

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

## French port and refinery workers' strike affects global oil movement

On Thursday the access road to the oil depot at Marseille port's Fos-Lavera oil terminal in southern France was blocked by strike action of refinery and port workers. Trucks were prevented from loading oil. The action is the latest by workers at the port, who have blocked the sea approach to the terminal for the past eleven days.

The strike is being held to protest attempts by the Sarkozy government to reform the French port under legislation passed by parliament in 2008. This will lead to jobs being transferred to the private sector. The workers are also protesting the pension restructuring currently being legislated by the government.

The action by the workers at Fos-Lavera has had a widespread global impact. Reuters has calculated that demand for at least 8 million barrels of crude oil, or nearly 10 percent of the daily global total, has not been met so far as a result. The port authority in Marseille revealed this week that there are at least 32 oil vessels waiting off the southern French coast. Some 6.5 million barrels of oil are waiting to be processed in 11 of the tankers at the port. Other estimates suggest a total of 44 vessels are waiting.

On Thursday port management issued a statement saying they would meet a delegation from the CGT union later that day in a bid to settle the dispute.

The oil terminal is the world's third largest, with oil traffic of some 60 million metric tons per year. Fos-Lavera supplies oil to six of the 12 refineries in France.

## Greek civil servants strike

Members of the Greek civil servants' union trade union Adedy held a 24-hour strike Thursday to protest the creation of a new salary structure. The measures introduced by the government of George Papandreou will result in further cuts to civil servants' income. According to Adedy, civil servants have lost 25 percent of their income in cuts introduced in the last 10 months.

The action is not being supported by the main Greek trade union body, the General Confederation of Greek Workers. It is the latest in a series called by Adedy following the May €110 billion bailout package agreed between the social democratic PASOK government, the International

Monetary Fund and the European Union.

As well as hitting government provided services, the action is also expected to lead to the cancelling of dozens of international flights. Demonstrations were held in central Athens and Thessaloniki.

## Supermarket staff strike in Poland

Employees in many of the larger supermarkets across Poland, including Biedronka, Carrefour, Real, Bomi, Praktiker, and Makro Cash and Carry, are to protest this week in a dispute over pay and conditions.

Workers are staging a work-to-rule. They intend to hand out leaflets to customers explaining their grievances, which include the low rate of pay for shopfloor workers (not much above the minimum wage) and the ever-increasing number of duties they are expected to perform.

The staff are rarely employed on full-time contracts. Jobs have also been lost when big supermarkets cut costs by allowing suppliers to stack shelves.

## French power workers set to strike October 12

Power workers employed by EDF are set to strike in France from October 12 to protest the government's attack on pensions. Legislation reforming pensions is currently going through parliament.

The action has been called by the CGT trade union. EDF is the world's largest electricity supplier.

Railway workers have also called for industrial action to be held on October 12 to protest the restructuring of pension rights.

## Bank workers ballot on strike in Ireland

A ballot is to be held on October 12 of 600 workers employed at the Bank of Scotland (Ireland) on a mandate for industrial action. The dispute is centred on a clarification of the working terms and conditions of employment at a new company, as well as the resolution of the current pension deficit.

According to the *Irish Times*, the union said the decision to ballot was taken after a further failure on the part of management to provide any clarity on the establishment of a separate company to handle the winding down of the bank's operations in Ireland. Bank of Scotland (Ireland) (BoSI) announced plans to close its local operations by December just six

weeks ago with the loss of 40 jobs.

### **Portuguese general strike to be held on November 24**

A general strike has been called by Portugal's largest trade union federation, to be held on November 24. The action has been called to protest the minority Socialist Party government's plans for austerity measures, which will hit civil servants hard.

The strike would be the first of its kind since 2007.

### **Israeli local Authority workers strike after no agreement reached in dispute**

The Union of Local Authorities in Israel began strike action October 5, after "seven months of negotiations which did not yield results," according to a union notice.

Striking workers blocked major intersections, including Sha'ar Hagai on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road, Hatishbi, Yad Mordechai, Bar Ilan, and others.

The union is demanding that the government return NIS 600 million that it has cut from the local authorities' budget and NIS 500 million that were cut from the education budget.

The action means the halting of garbage collection and the closure of municipal and local council offices. Telephones will not be answered and there will be no welfare services, street or lighting repairs.

### **Workers strike across five Egyptian governorates**

Almost 700 nurses and other workers at al-Azhar hospital in Damietta Governorate launched a strike October 4 at the hospital's campus to protest non-payment of wages.

Amal Farouk, nursing sector head, said that the strike intended to show the hospital administration the protestors will not back down until their wages are paid. Nurse Khaled Abd al-Aziz said the hospital's administration has refused to pay salary increases and incentives stipulated by hospital regulations.

*Al Masry Al Youm* reported that Fayoum Governorate "witnessed dozens of truck drivers protesting governor Galal Mostafa Saeed's decision to refuse the return of their license plates unless they pay a fine of LE10,000—imposed on the truck drivers for alleged parking and obstruction of traffic violations."

The truck drivers deny the allegations and insist that they cannot afford to pay the fine.

Employees at Banha University in Qalyubiyah Governorate organized a strike at the university's administration building to protest Banha's President Dr. Mohamed Safwat Thahrán's decision to extend working hours and to cancel paid vacations.

The protestors threatened to organize a sit-in if their demands were not met.

Hundreds of Kandaliya district residents in al-Gharbiya Governorate October 4 "refused to meet with a delegation sent to convince them to leave their homes and move into homes provided by the governorate under the pretext of developing the government-deemed 'unsafe' area,"

reported *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The same source reported that hundreds of hospital workers demonstrated in front of al-Hussein University Hospital to protest low salaries and poor working conditions. Workers at the radiology department demanded pay equity with their nursing colleagues.

### **Aboul Seba textile workers resume sit-in at factory in Cairo, Egypt**

This week textile workers employed by Aboul Seba' in Cairo, Egypt resumed their sit-in after the owners broke a promise to pay outstanding salaries and resolve workers' futures.

The sit-in on September 18 began as a dispute over unpaid wages. It was called off on September 25. The company agreed to make a decision about their future employment with the company on October 5 and said that workers would receive the money owed.

According to the *Tadamon* (Solidarity) website, workers reported seeing machines inside the factory being broken up and removed on September 28. In response, they surrounded the factory to try to prevent their removal.

A statement that appeared on *Tadamon* read, "Aboul Seba' workers' problems have been ongoing for more than two years, yet the government has not taken any action against the company owner who has laid off more than 2,500 workers—about half of whom are women."

### **Zambian doctors call off strike**

Doctors belonging to the Resident Doctors Association of Zambia who began strike action September 27 have returned to work. The doctors struck over conditions in the public health sector. Although the doctors have resumed work, negotiations with the government over conditions will continue.

### **Zimbabwean teachers begin slowdown**

Secondary school teachers belonging to the Teachers Union of Zimbabwe have embarked on a work slowdown in pursuit of a pay rise. If the government does not respond by October 10, the teachers say they will begin a sit-in.

Two other teachers' unions, the Zimbabwe Teachers association and the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe have given a month's notice of strike action in their pursuit of the pay rise.

Teachers currently receive about US\$150 a month and in line with other government workers, are seeking a salary of around US\$500, which they say is necessary to meet the cost of living requirements in Zimbabwe.

### **Council workers at Kisii Municipal Council strike in Kenya**

Around 300 council employees at Kisii Municipal Council began strike action at the beginning of the week. On Tuesday, as part of their protest they locked the town clerk and engineer out of their offices, accusing them

of corruption.

Amongst their grievances is the lack of protective clothing, adequate tools to do their work, harassment and victimization by chief officers and councilors, and corruption. The Kisii acting district commissioner, Mohammed Mwabudzo, along with union officials and council chief officers held an eight-hour meeting to try and resolve the dispute.

The workers jeered Mwabudzo when he addressed them and asked them to return to work. One worker said they would not “resume work until all the chief officers and departmental heads are replaced.”

### **Kenyan airline workers set to strike**

Airline workers at Kenya Airways, represented by the Aviation and Allied Workers Union (AAWU), have given notice of strike action to begin Wednesday October 12. The AAWU says around 5,000 members, including those employed by other airlines would be involved in the strike action.

It follows an attempt by the union to get Kenya Airlines to backdate an agreement signed in April this year by 15 months. The company has said it will only backdate it by seven months. The April agreement followed three days of strike action by 3,000 cabin crew, ground staff and engineers, who demanded a 130 percent pay increase.

Kenyan Airlines management has asked the Central Organisation of Trade Unions to intervene to try and resolve the dispute.

### **South African public sector strike settlement deadline expires**

Over one million public sector workers took strike action for three weeks in August and September, demanding an 8.6 percent pay increase and R1000 housing allowance. Three weeks ago the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was able to impose an end to the strike and a three-week-period consideration of the government offer of a 7.5 percent increase and R800 housing allowance.

The period to consider the offer ended the beginning of this week. Some of the unions involved have given their response. The largest public sector union, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union, which held a four-day national congress last week, has provisionally said it will accept the offer.

The largest teachers union, the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), has said it will not accept the offer. The union provincial secretary, Fezeka Loliwe, said, “The offer is far from meeting the demands of the workers and we will not accept it at all.”

However, he has said his union will be bound by the public service co-ordinating bargaining council decision.



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