

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: Three-day postal strike in London

Around 12,000 postal workers in London will take three days of strike action beginning this weekend over proposed job losses by Royal Mail. The Communication Workers Union's last three-day strike ended on July 10.

Ireland: Port protest blocks Dublin's East Link Bridge

Around 300 people blocked the East Link Toll Bridge in Dublin on the morning of July 28, in support of striking port workers.

The *Irish Times* reported, "Members of communities in the north and south docklands marched to the bridge in support of the 42 workers who have been on strike for four weeks."

The port workers are in dispute with Marine Terminals Limited (MTL) over the company's plans to impose compulsory redundancies and alter pay and conditions for the remaining workforce.

Ireland: Hospital security staff await strike orders

The *Limerick Leader* reported July 27 on the security staff "waiting to find out if their union has sanctioned a strike outside three Limerick hospitals after they voted unanimously in favour of industrial action over 'persistent and unilateral changes' in work practices."

SIPTU balloted its members, who are employed by the firm Key Security on July 23, after the company imposed changes to the workers' terms of employment without consulting with the staff or union representatives. The security firm, which employs 28 staff in Limerick, has security service contracts at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital, the Regional Maternity Hospital, St. John's Hospital and Southill House. Twelve of the security workers are union members.

Russia: Auto workers to hold August demonstration

AvtoVAZ workers are to hold a demonstration August 6, "five days after Russia's biggest carmaker suspends production for a month, to protest against pay cuts of 50 percent that the company plans in response to slumping sales," reported the *Moscow Times* on July 28.

Pyotr Zolotarev, head of the Unity union at the carmaker, told the paper that wages for AvtoVAZ's 110,000 employees will be slashed by half when the Tolyatti-based manufacturer resumes operations in September as it scales back work hours.

Average monthly pay at the plant is 12,000 roubles (\$US 386), according to Zolotarev.

AvtoVAZ announced plans on June 24 to operate one production shift for eight hours a day, five days a week through February to cut costs.

According to the Association of European Businesses, Russian sales of cars and light commercial vehicles dropped 49 percent to 763,962 in the first half of 2009 as rising unemployment, a devalued rouble and inflation reduced disposable income. Deliveries of AvtoVAZ's Lada models fell by 44 percent.

AvtoVAZ is 25 percent owned by Renault.

Egypt: Sit-in by Ministry of Justice workers continues

The *Daily News Egypt* reported July 29 that "an attempt to resolve the conflict between the Ministry of Justice and protesting legal specialists fell through after specialists deemed the ministry's proposals 'weak and insufficient.'"

During the three-hour meeting, the ministry proposed an average LE 50-100 increase in salaries starting next October. The offer was rejected by legal specialists.

Legal specialists at the ministry started an open sit-in on July 6 demanding the replacement of law 96/1952 and the cancellation of periodic book number eight that obliges them to examine case files in courtrooms only. They are also calling for better pay and work conditions. The sit-in has now entered its fourth week.

"We will continue our sit-in until our demands are met even if it takes months to achieve that," said the specialists' statement. Protestors hung lanterns in front of the ministry where they are staging their sit-in to symbolize their determination to continue striking during the month of Ramadan scheduled to start towards the end of August.

On July 26, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reported that "a group of 45 civil servants protested for the eighth time this month in front of the Ministry of Justice demanding implementation of the law requiring the ministry to hire them in the state litigation institution. They said the law has not been implemented due to the institution leader's 'stiffness.' The protestors threatened to go on hunger strike if their demands are not fulfilled."

Israel: National Insurance workers take strike action

National Insurance Institute (NII) workers took strike action July 27, closing all branches around the country. The workers are protesting “a deadlock in negotiations with the Finance Ministry over the union’s demands for additional staff to meet increased workloads, as the caseload has increased 30 percent while the number of NII employees has dropped by 450 since 2003,” according to *Haaretz*.

Israel: Airline staff to strike over benefit cuts

Globes online reported July 30 that the Histadrut union federation was due to announce an official dispute at El Al Israel Airlines to protest CEO Haim Romano’s demand for a cut in employee benefits to be included in the airline’s labour contract.

Romano is making the same demands that he had withdrawn when he signed the labour contract in November. He wants to limit the now unlimited 50 percent discount in fares given to the families of El Al employees.

Romano also wants new employees, hired after August, to pay taxes on the fare benefit. He wants to eliminate employees’ eligibility for car costs and new employees to contribute in the cost of meals.

South African municipal workers in nationwide strike

July 29 marked the third day of a strike by around 150,000 municipal workers belonging to the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU).

The action took place across all provinces of South Africa, and there have been marches and demonstrations in many cities. Their action is in pursuit of a 15 percent wage increase. The workers have turned down an offer of 11.5 percent. They are also seeking a minimum wage of R5000 (£390, \$640) for municipal workers, together with financial help towards housing loans and rental costs.

With inflation running at around 10 percent, the low-paid are being particularly hard hit, because food price inflation is higher.

President Jacob Zuma made promises of help to low-paid workers and those living in the townships as part of his campaign for election. In this he had the support of the South African Communist Party and the Trade Union body COSATU. Zuma has now begun to row back on these promises.

Speaking on Monday, SAMWU leader Dale Forbes said the workers had public support: “They want to see dramatic improvements in service delivery—which must start with improvements in the conditions of the workers.”

Talks between the unions and the employers’ organisation the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) reconvened yesterday.

Tanzanian dock workers strike

Around 600 dock workers at the East African port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania took strike action July 28 against the Tanzania International

Container Terminal Services (TICTS). The action led to a complete standstill of the movement of containers.

Speaking to the Tanzanian *Daily News*, Nico Shahidi, chairman of the Dock Workers Union of Tanzania (DOWATU) at TICTS explained, “We were promised new salaries effective this month, but salary slips given to us do not indicate any changes.”

Also in dispute were the amounts the workers were supposed to receive as bonuses and overtime rates.

Secondary school teachers strike in Nigeria

Secondary school teachers in the north-western Nigerian state of Sokoto began three days of strike action July 28. The teachers, members of the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools, are taking action to demand the implementation of the new Teachers Salary Structure (TSS), which had been agreed by the state governor, Aliyu Magatakarda Wamakko three months ago.

The *Daily Trust* newspaper quoted the chairman of the Sokoto chapter of the teachers’ union as saying, “Several promises were made...but up till now it [the deal] has not been implemented...a general meeting with representatives from all schools...[has] agreed that we should embark on three days warning strike action from Tuesday [28 July] pending any positive action on the part of the government.”

Further action would follow if there was no move by the state governor.

Nigerian judicial workers begin strike action

Court workers in Edo state, Nigeria, began strike action July 28 to back their demand for implementation of a consolidated salary structure for judicial workers throughout Nigeria. The action halted juridical processes with courts being closed.



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