Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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The World Socialist Web Site *invites workers and other readers to* contribute *to this regular feature.*

Bus drivers in Aberdeen, Scotland, strike again over pay

Drivers and other employees working for First Bus in Aberdeen held strike action on August 18 after talks over pay broke down again. It is the first of eight two-hour strikes planned by drivers, cleaners and maintenance staff.

Industrial action was suspended at the end of July for talks between the Unite trade union and First Aberdeen. A series of stoppages and a work-to-rule had been planned, after a 24-hour walkout in July.

In a separate dispute, strike action planned by almost 200 bus drivers in Nottinghamshire, England was suspended on August 19 by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union.

UK: airport baggage handlers and other ground staff strike

Around 150 staff at John Lennon Airport, Liverpool, are to strike indefinitely this week if a deal is not reached during last minute talks. Baggage handlers and other ground staff, employed by Servisair, are threatening to walk out over plans to cut 27 jobs. The strike would affect passengers with Ryanair, KLM, Wizzair, Flybe and Thomson.

Around 300 ground staff at Manchester Airport have also voted to strike over the August Bank Holiday weekend. The industrial action would involve cleaning, refuelling and baggage-handling departments during one of the summer's busiest periods.

The Unite trade union said the action is in support of improved pay offers to some of the airport's lowest paid workers.

Ireland: Port workers target bank during picket

"Unions representing workers at Peel Ports operations across Europe are gearing up for a co-ordinated protest against the company's treatment of its staff in Dublin Port," said the *Irish Examiner*, August 13.

The dispute at the Marine Terminals operation began seven weeks ago following trade union claims that its new owners, Peel Ports, were attempting to replace the existing workforce with lower paid, non-union workers.

Pickets were mounted at Marine Terminals from July 3, after the company made redundant a number of SIPTU trade union staff from its 70-strong workforce earlier this year, whilst other workers were asked to take redundancy. The remaining employees were told that they would have to sign new contracts and take pay cuts of up to 18 percent or face the loss of their jobs.

On August 17, a bank linked to a port company at the centre of the dispute was picketed by the port workers and their supporters. *The Irish Independent* said more than 30 protesters demonstrated outside the Deutsche Bank offices in Dublin in support of striking Marine Terminal workers. The bank has a 49.9 percent stake in Peel Ports, which operates the Marine Terminals.

Ireland: workers in sit-in at DIY store

More than a dozen workers at a co-op superstore in north Cork began a sit-in protest on August 13 in a dispute over redundancies. The 15 staff started the action at the 4Home Store in Mitchelstown after being given redundancy notice due to come into effect next Sunday. The DIY and homeware chain has closed seven other outlets nationwide in recent weeks.

Staff are demanding an improved redundancy package or an offer to relocate to another job within the company.

Two other 4Home stores in Fermoy and Annacotty are also due to close this weekend, with the loss of around 25 more jobs.

Ireland: Health staff may strike over medical card plan

Some 300 Irish health service staff processing medical card applications at local offices across the country are set to strike if the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) goes ahead with plans to centralise the processing of all such applications in Dublin. The workers are members of the Impact trade union.

Impact trade union official Gerry Dolan said the HSE planned to centralise the applications process on a phased basis from the end of this month in a bid to save €10 million. He claimed there had been no discussions with unions on the issue.

Dolan added that the centralisation of medical card applications would make it harder and slower for eligible people to obtain medical cards and would depersonalise the process, forcing vulnerable citizens to depend on e-mail and recorded telephone messages to have their applications dealt with.

The union claims that the centralisation of applications by those aged over 70 years for medical cards have already resulted in long delays, mistakes and poor response times, leaving patients and doctors frustrated and confused.

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Ambulance staff set to strike over new roster in Tipperary, Ireland

Ambulance staff in north Tipperary are set to walk off the job this week in protest at planned changes to on-call arrangements.

Following the retirement of a nurse, who had worked as a second crew member with the ambulance service at Roscrea station but who was not employed by the ambulance service, the Health Service Executive told staff it intended a change to its on-call service.

The change would mean that instead of having a paramedic in the station ready to respond to calls, two paramedics would be expected to respond to emergency calls from their homes. Staff claim this will add an extra 25 minutes to response times.

Paramedics were balloted for industrial action last month after management announced plans to impose the new work rosters.

Health workers from Nenagh and Thurles are planning to come out in support of their Roscrea colleagues. The paramedics say they will continue to provide an emergency service but "will not be carrying out other duties."

Strike at European Air Transport in Brussels

Belgium ground staff employed at European Air Transport (EAT), a subsidiary of international courier DHL, began indefinite industrial action on August 6 in Brussels. Some of the employees are members of the International Transport Union-affiliated union, SETKA BBTK. The action began following a breakdown in negotiations with management and trade unions. Pilots at EAT also walked out in support of their colleagues during the night shift.

The dispute centres around a restructuring and closure plan being introduced by DHL management that will impact on 400 workers' jobs. By the end of the year Deutsche Post DHL plans to close the EAT operation in Brussels.

Health workers strike at Malta hospitals

Nursing aides and care workers took strike action this week according to the *Malta Independent*. The newspaper reported that the indefinite strike action was "registered on 30 July over a 2008 agreement which UHM claimed was not being implemented in full."

Also supporting the action were health assistants, nursing aides, care workers, assistant care workers and paramedic aides at the Medical Imaging Department and Central Sterile Services Department at Mater Dei Hospital.

The Union Haddiema Maghqudin trade union was scheduled to meet with hospital and health centre employees on Thursday to discuss further action, according to the report.

Automotive workers continue strike to oppose plant closure in Raca, Serbia

On August 18 hundreds of workers employed by the automotive company Zastava Elektro held a demonstration outside the Privatisation Agency in Belgrade in Serbia. The workers have been involved in strike action for six months to prevent the closure of the plant, which is located in the town of Raca.

One of the strikers quoted in the media said, "Our main goal is to prevent the factory from going into bankruptcy, like the thousands of other factories throughout Serbia that have been ruined in privatisation scams. The strike began with the demand that the owners pay us what they owe us, but now we are insisting on the annulment of the privatisation deal and the renewed start-up of production."

The Serbian economy has declined drastically as a result of the global economic crisis. In the first quarter of 2009 its economy shrank 3.5 percent compared with 2008 last year. The economic crisis is set to worsen with predictions of a fall of more than 6 percent in 2009.

Hospital workers strike ends in Poland

An 11-day strike by hospital workers at the Radom Hospital in Poland ended on August 16. Following an agreement between the nurses and midwives' trade union, the staff will receive a one-off payment of 1000 zl. (238 euro) not the 450 zl. (110 euro) monthly increase they had been demanding. The payments are to be paid to staff in three instalments.

Iran: protest by sugar cane workers

Due to concerns about non-payment of overtime pay, workers at the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company's factory began a protest on August 7.

According to the *Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network* on August 15, "The workers have refused to use the punch cards to record their attendance and have chanted slogans against the official in charge of the time-keeping system. The protest is directed against the contemptuous bosses and the Ministry of Industries and Mines."

Among the employees' demands are wages and entitlement increases; the implementation of a job classification system; raise in the rate of overtime payments; ending of present card system; and an end to the sacking of temporary workers.

The Haft Tapeh workers have been in dispute for better pay, conditions and union recognition since October 2007.

Egypt: transport workers strike

Around 10,000 drivers, ticket collectors and administration workers at Cairo's Public Transport Authority protested this week over low pay. They say salaries have not risen since 1984. The transport workers began strike action on Tuesday with staff at 11 of the 19 public transport garages across Cairo continuing to strike on Wednesday.

Workers at garages at Gissr Elsuez, Elmostakbal, Imbaba, Elmazallat, Elfatth, Elnasr, Elamerya, Elteraa, Elmonieb, Elswah and Badr intend to continue strike action.

Speaking about the dispute, Khaled Aly of the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights said, "Security officials failed to thwart the strike despite relentless attempts to end it by force. We showed our solidarity with the drivers' demands, because although the Public Transport Authority's revenues rose by 3.9 percent last year, workers did

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not receive any incentives."

Public transport workers in Alexandria were also planning to take strike action in solidarity with the workers in Cairo, according to the centre.

Shop workers strike at Massmart group in South Africa

Workers at the Game division of the Massmart retail chain who began strike action throughout South Africa on Monday, returned to work Wednesday. The action ended after their union, the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers, accepted a monthly pay increase offer of R460 (US$58, £35) across the board or 7.5 percent, whichever is the greater. They had originally demanded an across the board monthly wage increase of R500 (US$65, £38).

However, the strike by workers belonging to the same union, at the Makro division of Massmart, which began last Saturday, is to continue. Their demands include a pay increase of R500 (US$65, £38) a month, across the board, a minimum monthly wage of R2800 (US$350, £210) and 15 percent staff discount.

Metrorail workers strike action in South Africa

Industrial action by workers on the Metrorail network entered its third day on August 19. Metrorail covers the main urban areas of South Africa and carries two million passengers a day. The workers belong to the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (UTATU), which has around 2,500 members working for Metrorail.

The dispute is over the terms of a recent wage settlement that meant workers are able to work less overtime. UTATU General Secretary Pieter Greyling said, "This will mean that our people could end up earning between R4000 (US$520, £300) and R6000 (US$780, £450) less a month. These people have been working this overtime for years now, and now the company wants to start limiting it."

The strike has had a major impact on the number of trains running. Members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers, working for Metrorail, were not taking part in the action.

Zimbabwean doctors join nurses in industrial action

Doctors at state hospitals in Zimbabwe are currently taking strike action against a US$170 salary level set by the government and in pursuit of increased allowances. The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association (HDA) said the stoppage went ahead following a breakdown in negotiations with health authorities. The doctors walked out at Zimbabwe's four major hospitals in Harare and Bulawayo.

HDA President Brighton Chizhanje said, "The industrial action has spread to all central hospitals in Harare and Bulawayo. We are looking for a situation where 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."

Their action was joined this week by nurses also taking industrial action. Nurses at Parirenyatwa hospital in Harare and at the two major hospitals in Bulawayo took action short of a strike. Nurses at Harare's main hospital began strike action on August 18. Their demands are for increases in salaries and allowances.

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