

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

UK: Pay dispute prompts college lecturers' strike

Lecturers at five English colleges have gone on strike over a long-running pay dispute with management, which has failed to implement a 2004 recommendation for a pay increase.

Staff at Doncaster College, Rotherham College and Leeds College of Art and Design are staging the 24-hour action, while lecturers at Greenwich Community College in London and Suffolk New College in Ipswich are also out on the picket lines, according to the BBC.

The University and College Union (UCU) has said some further education lecturers would earn up to £4,500 more a year if the pay recommendation was put in place. UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt said, "Flexible agreements have been agreed at a host of other colleges with serious financial difficulties to implement the deal, so there really is no excuse for these colleges to continue to refuse paying their staff fairly."

UK: National rally of fire fighters for strike vote

On September 28, fire fighters from across the country held a rally in support of colleagues in South Yorkshire who are involved in a dispute over shifts. Around 2,000 workers attended the rally at May Day Green in Barnsley.

Fire crews in South Yorkshire voted in favour of strike action last week over plans to enforce new shift patterns. The fire service wants crews to work 12-hour day and night shifts, instead of the current nine-hour days and 15-hour nights.

A protest was also held outside the county's fire authority in Barnsley.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has accused the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service of threatening to sack 744 fire fighters to force through employment contracts. The union says members will strike within weeks unless the threat of job losses is lifted. A date for strike action has not been set while negotiations between the two parties continue.

UK: Postal strikes continue

Strike action this week disrupted mail services at 16 postal delivery offices across central Scotland. Royal Mail said managers would handle

special delivery and tracked items, but ordinary mail faced disruption.

The strike is part of an on-going UK-wide action by postal workers against rationalisation, which management terms "modernisation."

The areas affected were Alloa, Anstruther, Bathgate, Bo'ness, Cowdenbeath, Cumbernauld, Dalkeith, Dunfermline, Grangemouth, Lochgelly, Rutherford, Stirling, and parts of Glasgow and Edinburgh.

UK: London Underground line staff to strike over workloads

Workers on London Underground's Victoria Line are to stage a 24-hour strike October 5 in a dispute over workloads, according to BBC reports.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) claims management has gone back on an agreement to reduce the number of return journeys a driver has to make in one day.

The RMT said since 2003 there had been an agreement in place on the line that five rounder turns—where train operators undertake five return journeys in a day—would be minimized. This agreement was made in recognition of the lack of air cooling systems in the drivers' cabs, the union said. The shifts having been effectively eliminated from the Monday to Friday rota until now.

The union claims since the opening of the new Brixton Depot, drivers have been put on five round trips, with management saying air cooling was now acceptable.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, said, "This underhand attempt to extract an extra 20 percent from the working day out of our members has provoked this action on the Victoria Line and we would urge the management side to re-open serious negotiations to resolve this issue."

As well as going on strike, staff will also be refusing to drive more than four round trips on the line from September 30.

Germany: Shipyard workers protest closure

An estimated 2,000 workers demonstrated at the northern German seaport of Emden on September 25 against the proposed closure of its shipyard, which has been in operation for over a century.

On September 29, ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS), which also owns shipyards Blohm & Voss in Hamburg and HDW in Kiel, sold Nordseewerke shipyard to wind farm maker Siag Schaaf Industrie. According to plans reported by the *Local*, TKMS will sell parts of its shipyard to Siag Schaaf Industrie. Siag would take on between 700 and 1,400 workers to build offshore wind farms.

The paper reported, "Hundreds of people gathered at the shipyard to protest, while local farmers brought in a tractor convoy and horns to show their solidarity."

“According to ThyssenKrupp, which said it planned on remaining engaged in the city, Emden will become an innovative location for offshore wind farms. The company plans to retain 375 of the shipyard’s 1,196 employees, while Siag will take on 721 and another 100 are expected to leave voluntarily or retire.”

Fears abound that the closing of the shipyard not only signals “a loss of a tradition,” but would have grave results for many subcontractors and adjoining industries in the area.

Ireland: Nationwide protest planned against budget cuts

According to the *Irish Independent* October 1, “Unions have urged up to 650,000 people to stop work during a national protest that could cause massive disruption next month.”

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has announced marches in protest at the next round of government budget cuts, which include unprecedented social welfare cuts and the imposition of up to a 10 percent pay cut across the public sector.

According to the paper, “Union leaders reignited a campaign they suspended in the spring yesterday after declaring they had been ‘screwed’ at useless government talks.”

The National Day of Action by private and public sector workers in Dublin and several other locations across the country will take place on November 6. The fact that the protest is on a Friday is being touted by the union as proof that it would cause more disruption than the protest by 120,000 workers organised by the ICTU last March, which was held on a Saturday.

The biggest public sector union, IMPACT, is also balloting for industrial action. However, it says it will not strike unless the government reduces wages, imposes compulsory redundancies or further cuts in pensions.

Egypt: Public transport workers threaten industrial action

Al Masry Al Youm reports that drivers for the Public Transport Authority are threatening to strike October 3, after the government failed to follow through on promises made during the negotiations that ended a two-day strike in August.

August’s strike concluded with most of the drivers’ demands being met. The government agreed to an 8 percent salary increase and a monthly food allowance of LE120, and said it would consider paying drivers and ticket-takers compensation for potential exposure to disease.

But the drivers say the agreement on exemption from traffic fines has not been kept. Drivers recently filed a lawsuit against the Interior Ministry when a colleague was charged with approximately LE 10,000 in fines.

A strike on October 3 would coincide with the resumption of the school year, which would have an especially large impact.

According to a report by the Egyptian Labour Union’s Statistics Authority, released September 30 and published in the *Egyptian Gazette*, Egypt was hit by 40 labour strikes during the first half of the year over pay and conditions.

The report reveals that around 11,500 workers took part in industrial action, while a further 52,000 threatened to strike. Thirty of the strikes were held by workers in the services sector, while 10 were held by

workers in the industrial sector. Civil servants staged the largest number of labour protests.

Only two of the strikes resulted in workers receiving improved pay or conditions, the report said.

Egypt: Textile workers’ strike is partial victory

The *Daily News Egypt* reported September 18, that “Workers in a Mahalla textiles factory have been awarded partial back-payments of their salaries a day after hundreds of workers protested in the streets of the Delta town.”

Workers from the Aboul Seba’ factory protested against factory owner Ismail Aboul Seba’ September 16 after management reneged on assurances that they would be paid their outstanding wages. Mohamed Maree writes on his blog egytimes.org that a notice has now been pinned up inside the factory announcing that all employees must take an obligatory 15-day unpaid holiday.

Iran: Textile workers go on strike

Around 250 workers at the Crepe Naz textiles factory in Harsin County, western Iran, stopped work September 12-15 to protest against not being paid their wages for the past four months, according to a report by The Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers (translated by the Iranian Workers’ Solidarity Network).

The Crepe Naz factory is affiliated to Mellat Bank and operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Industries and Mines. Its workers work a three-shift pattern in a day, said the report.

The workers eventually said they would accept 200,000 tomans (US\$202.47) as the “first instalment” and that in late September they would receive the remaining 275,000 tomans (US\$253.09) of their wages. They also issued an ultimatum to their employer that if they are not paid their full wages by late October they would strike again.

South Africa: Clothing workers set to return to work

After a two-week strike, 50,000 clothing workers returned to return to work Wednesday, September 30. The workers, members of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU), were on strike against their employer Appelo. The union demand was for 7.9 percent wage rise for workers in metropolitan areas and 11.5 percent wage rise in others.

South Africa: Gold miners strike enters third week

Around 4,000 gold miners, members of the National Union of Miners (NUM), marched to the offices of DRDGold in Carletonville on Tuesday.

Their original demand for a 13 percent pay increase has been pared back to 10 percent. The strike is affecting the Blyvoor and Crown operations

run by DRDGold. According to the company the strike means the loss of R2.4 millions (US\$319,000) worth of gold per day at the Blyvoor site.

Namibia: Road construction workers strike

Road construction workers employed by the Roads Construction Company (RCC) are on strike for improved wages. The workers are demanding a 21 percent increase for labourers, 14 percent for drivers and machine operators and 10 percent for foremen. The strike started last week. Workers are based at Ongwediva in the north of Namibia.

The workers are currently members of the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU), but the workers have accused the union of betrayal as they have agreed to the company offer of 10 percent across the board. They are considering joining the Public Service Union of Namibia (PSUN) if they fail to win their demands.

Kenya: University workers vow to strike

Over 27,000 university workers, members of the Universities' Academic Staff Union, Universities Non-Teaching Staff Union and the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers were due to commence strike action September 30.

The action was against the failure of the government to pay an agreed pay increase for this year, which should have been paid from July 1.

Zimbabwe: Police open fire on striking miners

Police fired on striking asbestos miners at the Shabanie mine in the town of Zvishavane last week. The miners are taking action over unpaid wages dating back to January. According to SW Radio Africa News, three of the miners who were fired on had to appear in court on Monday of this week on alleged public disorder offences. Two of them had to be wheeled into court in wheelchairs, having been shot in the legs.

SW Radio Africa News reports that police broke up a demonstration of over 1,000 miners and their families at the mine using teargas and violence. The International Trade Union Confederation, based in Brussels, sent a letter to the Zimbabwean government condemning the action of the police.



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