,400 workers at Alborz Lastic have not been paid for the past six months.

The protesting workers demanded their back pay and full nationalisation of the company.

The workers of Alborz have been sporadically protesting and striking since April 2008. During these protests, the authorities have dealt with the workers severely, including bulldozing their way into

the factory to arrest the protesters and even trying to employ the firefighters against them.

One worker from Alborz Lastic was interviewed by *Radio Barabari* (*Equality Radio*, in exile) on the day of the protest.

"This gathering is because we have not been paid for six months, and I've now been a 'fugitive' from my own home for 10 days! That's because I can't look my wife and children in the eye. I'm forced to continue with this gathering.

"Unfortunately, whichever of these [government] organisations we go to don't follow up our case seriously. And they don't really pay any attention to us. That's the reason why we were forced to come to the Labour Ministry today...."

Alborz Lastic, formerly Kian Tyre, is the oldest tyre manufacturer in Iran. It was founded in 1958 as the BF Goodrich subsidiary in Iran and re-named Kian Tyre in 1976 after it was sold to an Iranian company. After the 1979 revolution, it was nationalised; and in 1994, it was partly (60 percent) privatised. It was renamed Alborz Lastic in 2001.

#### **Iraqi textile workers demand outstanding dues**

On October 8, a demonstration took place of workers employed at the State General Company for Textile Industries in Wassit, 180 km south of Baghdad, calling on the government to pay them their outstanding dues.

"On Wednesday, the company's personnel demonstrated in front of the provincial council building, urging the government to pay them the variance in salaries, approved by the cabinet," said Ali Ghidan, a spokesperson for the company's workers.

Around 5,500 workers are employed by the company, Ghidan explained, adding that most of them live in difficult life circumstances and fear privatisation of the state-owned company.

#### **Kuwaiti oil workers strike**

On October 15, a union in the Kuwaiti oil industry called on workers to go on a strike at state refiner Kuwait National Petroleum Co (KNPC).

According to Reuters, the union said in a statement: "The board of directors for KNPC Labour Syndicate urges all employees and workers to stage a total strike in all sectors and be present in the headquarters of the syndicate...on Sunday at 0700 (local time)."

#### **South African bus company plans to replace striking drivers with scabs**

Bus drivers and maintenance workers employed by the Remant Alton bus company in Durban, South Africa, have been on strike since the middle of September. The action has paralysed the city's bus service.

According to the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the drivers have made claims of financial mismanagement by Remant Alton. They are demanding that they be re-employed by the ANC-led eThekweni municipality, which sold the company to Remant Alton under a black economic empowerment deal in 2004 and then bought back part of the bus fleet in August this year, leaving Remant Alton to continue as operator. The municipality has refused to hire the drivers.

Since the dispute began, Remant Alton has sacked more than 1,000 employees, claiming that the strike was illegal. They have attempted to employ a scab labour force, advertising for replacement drivers in Durban newspapers.

Spokesperson Ernest Nzuza insisted to the South African Press Agency that the strike would continue. He denied accusations that strikers had assaulted or intimidated those applying for drivers' jobs and denounced management for trying to replace the existing workforce.

On October 15, the strikers blocked the roads leading to Durban city centre after their plan to march to Durban City Hall was banned by the police. A mass protest was planned for October 16.

According to the *Sunday Tribune*, more than 20 buses have been torched since October 6.

#### **Tanzanian union leaders face angry members after teachers' strike called off**

On October 15, leaders of the Tanzania Teachers Union (TTU) told a mass meeting of their members that the national all-out strike due to begin on October 16 had been called off.

The meeting, which was held in the Diamond Jubilee Hall, in Dar es Salaam, erupted as angry teachers denounced their leaders. According to *This Day*, "Bottles and other objects were thrown at the high table occupied by Gratian Mkoba, president of the Tanzanian Teachers' Union, and other TTU officials." The report continued, "In the midst of the chaos, uniformed and plain-clothed policemen arrived and removed Mkoba and other leaders from the area."

The *Citizen* (Dar es Salaam) described the scene as chanting teachers jeered at their leaders. One of them grabbed the microphone from the master of ceremonies and declared that they would not turn back. Another woman shouted that teachers in the country had been marginalised, insulted and exploited for many years and were now fed up. "Enough is enough!" she declared. The paper reported that some teachers laid down in the middle of the street to express their anger and frustration.

The teachers are demanding the payment of Sh16 billion (US\$14 million) in allowance arrears and are making a number of other demands. The August meeting of the country's parliament approved money for this purpose, but it has not been paid.

The Tanzanian High Court has served the TTA with an injunction banning the strike from taking place, and the union has lodged an appeal. However, teachers in some areas are determined to go ahead with the action, whatever the consequences.

The government has introduced special attendance forms to be filled in by teachers reporting for work. In areas all over the country, teachers are turning up to sign the form and then operating a go-slow, often sending pupils home.

In the Tarime District, instead of reporting for work, teachers gathered at Turwa Primary School. According to the *Tanzanian Standard*, they vowed to continue with the strike, saying they were ready to be tear-gassed.



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