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: March to save steel plant

On July 18, thousands took part in a march to "Save our Steel" in Redcar, calling on the government to help the Corus steel plant that is faced with closure.

Union organisers said up to 5,000 workers and their families had turned out for the march and rally. Those who took part included workers from the local port and Teesside's chemical industry, as well from the Corus plants in Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire, and Rotherham and Stocksbridge, South Yorkshire.

Up to 2,000 jobs at the Teesside Cast Products factory are at risk, after an international consortium pulled out of a 10-year deal to buy Corus steel.

France: Workers lock up executives in new "boss-nappings"

According to the Associated Press, "French factory workers angry over layoffs and cost cuts locked up their bosses at a Michelin tire plant and a US-owned cigarette-paper mill in a new eruption of "boss-nappings."

Around 50 workers at Michelin's plant in Montceau-les-Mines in eastern France locked up four managers, including the director, late on July 22. The managers were released the next morning after regional officials offered to mediate, Michelin spokeswoman Fabienne de Brebisson said.

The incident comes amid tensions and negotiations over Michelin's plans, announced last month, to reduce its French staff by more than 1,000. Adding to the anger of the workforce was how management punished a worker for refusing to use machinery on which he had not been trained.

Also on July 22, workers at a mill that produces cigarette paper held four of their bosses during meetings regarding layoffs. The "napping," which lasted four hours, occurred in the town hall of Malaucene in southeast France.

The mill, owned by Alpharetta, Georgia-based Schweitzer-Mauduit International, Inc., is slated to shut down in September. The 211 workers are asking the government to intervene to help find a buyer for the plant, according to the CGT union.

Ireland: Cleaners dispute

The *Irish Times* reported July 22 that the "Minister for the Environment John Gormley has been called upon to intervene in an ongoing industrial dispute between cleaners and a company contracted to clean the department's headquarters."

The cleaners have been picketing the Custom House since July 1. They claim that Schorman Contract Cleaning Services, which took over the cleaning contract for the Custom House, has failed to honour agreed commitments regarding the continued employment of the workers.

Ireland: Workers to picket over redundancy pay

Workers being made redundant by a joinery company in Co. Kilkenny were due to picket the company's head office in Dublin on July 22.

The SIPTU union has said that Carroll System Buildings is only offering statutory redundancy of two week's pay per year of service to the 48 affected employees, stating that the Labour Court has recommended that they be given twice this amount.

Ireland: Bank of Ireland staff to strike over pay

Reuters reported July 22 that the UNITE union's 500 members at Bank of Ireland's insurance and pension units are to strike for a day over wages.

The union said, "The action is being taken in light of the Bank of Ireland's refusal to implement a Labour Court recommendation issued last month in relation to agreed merit-based payments to the staff involved."

UNITE said its members, most on salaries of less than €30,000 ($42,580), had taken a 12 percent salary cut this year due to "the non-payment of company-related performance payments."

Poland: Chinese workers protest over unpaid wages

According to AFP, "Chinese workers claiming to have been cheated out of wages by their Polish-Chinese labour agents have pitched a protest camp in front of the Chinese embassy in the Polish capital Warsaw."

One protestor, a tile layer who identified himself as Lim, told AFP that

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the workers were only paid for a short time after having arrived from China in March to work in construction. He said they were now homeless and didn't have the money to return to China. After having received no help from the Chinese embassy, the protesters pitched tents using sheets, tarpaulins and cardboard on its front lawn.

According to AFP, the workers come from southeast China, where they were hired by Heyly, a Chinese company, and its Polish partners to work on various residential construction sites around Warsaw.

According to the Web site of Fujian Heyly Overseas Employment Co. Ltd., the company is "a licensed overseas employment agency approved by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China." Among other activities, the company is also involved in "recruiting and recommending domestic labourers to work abroad," according to the site.

Egypt: Postal workers demand better pay, working conditions

Over 100 postal workers gathered outside the Central Post Authority in Attaba July 20, in a protest demanding wage increases and better working conditions, according to the *Daily News Egypt*.

The protest is the latest in a series of demonstrations by postal workers, who held up signs and congregated around colleagues who alternated between reading demands and rallying the crowd.

Abdel Meguid Abdel Aziz, an inspector and member of the postal workers' trade union committee, said, "We are trying to bridge the gap between the senior management and us, and we had to take this stand because we are tired of trying to reach the officials.... Alaa Fahmy, chairman of the Egyptian National Post, has refused to hear our demands. However, we didn't completely stop working today. We are gathered here just as representatives from different governorates. Our activity is still ongoing."

The workers have made 10 demands, including wage parity with employees of the Egyptian Telecommunications Company, that long-standing temporary workers be given permanent status, the implementation of a new appraisal system to prevent dismissal without due process and no Saturday working.

Rwandan construction workers strike

Over 200 construction workers on a new building for the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Court in Rwanda have been on sit-down strike for the last three weeks. The dispute is over non-payment of wages by the Belgian-owned construction company AMCECO.

The Rwandan *New Times* newspaper quoted one of the workers, Jacques Nkubana, explaining, "We want justice. We will definitely continue to decry this injustice so everyone concerned should come to our aid."

The $3 million complex was scheduled for completion by April of this year.

Nigerian academic staff strike

Academic staff belonging to the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) resumed strike action July 20. At a press conference July 19 following an emergency meeting of the union's National Executive Council (NEC), SSANU's President Promise Adewusi announced the recommencement of the strike.

The union has been in negotiation with the government for the last two-and-a-half years over better working conditions and improved conditions of service. The union says agreements had been reached, but the government has failed to honour them.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is also currently involved in strike action as part of a protracted struggle with the government over improved working conditions and pay.

Nigerian government workers strike

As part of an ongoing wave of action by various sections of Nigerian workers, government employees are on strike this week.

Postal workers belonging to the Nigerian Postal Services NIPOST took action in pursuit of arrears of pay. As a result of the action many post offices throughout the country have been closed.

Workers at the National Agency for Foods and Drugs Administration (NAFDSC) began strike action last week. Again the main issue was failure to pay arrears of wages from previous agreements.

Following a sit-in, workers in Abuja working for the Power Holding Company of Nigeria have threatened indefinite strike action in pursuit of a 150 percent pay increase. Strike action was due to start this week, but the government has referred the dispute to the Industrial Arbitration Panel for Settlement.

South Africa: Strike at Lotus FM

Workers belonging to the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media and Allied Workers Union (BEMAWU) began strike action at the radio station Lotus FM July 22. Lotus FM is part of the South African Broadcasting Corporation and caters to Indian listeners.

The workers are demanding the redeployment of the station manager, Gail Samuels, because of what BEMAWU President Hannes du Buisson called "a serious breakdown in the working relationship between her and the staff. We are prepared to go on strike for the next month if they...[do not] listen to us."

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