

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

11 September 2009

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

Workers and young people in Greece protest against government

On September 5, thousands of workers in Greece protested against the government of Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis. A demonstration of more than 10,000 was held in the northern city of Thessaloniki. The protest was held two days after Karamanlis had called for early elections to be held on October 4.

Several other demonstrations and rallies were held in the city, called by trade unions and protest groups. According to the AFP news agency, 2,500 police officers were mobilised to police the demonstrations.

For the main demonstration protesters gathered at the Thessaloniki international fair, an event held every September. The prime minister had opened the fair earlier in the day. Those attending carried placards, including ones reading "The government and the banks sell off the country". At one of the protests of 1,500, riot police used tear gas against demonstrators and arrested 20 people.

UK postal workers resume rolling strike action

Postal workers in several cities in the UK struck this week in the latest in a series of rolling strikes in a dispute over pay, job cuts and working conditions.

On September 9 postal workers in London struck from 0300 BST in delivery offices and collection points across the city. The stoppage, involving members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), was the eleventh 24-hour postal strike to take place in London since June. According to the CWU, some 20,000 Royal Mail workers were on strike during the latest action.

The union said this week that more undelivered mail is now backlogged than during the national strike of 2007. According to the union, more than 20 million items remained undelivered in London alone. The union added, "We also have reports of mail backlogs of a million items in the Bristol area, half a million in Peterborough, a quarter of a million in Leeds and failures and delays in the network across the UK.

"The situation is significantly disrupting mail with delays of over a week being reported."

Royal Mail management said that the union was exaggerating the figures.

Further strikes by postal workers are set to take place over three days from Sept 10-12. The strikes will be held at delivery offices in London and at distribution points at other locations nationwide.

Postal workers in Dundee take wildcat strike action to oppose sacking of colleague

Postal workers at the Dundee East office in Scotland staged an unofficial sit-in on September 3 to protest the dismissal of one of their colleagues by Royal Mail management. The sacking of the worker had prompted wildcat strike action by 125 workers at the depot the previous week.

The latest action took place as the appeal by the worker against the sacking began. During the protest some 70 staff staged the 70-minute sit-in in the canteen in the morning. One employee quoted in the local *Evening Telegraph* said of the action, "Workers walked out again for an hour today. The dispute is still rumbling on. The postmen believe they are being treated harshly. People got the feeling that if they didn't go back to work, though, there would be more people being laid off."

UK: Food processing workers begin unofficial strike

Food processing workers at a factory in Smethwick in the West Midlands, England, began unofficial strike action last week following the suspension of a Unite trade union shop steward. The initial strike involved more than 100 workers at the 2 Sisters Food Group plant.

According to workers at the plant, the dispute began when the shop steward reported a racist comment allegedly made by a security guard. Since the dispute began, 60 workers have been suspended by management for taking part in the sit-in.

The 2 Sisters plant supplies chicken products to the retail, food service and food manufacturing sectors. They include major supermarket chains such as Asda and Marks and Spencer.

Refuse workers begin strike action in Leeds, England

On September 7 refuse and street cleaning workers employed by Leeds City Council began indefinite strike action. The workers are members of the GMB, UNISON and Unite trade unions. The unions claim that the council plans to cut the refuse workers annual salaries by up to £6,000 from February 2011.

More than 500 workers are involved in the action, according to Unison. One worker told the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, “We would much rather be working. We don't want to cause people problems but we can't cope with such big wage cuts, nobody could.”

Leeds City Council is seeking to restructure the refuse service in an effort to save about £1 million a year.

Power workers at EDF in France return to work

Striking power workers employed by EDF at a 3,600-megawatt plant in the town of Bugey in France voted to return to work on September 9. The strike began on August 28 in a dispute over pay.

The action began when EDF halted its 900-MW nuclear reactor 4 for refuelling and maintenance. During the stoppage, employees also reduced output at Bugey's reactor 5 by 30 percent and 60 percent at reactor 2.

The strike was the latest in series of disputes by EDF power workers. From April to June, several hundred nuclear workers struck at power stations nationwide, resulting in maintenance operations being delayed.

The unions are calling for a pay increase of five percent and a 1,500 euro (\$2,174) bonus. The company is offering a 1.1 percent pay rise and individual pay schemes.

Namibia Council workers strike

Council workers in the southern Namibian coastal town of Luderitz began strike action August 27 in support of their demands for N\$350 (US\$49) per month pay increase. Over 100 workers belonging to the Namibia Public Workers' Union are taking part in the action.

The strike means rubbish has not been cleared and sewers are not being maintained. The council has obtained an order from the Labour Court in an attempt to limit the effectiveness of the action. The strikers have said they will stay out until their demands are met.

South Africa: Deals to end strikes at platinum plants

A strike of employees at Impala Platinum was called off after two weeks, when workers voted to accept a 10-percent pay rise. They had been demanding 14 percent. The strikers were under pressure from their union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), to end the dispute. Eddie Majadibodu, the NUM chief negotiator at Impala

insisted, “We can't have an indefinite strike. Management is not going to increase its offer.”

Meanwhile, 30,000 NUM members on strike at the largest South African platinum producer, Anglo Platinum, are due to vote Monday September 14 on a wage deal negotiated by the NUM and the company last Monday. The union will recommend acceptance of the offer which is a 9 to 10-percent pay increase and higher minimum wage.

Strike of Ugandan textile workers closes factory

An all-out strike of a thousand workers at the Southern Range Nyanza factory in the city of Jinja, in eastern Uganda, began on Monday 7 September. The factory, which was privatised in 1996, manufactures textile goods.

The strikers' grievances include low pay, poor treatment by management and lack of job security. Some workers say they have worked for the company for 10 years, but have had no letter of appointment. The workers complain that the company has been promising a pay increase for the last three years. According to a report in the *Ugandan Business News*, the workers, who include professionals, only earn between 100,000 and 300,000 shillings (US\$51-US\$153) per month.

The company states it is in negotiations with the workers' union. Leaders of the strike have been threatened with the sack.

Airline pilots strike in Morocco

Airline pilots working for the Moroccan airline, Royal Air Maroc (RAM), began all-out strike action September 3. This is the latest in a series of strikes by the pilots, who are members of the 400-strong Moroccan Pilots' Association. Most of the company's 33-strong fleet of planes have been grounded. The action is in opposition to the company's plans to use non-Moroccan pilots on its low cost subsidiary airlines—Atlas Blue and RAM express—and pay them 20 percent less.



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