

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

France: Industrial action hits Eurostar trains

On August 31 managers employed by Eurostar took strike action aimed at stopping the “self despatch” of Eurostar services from Paris.

Members of the TSSA rail union are refusing to take part in any training, induction or coaching in relation to self-despatch of Eurostar trains by train managers, according to a TSSA press release.

Eurostar workers voted by almost 92 percent in favour of industrial action when the rail corporation tried to impose new working practices.

France: Energy workers to join pensions strike

Workers employed in the energy sector have said they would join a national one-day strike next week, in protest at planned pension reforms by the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Reuters reported, “All of France’s main union confederations have agreed to take part in the Sept. 7 strike in protest at plans to raise the retirement age to 62 from 60, and sectoral unions are gradually presenting their strike plans.”

Workers in public transport, teaching and telecommunications, among others, will be involved in the action. Unions say they mobilised two million in June to protest the pension proposals.

Greece: Five-hour public transport strike planned

A five-hour strike will take place this month by workers employed on the public transport system and the Hellenic Railways Organization (OSE) in protest against privatizations, firings, wage cuts and cuts in benefits.

The action is to be staged during the first 10 days of September.

UK: BA cabin crew in fresh strike threat

Cabin crew at British Airways are considering a fresh wave of strike action if no resolution is reached soon over ongoing issues concerning jobs and contractual agreements.

The dispute began last November, when BA announced it was cutting crew pay and reducing staffing. The removal of travel concessions—some

essential for work travel—from striking workers has since become one of the main obstacles in the dispute.

Cabin crew rejected BA’s latest offer in July.

A spokeswoman for Unite, which represents 90 percent of BA’s 12,000 cabin crew, said a new strike ballot was “always an option” and that there would be a mass meeting of its members at Kempton September 6.

The present dispute is believed to have cost the airline £150 million. Shares in BA have fallen 4 percent in the last month.

UK: Strike action set for Coca Cola’s North London plant

Workers at Coca Cola’s Edmonton plant in north London have voted overwhelmingly to take strike action to reject the company’s 2 percent pay offer.

The Unite union’s regional officer, Wayne King, said, “With inflation touching five percent, the offer by this highly profitable global company is unrealistic and, given the massive profits of this corporation, frankly insulting... Coca Cola is in no way suffering during the recession yet it wants to force its workers, in one of the world’s most expensive cities, to accept a poverty pay deal.”

The workers voted 81 percent in favour of strike action and 92 percent in favour of action short of a strike.

Coca Cola produces about 2 million bottles every 24 hours at the 150-employee Edmonton site and nationally employs a workforce of more than 4,000.

UK: Five-day council strike looms for mid-October

The Kirklees, West Yorkshire branch of the union Unison has decided to ballot its 8,500 members on industrial action in a dispute about redundancies and sick days.

Thousands of council workers are to vote on a strike that could close schools, disrupt refuse collection and care work for five days next month across Huddersfield.

The last Kirklees Council workers’ strike took place in July 2008. Eighty schools across the district closed and no bins were emptied during the two-day stoppage, leading to a backlog that took weeks to clear.

The current dispute centres on the council’s plan to reduce its non-school workforce from 11,200 to 9,700 as part of public spending cuts. Around 400 staff have already taken voluntary redundancy or early retirement in the past year. The council is now set to make compulsory redundancies.

The union is advancing a formal opposition to the “Bradford Formula”, the mathematical equation giving every employee a score based on the number and length of their sickness absences. The formula is designed to remove staff whose frequent absences hit productivity.

Kirklees Unison members will be balloted between September 9 and 29.

UK: Scottish council workers could strike over pay cuts

Strike action is being considered by Scottish council workers, after local authorities announced the imposition of pay cuts on 150,000 low-paid staff.

Tens of thousands of refuse collectors, school support staff, housing and social workers will be affected by the council executives' decision. Local authorities management organisation Cosla said that an "unprecedented financial situation" had forced executives to withdraw from pay negotiations with unions and impose a miniscule 0.65 percent pay rise on workers who already earn as little as £10,000 a year.

On top of this, authorities are to impose a pay freeze for the next two years.

Ireland: Wildcat strike by power station transport workers

An unofficial strike by Bord na Móna workers at a County Longford power station is set to continue after staff rejected proposals to return to work, the *Irish Times* reported August 27.

A ballot of the 40 suspended transport workers was taken at the Lough Ree power station.

The workers went on strike last month over payment of overtime during a period when the power station was closed for extensive repairs. Workers have lost between €70 and €150 a week in overtime payments as a result, because they were not delivering peat to the station at night when it was closed.

The plant reopened four weeks earlier than expected and workers were due to go back to work on full pay. The workers refused to return to work and bring peat to the station. They were suspended last week by Bord na Móna without pay.

The union has opposed the strike.

Russia: Metalworkers strike in demand of unpaid wages

Over 80 workers at the Ikar metal plant in the Russian city of Kurgan have gone on strike to demand their overdue wages, reported RFE/RL's Russian Service, August 26. The total workforce at the plant is around 1,700.

Union leader Stanislav Sorokin told RFE/RL that the plant's administration owed over 10 million rubles (about \$329,000) to the workers. He said the plant's leadership was avoiding direct talks with the union.

Output at the plant declined by 44 percent last year and continues to fall.

Kurgan Oblast Governor Oleg Bogomolov has ordered the plant's managers to draft an "anticrisis plan" by September 10, saying that the plant could be declared bankrupt if they failed to do so.

Kuwait bus drivers strike

One hundred eighty-five public bus drivers at the Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) went on strike last month, "since the company has been ignoring their repeated requests on the withdrawal of a decision on reducing their salaries by KD 50", sources told the *Arab Times*, August 29.

According to the paper, "sources said the strike led to chaos in many government sectors because a large number of the expatriate workers depend on public buses to reach their work places."

The drivers have threatened to continue the strike until their demands are met. The workers were angered by the fact that the salaries of the company officials have increased, while their wages have decreased. They have appealed to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour.

The drivers told the *Arab Times* they have conveyed to the minister the terrible living conditions and the unhealthy accommodation the company has provided them infested by bugs and flies. Chairman of the Workers Union at the Kuwait Public Transport Company, Meshaal Al-Enezi, said the drivers have gone on strike because the company has not paid them the KD 50 that was approved by the government in 2009.

Al-Enezi added the company has increased the salaries of managers and CEOs by as much as KD 300 and KD 500 in addition to the KD 52,816 compensation paid to the board chairman. The drivers also claimed that they are forced to work for 10 continuous hours in summer and during Ramadan.

Nigerian judiciary workers propose strike action

Court workers belonging to the Sokoto state chapter of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) have given the state government notice of strike action. In a letter dated August 23, the union wrote giving a two-week ultimatum to the government to bring in the previously agreed Consolidated Judiciary Salary structure (CONJUSS).

This would be the second round of action taken to try and get the agreement implemented. The union pointed out that in spite of the recommendation by the Judiciary Service Commission that the Sokoto state government implements the agreement, they have failed to do so.

South African car component workers begin strike action

Following the strike by car manufacturing workers last month, car component workers began strike action Wednesday, September 1. The eight-day strike by over 30,000 car workers was ended with the workers winning a 10 percent pay increase. Their demand had been for a 15 percent rise. Car manufacturers estimate 17,000 cars were lost as a result of the strike.

The current strike involves around 70,000 car component workers. Volkswagen say it will lead to a "substantial loss of volume". General Motors said the effects of the action would hit their operations, "resulting in loss of production".

The workers are seeking a 15 percent pay increase. The employers' current offer is 6 percent. In a separate dispute, which began on Monday,

workers in the tyre and rubber industries began strike action. This led to a complete stoppage of production at the Dunlop, Bridgestone and Continental factories.

South African public sector worker strike enters third week

The more than 1-million-strong strike by public sector workers has entered its third week. With President Jacob Zuma back from his visit to China, the unions have been in talks with the government.

The government has upped its offer to a 7.5 percent pay increase and a R800 monthly housing allowance. The workers' claim had been for a pay increase of 8.6 percent and a R1,000 housing allowance.

COSATU and the Independent Labour Caucus (ILC) unions rejected the latest offer. However, solidarity action that was due to be taken by COSATU members (other than the public sector workers currently on strike) beginning Thursday, September 2 has been put on hold. The solidarity action would have more than doubled the current 1 million workers taking strike action.



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