Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 October 2008

The World Socialist Web Site *invites workers and other readers to* contribute *to this regular feature.*

UK civil servants vote to strike

A majority of members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) have voted in favour of a programme of industrial action against the government's 2 percent maximum pay offer. Some 54 percent voted for strike action posed by one question and 80 percent for action short of a strike posed in another question. The turnout was 35 percent.

The PCS is demanding a consolidated basic pay increase at least equal to the retail price index, an end to pressure for regional pay and to performance-related pay.

The national executive committee is to decide "on the timing of national strike action and to endorse plans for targeted sectoral action and national action short of a strike" if there is no response from government.

Ford transit workers take unofficial action

Ford workers at its Southampton plant took unofficial strike action on October 20, following the breakdown of national pay talks and a failure to agree on the production of the new Ford Transit in 2011.

Ford wants to move production of the Transit van to Turkey.

Scottish Water workers vote on strike action over below-inflation pay

Workers at Scottish Water are being balloted on industrial action after the company imposed a below-inflation pay deal. The UNISON union web site said that the imposition of a 3 percent rise over 15 months—worth just 2.4 percent over a year—had "ended six years of partnership working between the company and staff." Branch Secretary Steve Scott said, "This pay cut is simply not acceptable when inflation is rising—recently reaching 5.2 percent—energy prices are rising by anything up to 30 percent and food by 11 percent." Other unions are also balloting their Scottish Water members in a joint industrial action campaign. Scottish Water claimed it is following the Scottish government's target to limit public sector increases to 2 percent.

Scottish bus workers vote for strike action over pay deal

Bus services across the Highlands and the northeast of Scotland are soon to be hit by strike action. Following a ballot by the UNITE union, workers at Stagecoach Bluebird will begin a series of five one-day strikes October 30.

The BBC said around 500 drivers, mechanics, cleaners and office staff are expected to be involved. They had previously rejected a pay deal. Workers involved are based at bus depots in Aberdeen, Stonehaven, Banchory, Ballater, Insch, Alford, Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Elgin, Macduff, Inverness and Tain.

An Aberdeenshire Council spokesman said the local authority was awaiting full details of the proposed strike action, but that it was likely some parents would have to make alternative arrangements for getting children to and from school. Stagecoach is a major provider of school transport.

Egyptian hospital workers protest private sell-off

Around 250 workers in Giza Ophthalmia Hospital held a protest October 20, after officials of the administrative affairs asked them to offer their resignation as the hospital was to be sold to a foreign investor.

According to *Almasry Alyoum*, "the hospital manager said he received instructions to transfer the employees elsewhere without knowing the reasons behind such a step. However, he said that the Ministry of Health Undersecretary told the workers that they would not be dismissed, as the hospital would not change its activity."

Dr. Ali Al-Ghazali, the manager of the external clinics, said he was stunned by the administrative affairs officials asking him to fill an application containing the name of the physician, his job and the place to which he wished to be transferred.

Ugandan truck drivers strike closes border post

Long-distance truck drivers struck at Malaba customs yard on the border between Uganda and Kenya. Their protest, which began on October 17, is against the poor state of the yard and the road leading up to it, which they claim has led to several accidents.

The chairman of the Great Lakes Long Distance Truck Drivers Union, Nicholas Mbugwa, told *Daily Monitor*, "Trucks are overturning and breaking down every day at that yard. It is becoming very costly to drivers, importers and transporters because of the cumbersome experience they go through."

The truckers are also calling for the ending of the policy of the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) of removing vehicle number plates when they refuse to take the risk of visiting the yard. To regain their legal right to drive a vehicle whose number plate has been removed, they have to pay a fine of sh200,000 (US$117).

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Representatives of the drivers had warned the Ugandan government there would be industrial action if conditions at the customs parking yard were not improved.

The Ugandan government is under pressure because it is hosting a regional summit to harmonize trade and infrastructure development in the region. A spokesperson for the Uganda Revenue Authority, Paul Kyeyune, claimed that the government has made funds available so that repairs could begin this week. He told the *Monitor* (Kampala) that negotiations are under way between the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance to raise money for the multibillion-shilling project to repair the infrastructure at the border post.

Nigerian tanker drivers on strike over fuel price, working conditions and bad roads

On October 15, members of the Petroleum Tanker Drivers (PTD)—a branch of Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) —took part in a national one-day warning strike over the high cost of diesel, which is causing businesses to close or contract, putting them out of work. The strike was also highlighting the poor working conditions drivers have to endure, and the bad state of many of the roads around the oil refineries, which the drivers claim causes a high level of fatal accidents.

PTD warned that it would "embark on indefinite strike" in 14 days time, unless action is taken to address the issues raised. It listed a series of attempts made by the union to "negotiate conditions of service," but all proved fruitless.

National Chairman of the PTD, Timothy Ogbu told *This Day* (Lagos), "We have already served notice to relevant agencies of the government and the NARTO [Nigerian Association of Road Transport Operators] of our intention to proceed on nationwide strike within 14 days if no visible efforts are made to address these problems. The deadline starts today. By midnight October 29, tanker drivers nationwide must withdraw their services throughout the downstream arm of the petroleum industry.

"PTD hereby issues a 14-day ultimatum and if no action is taken by government or NARTO on these well-known issues, we would embark on indefinite strike."

Zimbabwe mine workers sacked for going on strike

Approximately 500 workers went on strike at the Renco Gold Mine, Zimbabwe, on October 6 and 7 after their September salaries were not paid on time due to "shortage of bank notes.

Some of the strikers were served with suspension letters on October 8, and instructed not to leave the mine compound until their cases were heard. The miners claim that about 20 were dismissed. One of the dismissed men alleged that workers brought up before the disciplinary committee were denied representation by their union.

Renco Mine is owned by Rio Tinto Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean health service crisis spreads to senior clinicians

Junior doctors and nurses in Zimbabwe's public hospitals have been on strike since August to press for higher pay and better working conditions.

The specialist doctors, including surgeons, neurologists and gynecologists, who have been keeping the public hospitals running ever since, have now taken strike action on their own behalf. The strike began on October 16, after deadlock was reached on salary review with the Health Services Board. *ZimOnLine* reported that the senior doctors are demanding their salaries be paid in hard currency and not in the local dollar, which has been hit by inflation of 231 million percent.

Some of Zimbabwe's largest hospitals have begun discharging patients and suggesting they seek treatment in private hospitals.

Kenyan council workers strike over assault on colleague

Over 100 workers at Meru Central County Council, near Mount Kenya, took protest strike action after a councillor, Mutwiri Kithinji, allegedly assaulted one of their colleagues.

A workers' representative, Stephen Nkumbo, told the *Nation* (Nairobi) that they were tired of harassment by politicians, particularly councillors.

The workers marched to Meru Police Station demanding the arrest of the councillor.

Nigerian council workers protest non-payment of 10 months' salary arrears

Over 50 members of staff of Gboko Local Government Council of Benue State, in southern Nigeria, marched to the Benue State House of Assembly on October 15, to protest the non-payment of 10 months' salary by the Gboko Local Government Council.

According to *This Day* (Lagos) the demonstration, made up of men and women, many of whom were carrying their children, called on the State House of Assembly to come to their rescue.

Michael Vandiyina, speaking on behalf of the protesters, told the paper that they were legal employees of Gboko local government, and wondered why the local government council authority had continued to deny them salaries for over 10 months. He described the plight of the families, whom he said were suffering from hunger and frustration.

South African Woolworths workers' strike continues over union recognition

Woolworths staff throughout South Africa have been on strike for three weeks over recognition of the SA Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (Saccawu). Negotiations have taken place between management and the union, but so far no agreement has been reached. Strike meetings have been called by Saccawu to discuss the outstanding issues, especially union access and "stop-order agreements."

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