

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

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

German steel strike over wages dispute

Around 600 steelworkers walked out at ThyssenKrupp in Duisburg, Germany, last week, when short-term contract employees demanded the same pay as full-time employees. The IG Metall union said 11,500 of its members were on strike by September 24. The union has said it is hoping employers will offer a 6 percent rise. The steel industry employers' association has rejected the workers' demands.

Industrial action hits mass transit across Bavaria

Mass transit workers, including train drivers, controllers and service employees, in the cities of Munich, Nuremberg and Augsburg, took action September 24 in an ongoing wage dispute.

The workers last struck September 10 and 15. Deputy leader of the DBB union Willi Russ told news agency DAPD, "It was in their hands whether or not to prevent a strike during Oktoberfest in Munich. But they didn't use the opportunity. And our offer is still valid—as soon as the Bavarian community employers association signals its ready to talk, we're available." The drivers now work 42 to 43 hours per week to earn a wage that was agreed to at 38.5 hours per week.

UK biscuit factory workers take action

Around 360 workers and transport employees from the Tunnock's biscuit factory in Uddingston, Lanarkshire, took two days of strike action September 23 and 28 over pay. An

11th-hour pay offer made by the firm was rejected by workers. The union is to ballot members on the 2 percent offer and warned there may be more strikes if the dispute, which has been going on since July, is not resolved.

Tunnock's, famous for its teacakes and caramel wafers, will be given seven days of notice if any further stoppages are scheduled. Company directors received a 62 percent pay increase last year.

Seven-day strike at UK glass plant

Workers at Tyneside Safety Glass in Gateshead began a week-long strike September 20, over pay and changes to working hours.

The Unite union states the action was called after the company imposed a pay freeze for the second year running, combined with changes to shift patterns. In some cases, the changes will add an extra 10 hours to the working week, taking some workers to the maximum 48-hour working week stipulated under the European Working Time Directive.

The workers at the glass plant, who are paid only just above the national minimum wage, had their pay frozen in 2008 despite the company having a full order book. Unite said that "the employer has also told union representatives that they intend to break the union on site."

Unite assistant general secretary Tony Burke said, "Telling workers that they intend to 'beat the union' is harking back to the 1920s.... We remain available to talk at any time and urge management to get around the table so we can have a negotiated settlement."

A further seven-day strike is planned from October 4.

Russian construction workers in hunger strike at Navy HQ

Twenty construction workers at the headquarters of the Russian Navy's Northern Fleet at St. Petersburg began a hunger strike September 27, to demand eight months of unpaid wages.

Wage arrears already amount to 65 million rubles (US\$2.1 million, €1.6 million) among employees, trade union leader Natalia Dorovatovskaya told AFP.

Dorovatovskaya said conditions had become “catastrophic” in the construction arm of the Northern Fleet, which answers to the Russian Defence Ministry and employs some 132 people.

The strikers are threatening to block the highway to Severomorsk, where Russia’s Northern Fleet is based some 16 miles from the port city of Murmansk, if they have not received wages by today. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin personally intervened in June 2009, when angry factory workers blocked a key highway in a dispute over wage arrears in the northern town of Pikalevo.

Botswana public sector workers in go-slow

Last week, nurses and teachers in Botswana began a go-slow, boycotting duties for which they are not paid. The workers are represented by five unions, under the Botswana Federation of Public Sector Unions.

The action follows deadlock in the talks between the federation and the Directorate of Public Service Management over grievances raised by the different unions. The unions gave the employers a week to address the grievances.

Teachers talking to the *Sunday Standard* explained, “We no longer stay behind to help students who are preparing for their examinations.... We have suspended all extracurricular activities.”

Last Friday, the nurses suspended their action, begun on Monday, following an agreement between their union and the Ministry of Health to set up a joint working group due to meet September 27.

South African Pick n Pay workers strike

More than 27,000 workers belonging to the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) and working for Pick n Pay began strike action September 27. Pick n Pay is South Africa’s second largest grocery chain.

The union is demanding a 12 percent pay rise and that staff be given a 10 percent discount on basic foods at the stores. They want a guarantee of 120 hours work per month for employees on variable hours and for the pay agreement to cover a year.

Union Deputy General Secretary Mduduzi Mbongwe explained that Pick n Pay management were expecting employees to have no rise next year, and in 2012 just an

adjustment in line with inflation. He said, “This is likely to lead to a cut in real wages for workers and to further impoverish already poor working class families.”

Kenyan union accuses company of sacking women who became pregnant

The Tailors and Textile Workers Union of Kenya has accused the Athi River-based Global EPZ (Export Processing Zone) company of unlawfully sacking 24 women on September 16. According to the union, they were dismissed because they had become pregnant.

General Secretary Rev Joel Chebii explained, “Pregnant women are being sacked so they cannot proceed on maternity leave.”

Companies were set up in EPZs to take advantage of the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to be able to export to America on favourable terms. Kenya is now one of the main exporters of textiles to the US. Eighty percent of Kenyan textile workers are women.

Zambian state doctors strike

Doctors belonging to the Resident Doctors Association of Zambia (RDAZ) began strike action Monday, September 27. RDAZ has been in discussion with the Ministry of Health and the Medical Association of Zambia over the last two years. The doctors’ dispute is over the conditions they face in the public health sector.

A report in the *Times* of Zambia, September 29, said the government had begun talks with the doctors’ representatives to try and resolve the strike, which was beginning to have a serious impact.



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