

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.

Irish industrial diamond workers to ballot for strike action

Workers at Element Six, formerly known as De Beers Industrial Diamonds, in Shannon are to hold a ballot on industrial action. The company had earlier announced it was ending manufacturing in the town, with the loss of 370 jobs.

The decision to vote on strike action was made following a meeting of union and non-union workers at the plant. A joint statement by the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the Technical, Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) said the two unions will “continue to explore all avenues to resolve the current dispute prior to taking industrial action.”

The company has made clear a proposal to temporarily save 160 of the 370 jobs would involve “comprehensive changes” to work practices and increases in productivity.

According to the *Irish Times*, management at Element Six also told workers that any further unofficial stoppages would result in the company pressing ahead with its original plan to shut down manufacturing.

Russia: Protest rally at Soviet-era auto plant

According to the *Moscow News*, a protest rally by 2,000 auto workers at the huge AvtoVAZ plant August 6 “prompted the state corporation running the factory to threaten to fire troublemakers, while President Dmitry Medvedev reacted to workers’ complaints of mismanagement by announcing an inquiry into state-run companies.”

The company, which produces the Lada car, has closed its main plant at Togliatti, central Russia, several times in the past year as sales have collapsed.

Pyotr Zolotaryov, leader of the Edinstvo, or Unity trade union, that organised the demonstration, called for AvtoVAZ to be nationalised and union activists said the plant should come under workers’ control, said the paper.

AvtoVAZ, which is controlled by state corporation Russian Technologies, announced last month it was sending workers on an enforced leave for the month of August and would cut hours and

wages in half starting in September.

The BBC says the decision will affect 100,000 workers and their families, who will be forced to survive for six months on half pay of \$300 (£176) a month.

The company denies accusations that it has plans to fire 26,000 employees, one-quarter of the workforce, at its giant plant. The *Moscow News* said, “Analysts fear there may be social unrest in Tolyatti, a city of 700,000, on a much larger scale than in Pikalyovo, a small Leningrad region town where Prime Minister Vladimir Putin intervened in June to get three factories reopened and back wages paid.

Sporadic postal walk-outs in UK

Up to 25,000 postal workers went on strike August 7, according to the *Financial Times*. A series of 24-hour strikes by postal workers continued in East Anglia August 10, and the following day in Stoke-on-Trent in a long-running dispute over jobs, pay and conditions associated with management’s attempts to further casualise the service.

Thousands of postal workers in London staged a 24-hour walkout August 12. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) said around 12,000 of its members were involved in the action, affecting deliveries and collections all day.

“The union has announced plans to ballot all its postal-worker members for a national strike in September, threatening the worst disruption to mail deliveries for two years,” reported the BBC.

UK airport workers to consider strike action

The Unite union reported August 10 that baggage handlers, terminal cleaners and workers responsible for refuelling aircraft at Manchester Airport are being balloted for industrial action in a dispute over pay. A vote in favour could mean industrial action during the peak August bank holiday weekend.

“The 300 workers based at Manchester Airport taking part in the ballot are employed by Swissport, Rentokil/Initial and ASIG. The disputes are over plans to impose a pay freeze and to renege on a pay deal agreed in 2008,” said the union Web site. The union is to announce the ballot results for industrial action on the week beginning August 17.

Staff at three Spanish airlines set for strike action

According to the *Peninsula*, workers at Spanair, EasyJet and Air Comet are to take a series of mainly 24-hour walk-outs throughout August. Workers are taking action during the busy holiday season in search of a collective agreement that has been in the negotiation stage for the past 18 months.

Egyptian textile workers' strike enters third month

Around 800 workers from the Tanta Flax and Oil Company demonstrated in Cairo August 10 in protest at the General Union of Textile Workers' calls to end their strike, now in its third month.

The workers are demanding a wage increase to correspond with the average minimum wage across the country, something that has been written into their contracts. Other demands include an increase in meal allowances and the re-employment of nine fired workers.

According to the *Daily News Egypt*, the workers blocked the roads to and from the factory before anti-riot police trucks were called to the scene. "They are outnumbering us and they are trying to push us back inside the factory," Safwat Michel, a strike leader told *Daily News Egypt*. "They are now threatening to beat us back to the factory.... Now we are about 750 workers and we are waiting for the third shift to join so we will be 900."

Saudi businessman, Abdullah Al-Kaeky, bought the company in 2005 from the Egyptian government, allegedly for a much lower price than the market value.

Zambian supermarket workers take action

Workers at the South African owned Shoprite chain of supermarkets across Zambia began indefinite strike action on 11 August. Shoprite has around 15 stores across Zambia employing several hundred workers. The workers demands are for the implementation of a pension scheme and a pay rise. This comes in the wake of strike action three weeks ago.

The workers are represented by the National Union of Communication and Industrial Workers (NUCIW). A NUCIW representative told the *Zambia Times*, "We started the pension scheme negotiations four years ago, and this year after the government intervened, our management assured us that they would increase the pension, and the deadline was June 30, 2009...management has defied the government's directive.... So we have gone on strike."

Zimbabwe hospital doctors' strike

Hospital doctors across Zimbabwe are taking strike action. The doctors are represented by the Hospital Doctors Association (HDA). The country's major hospitals in Harare and Bulawayo are affected by the action.

The government had offered a guaranteed monthly salary of US\$100 for all public servants. The doctors had subsequently argued for an increase to \$170, which was granted. However, allowances that had previously been granted were curtailed or cut.

A Reuters report quoted HDA President Brighton Chizhanje explaining, "We are looking for a situation where the government pays salaries above \$1,000 and \$500 in allowances. The current flat \$170 they are paying is inadequate and has no provision for on-call allowances, transport and housing allowances."

Ghana gold miners' action over pay

Five thousand mineworkers belonging to the Ghana Mine Workers Union (GMWU) took two days strike action last week. The miners work for AngloGold Ashanti at the gold mines at Obuasi, Tarkwa and Idruapem. They were protesting at the vast differential in pay of Ghanaian workers as compared to expatriate workers doing the same job. According to the union, the expatriate workers are paid 30 times more. The workers are also protesting the company plan to stop paying the miners in US dollars and pay them instead in the local currency, the cedis.

The strike was brought to an end after the intervention of the Ghanaian National Labour Commission. The GMWU has said the action will recommence if the talks are unproductive.

Nigerian university staff continues strike action

Action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) began June 24. On August 10 the government called off the current round of negotiations. The dispute is over the government's failure to endorse an accord made in 2006, which included a new salary structure for academic staff and budget provision. The action is taking place at both state and federal universities.



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