

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Romanian public employees to launch general strike

An estimated 800,000 public sector workers are to launch a general strike on October 5 against an IMF-recommended package of cuts in public spending.

According to *Reuters* and the *Romanian Times*, a mass picket outside parliament has been called for September 15. Unions are asking teachers to boycott Monday's opening of the new academic year and the first day of school.

Russian sailors threaten hunger strike over wage arrears

The Russian sailors' trade union announced September 9 that the crew of a Russian vessel owned by the Arctic shipping company are threatening to go on hunger strike over wage arrears, reported *RIA Novosti*.

Russian prosecutors established that the Arctic shipping company had not paid wages to its 292 employees since April, and currently owes 16.9 million rubles (\$538,560).

In an address to the union, a statement from the crew of the Maksim Ammosov ship said, "[The owner] is three to four months in wage arrears... We are launching procedures for calling a general strike among the crews of vessels owned by the Arctic shipping company. We will appeal directly to the Russian president. If it does not help, we will go on a hunger strike."

According to a union official in Vladivostok, the ship is continuing to load timber, and is currently preparing to leave Russia's Far East Primorye Territory for South Korea.

Public labour inspectors in the Russian Far Eastern republic of Yakutia have imposed a 30,000 ruble (\$956) fine on the shipping company for labour code violations over wage arrears.

Eurostar cleaners strike over pay

Workers employed to clean Eurostar trains are to start a 48-hour strike in a dispute over pay, jobs and the introduction of fingerprinting to check in staff.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has accused the Eurostar's cleaning company, the Carlisle Group, of using the dispute to try to break the union, reports the *Press Association*.

The general secretary of the RMT, Bob Crow, said "he had obtained an internal company email which said managers welcomed the dispute because it gave a chance to break the RMT's 'stranglehold' on the industry."

UK bus drivers strike in pay dispute

Bus drivers staged a second 24-hour strike in the Greater Manchester area earlier this week, reported the BBC. The workers took action over a pay freeze.

Services in Wigan, Bolton and Bury were worst affected by the action involving 833 workers at the First Group bus company. Routes in Trafford, Stockport, Salford and Rochdale were affected, but school and college buses were running.

The company has said it is "not possible" to fund a pay rise in the current economic climate. Further stoppages are planned for September 21 and 28.

UK council employs companies to break refuse collectors strike

Council leaders in Leeds, West Yorkshire have begun to use private companies to try to break the strike by the city's bin workers. Leeds refuse crews and street cleaners are striking over proposals to cut their wages by up to ?5,000-a-year early in 2011.

The Yorkshire Evening Post reported that Council bosses say the new pay and grading structure has been drawn up to ensure the council meets equal pay legislation, which says people doing work assessed as being of equal value are paid the same.

The strike by the refuse collectors began on September 7. Despite the inevitable disruption, striking workers have won significant support in the city.

During the first week of the dispute, about six crews were working. The council says that figure has now risen to 13, with some of the strike-breaking cover arranged through expensive private companies.

The council has spent around ?100,000 sending letters to all the city's households explaining what people should do with their bins during the strike.

The two trade unions involved, Unison and GMB, said they were seeking legal advice over the council's tactic.

The council says three of its household waste sites are closed, Holmewell Road, Middleton; Grangefield, Pudsey and Calverley Bridge, Rodley. Lengthy traffic queues have formed outside some sites as people try to dump their rubbish.

French microchip workers strike over redundancy

Workers employed by Freescale Semiconductor's site in Toulouse took strike action September 6 over redundancy payments.

According to News, Freescale's 68,000-square-foot factory produces power management products for the automotive market. The chipmaker also added that it would lay off 236 production workers, on a total of 800, in the mobile phone semiconductor unit at the end of the month.

The unions said that around 75 percent of workers are on strike and that the production unit that operates mainly for the automotive sector is paralyzed.

Massive vote for action at Barnsley College

Lecturers at Barnsley College, South Yorkshire were to strike for one day yesterday, after a majority vote for action over restructuring.

Management at the college have outlined redundancies and changes to work roles. Eight lecturers have reportedly been forced to downgrade and take on the title of learning mentor or associate teacher—meaning pay cuts of over ?12,000. Others have been forced into early redundancy to avoid the same fate.

Municipal workers protest in Jerusalem

The *Jerusalem Post* reported on a two-day warning strike that began on September 13, called by the Union of Local Authorities, and concluded with "hundreds of municipal workers from all over the country converged on Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem for an anger-fuelled protest."

The workers were protesting the government's plan to cut local municipality budgets by millions of shekels. The demonstration was said to be "made up of diverse faces from the small towns and villages that dot the country's periphery.

"Truck drivers from Fureidis, sanitation workers from Dimona, municipal clerks from Tiberias and security guards from Afula were but a sampling of the demonstration's participants, the majority of whom clad themselves in yellow T-shirts brandishing the slogan, 'Bibi [Netanyahu's nickname] wants the citizens to pay the price.'"

Protesters later pushed past police and forced themselves through to a security barrier at the entrance to the prime minister's office. ULA workers caused large traffic delays on various major highways when they drove fire and garbage trucks, along with other municipality vehicles, down the road at low speed in protest over the government's intended cuts to their budgets.

Zimbabwean Asbestos miners strike

Over 2,000 asbestos miners at Zvishavane, in south-central Zimbabwe, are in the third week of wildcat strike action over wages unpaid since January. The state-run company has been paying certain workers, selected at random, small amounts, around US\$30 each month. The rest have received nothing.

Zimbabwean, management According to the company is bankrupt but that an American customer will pay US\$65 million, providing the workers return to work first. The striking workers have rejected this.

South African Revenues' staff return to work

After taking all-out strike action this month, staff working for South African Revenues Service returned to work this week. The workers, members of the National Health and Allied Workers Union and the Public Service Workers Union, won a pay increase of around 10 percent backdated to July 1. There was also agreement to set up a special task team to discuss other unresolved questions.

South African gold miners strike

Over 4,000 gold miners, members of the National Union of Miners (NUM), have begun strike action at the Blyvoor and Crown mines of DRDGold. The strikers are demanding a 13 percent pay increase.

The company, South Africa's fourth largest gold producer, has signed a new two-year pay agreement with the smaller United Association of South Africa, which includes an incentive deal. NUM spokesman Lesiba Seshoka said, "The strike will go on indefinitely."

Striking academics in Nigeria stage mass rally

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities at Nigeria's oldest University in Nigeria's western state of Oyo staged a street rally this week to gain public support for their two-month strike. They are demanding, among other things, that the federal government ensures better funding for university education in Nigeria.

The rally was supported by the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities and the Non-Academic Staff of Universities as well as the National Association of Nigerian Students.

The chairman of the ASUU chapter at Ibadan University told the *Nation* newspaper that they had held the rally to let people know "what those claiming to be their elected or selected representatives are doing to the future of their children, that they are comfortable with the situation because their own children are in Harvard and other high-brow universities abroad."

The National Association of Nigerian Female Students has condemned the government for abandoning talks and threatened to "take over the streets of Abuja in a mass protest."

Ghanaian gold miners mount go-slow

Miners at Gold Field's Tarkwa mine in Ghana began a go-slow this week in support of a pay demand with the prospect of an all-out strike. The mine is Ghana's largest gold mine and employs nearly 2,000 permanent workers and 3,000 contractors. The general secretary of the

General Mineworkers' Union reported talks were not progressing and that an all-out strike seemed inevitable.



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