

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.

UK: London post workers take three day strike action

Postal workers in London began three days of industrial action July 8 in an ongoing dispute with the state run Royal Mail over cuts to jobs, wages and conditions. The 11,000 involved in the action are members of the Communication Workers Union.

The dispute involves delivery staff, who struck on Wednesday, distribution workers on Thursday and mail centre staff who are to strike on Friday. The action has caused major disruption to deliveries throughout the London area.

Immediately prior to the industrial action, Royal Mail had attempted to prevent it going ahead by appealing to the High Court. The strike went ahead when the court ruled that it was legal.

The CWU stated that it had called the action due to Royal Mail reducing the pay of employees and implementing other cuts that it said was affecting services. The union had offered Royal Mail management a three-month no-strike deal prior to the industrial action, but this was turned down.

The action takes place in the same week that the government announced it would continue with its plans to part-privatise the Royal Mail once “market conditions allow”. The government is seeking a private buyer to acquire a 30 percent stake in Royal Mail.

The CWU plans to hold a national day of action on Friday July 17, “which will combine industrial action and demonstrations”.

UK: Bus drivers strike over pay claims

Bus drivers in South Yorkshire, England are to hold a one-day strike today after management rejected their calls for a pay increase. Seventy-seven percent of bus drivers voted for strike action.

Talks held between the private transport operator First and Unite union officials at conciliation service ACAS July 7 failed to resolve the dispute. The union rejected a 2.95 percent pay award based on productivity improvements at depots in Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster.

Bus drivers in Aberdeen, Scotland, have balloted on possible industrial action over a demand for a 52 percent pay rise. Similar action in 2008 brought buses in Aberdeen to standstill.

UK: Rail workers to be balloted for strike action

Reuters reported July 8 that rail employees working for National Express East Anglia are to be balloted over industrial action in a dispute over pay and working conditions.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) says National Express has failed to make “any significant offer” on pay.

The government recently stripped National Express of its key East Coast service and warned it could also lose the East Anglia network that runs commuter services from destinations such as Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich into London.

UK: Finance staff prepare for strike action at Capita

Finance workers at Capita in Glasgow are taking strike action today in a dispute over pay.

Unite union members are angry that Capita has refused to consider anything above a 1.5 percent pay offer, despite an 18 percent increase in profits for the company.

Ireland: Thousands of electricians strike

Around 10,500 electricians went on strike around Ireland on July 6 “in a major test of government and employer efforts to cut pay during a record recession”, reported *Reuters*.

Electricians say a wage increase of around 11 percent is outstanding for two years. Employers have said they intend to cut their wages by 10 percent.

According to the *Irish Times*, “the strike centres on a grievance between electricians and electrical contractors. However, because contractors not only provide services on building sites but also in factories, it is having an effect on businesses not directly involved in the row”.

The paper reported that on July 6 drinks group Diageo secured an injunction to prevent picketing at its plants.

Employer group, the Electrical Contractors Association, has said the striking electricians will be laid off if they continue their action.

The threat was issued after pickets were mounted on more than 200 construction sites, including major works at Dublin Airport’s new terminal, the Lansdowne Road stadium, and a new criminal courts complex.

There was severe disruption to building projects and major employers such as Intel, Diageo, and Pfizer, and power stations including Aghada

and Moneypoint.

A Cadbury spokeswoman said a small number of employees had not reported for work and that this had caused considerable disruption and resulted in a “complete cessation of production in Coolock”.

The *Irish Independent* said “highly placed industrial relations mediators” have predicted that “blood will have to be shed” before the dispute is resolved.

The employers’ group Ibec has also warned of possible lay-offs in companies hit by the dispute. It said many companies were having to consider measures that would have a major impact on all their employees, unionised or not, in response to Technical, Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) pickets.

The TEEU replied that Ibec was seeking to create a climate of fear and to divide workers.

Prime Minister Brian Cowen has vowed to squeeze the budget deficit under a European Union limit of 3 percent of GDP by 2013 from a targeted 10.75 percent this year. Cowen is also under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut public sector pay in the budget in December.

Spain: Proposed strike by hotel staff at resorts

Over 50,000 hotel workers are threatening to walk out next month in a pay dispute that could force many hotels to close, reports *ttglive.com*.

The strike was announced by the unions that represent chambermaids (whose wages in the region are claimed to be the lowest in Spain), cleaners, receptionists and other hotel workers.

Costa Blanca resorts including Benidorm, Alicante, Torrevieja, Denia and Javea could be affected.

Egypt: Journalist prevented from covering ongoing dispute

A journalist with *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, Joseph Mayton, was physically prevented from covering the ongoing dispute at Tanta Flax Company.

The strikes at the plant just outside Tanta, 90 kilometres north of Cairo, began in May. Workers are protesting a denial of an annual wage rise of 7 percent, as well as demanding better work conditions.

Mayton reported on July 7 how he was grabbed, pushed, punched and forcibly removed from the premises by security officers. According to Mayton, he presented his foreign press card, but state security refused him entry. In an interview, Mayton said he believes that state security wants to prevent foreign journalists from covering the case.

Mayton attempted to capture footage of the factory, but was followed by several officers who began pulling and grabbing him and his belongings, and punching him. He was then escorted to the head state security chief on site, and he and his American photographer, Jonathan Ward, were told to leave.

The *Daily News Egypt* reports, “Then, Mayton says, more state security officers arrived, and he was pushed onto a microbus bound for Tanta’s train station. Instead of returning to Cairo, Mayton and Ward left the station and went back into Tanta to meet one of the workers at the factory.

“According to Mayton, during the interview his contact received a phone call saying that the microbus driver Mayton had paid off at the station had been arrested, and that the police were looking for them. The two journalists headed back to Cairo”.

Egypt: Journalist begin sit-in over publication dispute

Around 80 journalists at *Al-Badeel* began a sit-in at the paper’s Cairo offices, when the weekly edition was scrapped.

The *Daily News Egypt* reports that, “In April financial problems forced the newspaper’s management to turn the paper from a daily to a weekly”.

The sit-in began July 1 in response to a demand made by *Al-Badeel*’s executive board that the paper’s writers submit resignations and renounce claims to their financial entitlements, in return for the paper continuing to issue a weekly edition.

According to Ahmed Harbiya, an *Al-Badeel* journalist participating in the sit-in, the executive board also made a new offer, asking that half the journalists resign so that the weekly publication of the newspaper would continue.

Harbiya told *Daily News Egypt* that he and his colleagues were willing to forego their claims to redundancy pay “so that the money would be used to publish the paper and on condition that we as journalists run the paper”.

Harbiya says that journalists have been receiving basic salaries of between LE 250 and LE 500 since the paper’s financial crisis hit.

Zimbabwean teachers protest non-payment

State teachers in Zimbabwe held a demonstration on July 3 in Masvingo to protest the non-payment of their salaries. They complained that they had not been paid since the start of 2009 when the government was forced to drop use of the Zimbabwe dollar and switch to using US dollars.

The teachers marched through the Masvingo streets holding placards and singing protest songs. The protest was organized by the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe.

Zambian health workers face discipline after ending strike

Over 300 Zambian health workers face disciplinary action unless they write a letter dissociating themselves from strike action. The strike was over demands including allowances for night duty, uniforms and overtime.

Their union advised them to return the letters to management, saying that the government had agreed to a full amnesty if the strike was brought to an end. The president of the Health Workers Union of Zambia admitted, however, that he had known in advance about such letters being produced.

The Ministry of Health stated, “Amnesty will only apply to those who will respond [to the letters]”.

Kenyan striking local government workers lock out Town Clerk

Striking local government workers in Malindi, Kenya, locked out Town Clerk Peter King’oina whom they accuse of failing to submit their savings and pension contributions, and not paying them their uniform allowances.

The workers said they would never allow King’oina into his office, keeping the keys as they held demonstrations around the Town Hall. As a result of the dispute, the mayoral election in Malindi has been delayed because the Town Clerk is the returning officer.

Algerian steelworkers strike over pay and conditions

Around 7,000 workers at the ArcelorMittal steel plant in El Hadjar, Algeria, began indefinite strike action on July 6.

According to the *Times* of India, the workers are demanding higher pay, improved working conditions and a review of their benefits and pensions.

Talks on their demands stalled on the issue of pay, with management having refused to offer any increase. Four members of the negotiating committee are said to be on hunger strike in protest.

The steel plant was privatised in 2001.

South African building workers strike over pay

Around 70,000 South African building workers are on indefinite strike in support of their demand for a 13 percent pay increase. The employers are offering 10 percent.

The strikers belong to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Building Construction and Allied Workers' Union (BCAWU). The NUM said its members in the construction sector would protest at the sites of stadiums and other major infrastructure projects.

The strike followed a decision by the Labour Court to reject the employers' application to stop the strike.



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