

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: Cadbury workers to strike over pay

On July 9 workers at the Bourneville, Chirk, Marlbrook and Somerdale plants of the major chocolate producer, Cadbury, protested outside the corporation's European Forum over pay.

The protest comes as the workforce considers strike action to protect their pay deal, according to the Unite trade union.

Unite national officer, Jennie Formby said, "Workers know that this move has nothing to do with cutting costs during tough times and everything to do with an employer cynically taking advantage of a recession to attack workers' pay."

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations reported that "delegates from five European countries attending the Cadbury European Works Council in Heathrow on July 9 walked out of the meeting at 12 noon to join their UK colleagues in a protest against Cadbury UK management's refusal to honour the final year of a three-year pay deal.... The UK workers were gratified over the excellent support from their European comrades, many of whom are also facing pay freezes and squeezes."

The workers are insisting that the company honour the final year of a three-year pay agreement. Cadbury had agreed to a wage deal of Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 0.5 percent, but with a minimum of two percent for 2009. But RPI in February was zero percent so the company is breaking the original agreement and instead imposing a deal of 0.5 percent.

Cadbury's recorded a 30 percent rise in profits this year.

UK: Ballot for strike at Guardian print centre

The Unite trade union announced July 10 that it is "preparing to ballot its members at the Guardian Print Centre (GPC) for industrial action over the company's proposals to make a quarter of the staff redundant."

Any strike at GPC, based in London's Docklands, would halt the printing of the *Guardian* newspaper in southern England.

France: Telecommunications workers threaten to blow up plant

Reuters reported July 15 that workers at the French arm of telecommunications manufacturer Nortel Networks Corp. threatened to blow up the factory unless they secure "decent layoff terms."

Toronto-based Nortel was formerly the largest North American telecommunications equipment manufacturer, but filed for bankruptcy in Canada and the United States in January.

Le Parisien said the workers had placed gas cylinders in front of the plant in the Yvelines area near Paris, where 480 jobs are to be axed following bankruptcy proceedings. The newspaper reported the gas cylinders as being empty.

According to Reuters this was the second threat by French workers to blow up a factory in a week. According to the BBC, workers at collapsed French car parts maker New Fabris made a similar threat on July 12 concerning job losses at their plant. The workers in Chatellerault, southwest of Paris, gave auto groups Renault and Peugeot, which provide 90 percent of the plant's work, a July 31 deadline to pay them €30,000 (£26,000) each.

New Fabris was declared bankrupt June 16, and 366 of its workers are involved in the dispute. The company, which went into receivership for the second time in two years last month, holds at least €2 million of stock.

In recent months protesting workers have detained managers at factories across the country in a spate of so-called "boss-napping" incidents.

Russia: Riot police disperse protesting workers from highway

The July 13 edition of the *Moscow Times* reported that "Altai riot police violently dispersed a crowd of about 200 unpaid workers who tried to block the M-52 federal highway running from Novosibirsk to Mongolia on Friday."

According to reports by Gazeta.ru, workers from the Magistral construction company blocked a highway outside the southern Siberian city of Gorno-Altai on a short time July 10.

Special forces forced them to the side of the road. Several arrests were made after workers refused to disperse and continued their picket along the Chuisky Highway, which links Novosibirsk, some 3,000 kilometres (1,750 miles) east of Moscow, with Mongolia.

The workers say they are owed 5.6 million rubles (\$170,000) in back wages and blame the Altai republic's administration for a lack of work.

This was the second demonstration by the workers. Police moved around 100 workers demonstrating along the same highway July 3.

Television footage of the dispute showed rows of police aggressively pushing back protesters, among them a man carrying a young child on his shoulders.

This is the latest in a series of roadblocks and attempted roadblocks. Similar actions taken earlier by unemployed workers in Pikalevo, Leningrad Region, created a massive traffic jam and attracted the direct intervention of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. After Putin's intervention, President Dmitry Medvedev threatened to fire governors who did not prevent similar protests.

The recent action differs from previous ones as it was also supported by the company management. Manager Vasily Piryayev said, "The workers are not asking the government of the Republic of Altai for money. The only thing they are demanding is that they be provided with work."

RIA-Novosti said that Magistral, one of the biggest road-construction companies in the republic, has laid-off a third of its employees since the start of the year.

The government had pledged to finance road construction as part of its job stimulus program during the economic crisis. Unemployment in Russia has risen sharply in recent months, creating anxiety in the Kremlin about labour unrest spreading.

Egyptian textile workers' strike

According to *arabist.net/arabaw*, around 1,000 workers at the privately-run Abul-Seba'e textile company began strike action July 12, to demand three months of unpaid wages.

Alaa El-Gameel, one of the factory workers, told *Daily News Egypt*, "The excuse we were given was that factory's exports had stopped, that they didn't have the money and they kept telling us to be patient," he said. "Ramadan and Eid are coming, and I'm married, I can't afford to wait any longer," he added.

Over 4,000 work in the three Abul-Seba'e textile factories in Mahalla. The workforce, led by the female workers, blocked the highway in front of the factory after smashing the factory gate. There were clashes between the strikers and the Central Security Forces. Damage was caused to at least three cars and a bus that had hit one of the female workers.

South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) protest

Workers at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) marched to its headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, on Tuesday in support of their pay demand. Workers belonging to the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) and the Media Workers' Association of South Africa (MWASA) are taking action over SABC's failure to honour a 12 percent pay increase agreed to last year.

Workers belonging to the Broadcast, Electronic Media and Allied Workers Union (BEMAWU) are supporting workers in the other unions. They have lodged their own separate, but similar demand.

SABC, pleading lack of funds, had offered 8.5 percent and upped this to around 10 percent at meetings with the unions this week. Union leaders rejected this latest offer.

The unions have a mandate from their members to take strike action, due to start Friday, unless SABC meets the 12 percent demand.

Inflation in South Africa is running at around 10 percent, with the poor disproportionately affected.

South African building workers set to return to work

Around 70,000 construction workers belonging to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Building Construction and Allied Workers' Union (BCAWU) are set to return to work on Thursday July 16.

The week-long strike was in support of a 13 percent pay increase. The employers' previous offer of 10 percent was rejected. A BBC report of July 15 says negotiators for the union have accepted an increased offer of 12 percent from the employers.

The strike had brought work on the five new football stadiums for the 2010 World Cup to a standstill. Work on the prestigious Guatrain, rapid rail link between Johannesburg International airport, the city and Pretoria was also affected. It is due for completion in time for the World Cup.

Zimbabwe teachers continue action in support of pay claim

An SW Radio Africa (London) report of 13 July says teachers belonging to the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) who took part in boycott action last Friday in Masvingo have been threatened by ZANU PF youth militia. Speaking on Monday, PTUZ President Takavafira Zhou said, "The militia leaders have threatened that they will deal decisively with teachers if they keep boycotting classes."

Teachers in Zimbabwe currently receive a monthly salary of US \$100. They are paid in US dollars because the Zimbabwean dollar is effectively worthless. Teachers belonging to the PTUZ, together with teachers belonging to the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA), are involved in action in pursuit of a minimum salary of US\$400. The Zimbabwe Central Statistical Office estimates that the average family needs \$500 a month for a living wage.

Two hundred teachers belonging to PTUZ marched in Harare on Monday as part of their pay campaign. They handed in a petition to the Public Service Minister. They plan a march on the Prime Minister's office next week.



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