

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 September 2010

German steel workers strike over wages and conditions

Around 85,000 steel workers across the northwestern part of Germany have embarked on warning strikes in support of a 6 percent wage increase and equal treatment of agency workers.

The strike covers the states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Bremen. On September 22, workers at Salzgitter, Germany's second largest steelmaker went on strike. According to a spokesperson for the IG Metall union, the strike involved at least 1,300 employees.

The warning strikes are to end on September 24.

German health workers strike over declining care, fewer doctors

Thousands of general health practitioners shut their offices September 22 in protest at the government's proposed plans to reform the national health care system, warning of declining care and fewer doctors.

Around 1,000 doctors, together with employees and patients, held a demonstration in the city of Essen while around 3,000 were expected at a demonstration in the southwestern town of Sindelfingen.

Organizers said that one in four doctors' practices stayed shut throughout the day.

The German cabinet is to discuss a reform package proposed by Health Minister Philipp Roesler next week, which includes increased fees for patients and savings from insurers, hospitals and doctors, meant to fill the system's €11 billion (\$14.3 billion) funding gap the government foresees for 2011.

According to a report by Munich-based daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, fees rose by 11 percent from 2007 to 2009. The increase was even greater in some areas, rising 24.1 percent in Hamburg.

Macclesfield, England: AstraZeneca workers continue strike over pension changes

Strike action over changes to pension arrangements at the Macclesfield pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca have entered their third week.

Workers at the firm are set to stage a four-hour walk-out this week in

protest at plans to phase out its defined benefit scheme. Previous strikes on September 8 and 15 saw hundreds of workers take industrial action in protest.

The changes to the AstraZeneca scheme will mean that pay rises will not be considered as pensionable salary for the 2,500 members currently in the pension scheme. The scheme was closed to new entrants in 2000.

Leisure centre staff strike in Swindon, England

Swindon's Link Leisure Centre will be closed September 25 and 26 due to strike action by staff over council plans to take away weekend and overnight allowances. The Unison union said some of its members were now faced with not being able to pay their bills.

As a result of the industrial action the Swindon Wildcats are to play their home league game against Guildford 24 hours earlier on Friday night. The Swindon Dolphins' swimming championships, also scheduled for this weekend, have been moved to October 10 and 16, while all skating lessons have been cancelled.

Slovenian construction workers strike over nonpayment of wages

Over a thousand workers at the insolvent Veljenje-based construction company Vegrad took strike action September 20 after not having received their wages for the month of August. The workers are also owed payments for past months.

Romanian public sector workers set to strike over wage cuts

At least 30,000 public sector workers across the country are set to strike September 27 over wage cuts.

Prime Minister Emil Boc slashed public sector wages by 25 percent in July to meet the conditions of a €20 billion (\$25 billion) loan from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union.

Romania's economy is expected to shrink by more than 1 percent this year, after declining by 7.1 percent in 2009.

The leader of one public sector union with 70,000 members, Vasile Marica, suggested the strike was illegal. He said that even if it went ahead,

it would not disrupt work at tax and financial institutions, national news agency Agerpres reported.

Greek truckers protest at parliament over freight liberalisation

Truck owners and drivers from across the country staged a protest march September 21, to parliament in downtown Athens, to deliver a petition demanding the withdrawal of the draft law liberalizing road freight transport.

Tension briefly flared outside the parliament when the protesters arrived at the Monument of the Unknown Soldier to hold a sit-in demonstration. Minor scuffles occurred when police tried to block the marchers from approaching the parliament building.

The protesters spent the night outside the parliament. According to professional truckers, over 750 trucks and fuel trucks were parked along roads in the Attica prefecture September 22.

Greek railway workers set to strike

Workers employed in the railway OSE have announced a series of work stoppages to be launched September 22, in protest at the measures promoted by the government to restructure and reform Greece's debt-ridden railway organisation. Accumulated debts have run to an estimated €10 billion.

Spanish miners begin strikes to demand unpaid wages

On September 22, miners began the first of two planned 48-hour strikes to demand unpaid wages and EU approval of a plan to let Spain favour domestic coal over imports as part of aid for the loss-making industry.

A spokesman for Spain's biggest union grouping, Comisiones Obreras, said all of the country's approximately 7,400 coal miners had responded to the strike call and that many were continuing protests that had been under way for weeks.

About one-third of the miners say they have not been paid for several weeks, and miners have in recent weeks blocked roads and held underground sit-ins.

Chairman of coal producers' group Carbunion, Victorino Alonso, said earlier this month that firms could not afford to pay miners because they had not sold any coal since February.

A second strike is set for September 29-30 and will coincide with a nationwide general strike.

Egyptian textile workers demonstrate over unpaid wages

Workers at Mahalla's Aboul Seba' textile factory demonstrated again this week over unpaid wages. Over 4,000 workers are employed in the three Aboul Seba' factories in Mahalla.

One of the striking workers, El-Sayed Rizq El-Shishtawy, told *Daily News Egypt* that employees have been on unpaid mandatory leave since the beginning of September. He and the other workers had only been receiving a fraction of their wages for the three months preceding their leave.

"They've been giving us LE 150 per month when most of us are paid about LE 1,000 per month," said El-Shishtawy. "When we went back to work last week after the holiday they made us take, [manager] Ismail Hussein told us that we'll be off work for another 15 days."

Workers at Aboul Seba' held protests over the same issue in January and July of this year. In July 2009, clashes erupted when 500 Aboul Seba' workers gathered on the street outside the company factory and security used force to push them back inside the factory premises. Workers responded by throwing stones.

Nigerian doctors in two states continue strike action

Medical staff including doctors have been on strike in Delta state for the past two months in pursuit of a 100 percent pay increase. The increase has been sanctioned by the federal government, but the state government has said it will pay only 70 percent of the increase. The state governor, Emmanuel Uduaghan, threatened striking medical staff in the 62 general and teaching hospitals of Delta state that if they refuse to return to work they may be sacked.

Meanwhile doctors in Lagos state resolved at an emergency congress held September 20 to continue their five-week-old strike. The strike is by 12,000 medical staff belonging to the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD). They are demanding the state government implements the previously nationally negotiated Consolidated Medical Salary Structure (VONMES).

Kenyan City hall staff in Kampala down tools

Staff working for Kampala city council (KCC) went on strike September 20 over non-payment of wages. The Kampala town clerk, Ruth Kijjambu, was suspended over a row over signatories. The mayor then froze five KCC bank accounts controlled by the town clerk. These accounts include those used to pay KCC staff.

The members of KCC Labour Union took strike action demanding the accounts be re-opened. Union chairman Isaac Ssejjoba, explained, "We have with immediate effect suspended KCC work until council accounts are opened. Our focus is not solely on salaries but the entire service delivery of council".

Zambian hotel staff strike

Workers employed at the Sun International hotel in Livingstone took strike action last week. The strike was in support of a K 700,000 (US\$146) across-the-board salary increase. Management were offering 8 percent which for many employees only on K 300,000 (US\$62) a month

would mean a raise of K 24,000 (US\$5). The strike caused management to transfer guests to other hotels.

Rea Vaya bus stations.

Zimbabwean airline pilots strike disrupts Mugabe flight arrangements

The ongoing strike by more than 40 Air Zimbabwe pilots led to “special arrangements” having to be made to fly President Robert Mugabe and his contingency to a United Nations meeting in the United States. The pilots are demanding pay arrears and condemned the government announcement that it is to spend US\$400 million on buying two new Airbuses. The pilots’ salary arrears amount to US\$1.2 million.

Zimbabwe: Teachers threaten strike at Mukomberanwa school

Teachers at Mukomberanwa secondary school have threatened strike action over non-payment of incentives. The headmaster of the school, who recently committed suicide by taking poison, is alleged to have taken money intended for the teacher incentive scheme.

South African platinum miners strike continues

The strike by more than 8,000 miners at the Northam Platinum mine in Limpopo province has entered its third week. The miners are demanding a 15 percent wage increase and a living allowance of R3500 (US\$500). The miners, members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), last week rejected a company offer of 8.5 percent.

The NUM and the company were due to meet again on September 21 under the auspices of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

South African iron ore miners may strike

Miners belonging to the NUM and working for Kumba Iron Ore may strike over pay demands. Talks between the NUM and the company broke down this week. The NUM demand is for a 7.5-10 percent pay increase depending on category. The company is offering 7-9.5 percent.

Unofficial transport strike in Johannesburg

Staff working for the Rea Vaya rapid bus transport system took wildcat strike action on Monday to demand permanent contracts. They have been on temporary contracts since the service began over a year ago. The current contracts are due to expire at the end of next month.

The strikers work as cashiers, marshals, security and cleaning staff at the



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact