Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 July 2011

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

Greek taxi drivers on 24-hour strike

Taxi drivers across the country held a 24-hour strike to protest government changes involving the opening up of the profession to more competition, which workers say means expensive licenses purchased to buy into the profession will become worthless.

Dozens of taxi drivers held a noisy drive-by protest outside the Parliament building in central Athens.

The measures were pledged in order to continue receiving emergency funds from the International Monetary Fund/European Union. The government passed legislation earlier this year targeting so-called “closed professions”, which it claimed benefited from tightly controlled licensing practices or fixed profit margins. Those affected will include taxi and truck drivers, pharmacists, lawyers and notaries.

Rail workers at Poland’s premier passenger carrier in pay strike

On July 5, trains at the country’s premier passenger rail carrier, Przewozy Regionalne, stopped as workers went took industrial action to demand higher wages. They are demanding a z?.280 monthly wage increase.

UK biscuit factory workers in work stoppages over pay disparities

Over 300 staff at the Burton’s Foods biscuit factory in Blackpool are to strike in a pay dispute on July 12, 18, 20 and 26, as well as work to rule and cancel overtime.

Around 86 percent of unionised workers voted to take action.

The workforce at the Blackpool factory—which produces the well known Wagon Wheels, Maryland Cookies, Jammie Dodgers and Cadbury’s Fingers—say management has seen their pay almost double, while workers have only had a below-inflation 1.8 percent increase.

Workers say they are paid less than the company’s employees at four other UK centres.

UK: Southampton public employees strike spreads as council rehires on lower pay

Strike action in Southampton is spreading, with UNISON and Unite announcing that more essential public employees will join the six-week long action. Building maintenance workers and port health officers in Southampton are to join a six-week long strike of public employees from July 11.

The building maintenance workers, who carry out repairs on council housing stock, and port health officers, who inspect and certify cruise liners, containers and oil tankers will join the action the day the council plans to sack the entire workforce and rehire them on lower pay. Southampton’s port is one of the busiest in the UK.

According to the website of the Unison union, city-wide industrial action on July 11 will involve workers in waste and recycling, street cleansing, libraries, Itchen toll bridge collectors, social care contact supervisors and vehicle mechanics. More than 200 building maintenance workers will take one day’s strike action on July 13. Port health officers will begin a five-day action from July 11.

Shropshire, UK, council workers could strike after pay cut or job loss ultimatum

Council workers in Shropshire may be balloted for industrial action, after the council sent letters to all 6,500 staff, sacking them and saying that it will re-hire them only if they agree to a pay cut.

The council says that those who do not agree will be dismissed without any compensation, according to the Unison union website.

UK: Lecturers strike at Leeds College of Building over job losses, pay

Lecturers at Leeds College of Building took industrial action July 6 in a dispute over job losses and pay.

According to the University and College Union (UCU) website, “the college has reneged upon an agreement to protect staff pay for three years, as some staff now face annual pay cuts of as much as £10,000. On top of the pay cuts, the college wants to make 39 redundancies”.

Those who remain have been warned to expect an increase in working hours of up to 20 percent.

© World Socialist Web Site

The UCU has said the college is using the funding changes in further education as an excuse for rushing through its own cuts agenda, pointing to the fact that Leeds College's latest financial accounts showed that it was holding £10,157,000 in reserves, including cash balances of £7,272,000.

Belgian oil workers protest against sackings

Oil workers belonging to six trade unions, constituting all unionised oil workers, picketed at the gates of the Belgian Refining Corporation (BRC) June 30, in protest at the sacking of three workers.

A nationwide action is planned.

According to the online *ICEM InBrief*, "Two of the three sacked workers were union representatives of ICEM-affiliated Centrale Generale-FGTB, making the company even more liable for unfair dismissal. The three are guilty of no misconduct at all, although management have actively spread lies relating to the intimidation of a security guard and his family.

"The Swiss management of BRC, under CEO Massenhaurer, has shown itself to be staunchly anti union, but inventing misconduct stories in order to sack union reps is new."

The BRC refinery is located north of the Port of Antwerp at the centre of the ARA region, owned by European refiner Petroplus Holdings and has production capacity of 107,500 barrels per day.

Protests at Dublin hospital at under-resourcing and over-capacity

More than 120 people staged a demonstration outside Tallaght Hospital in Dublin July 4, organised by the Tallaght Hospital Action Group (THAG) in solidarity with staff at the hospital. It was in protest at the under-resourcing of the hospital and its operating at over-capacity.

THAG say the current hospital budget is only adequate for 350,000 patients, but it now caters for a catchment area with more than 500,000 people.

Figures released for last year show Tallaght Hospital has fewer consultants than the other Dublin hospitals, Beaumont, St James's, the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, and St Vincent's, but that it had the highest inpatient discharges and attendances to its Emergency Department.

UK teachers vote for strike over state funded-privately run academy plans

Teaching staff at Diss High School in Norfolk are set to go on strike this week, following proposals to apply to the government for academy status, leading to fears regarding future pay and conditions.

If the strike goes ahead, the school would become the first in Norfolk to strike over academy plans, according to the Norfolk region *Eastern Daily Press*.

Academy status enables private companies to take control of former state schools; determining their teaching curriculum, pupil exclusions and pay and conditions for staff, while funding the refashioned institutions from the state treasury.

Egyptian workers continue protests at unfulfilled pay and conditions

Over 3,000 workers at the Nagaa Hammadi Sugar Factory went on an open-ended strike July 5 to demand improved wages and working conditions, reported *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The workers, who accuse the management of ignoring their demands, are calling for a monthly bonus of 200 percent of their basic salaries, the payment of hazard allowances, and the appointment of workers with temporary contracts.

Around 200 workers at the Swiss Company for Stainless Steel Sinks, in 6th of October City, also went on strike, demanding wage increases and more bonuses.

Suez Port workers escalated their protests this week to demand better wages, by cutting off electricity to the neighboring city of Port Tawfik. The workers have been on strike for the past three weeks.

"The protesters said that Manpower Minister Ahmed Hassan al-Borei had promised to fulfill their demands, but they still have not received the promised salary increases", said *Al Masry Al Youm*.

Israeli doctors to step up strike over contracts

Haaretz.com reported this week that doctors are "expected to intensify their nationwide strike on Friday, a move that could lead to the unification of several medical departments in hospitals throughout Israel".

The Israel Medical Association has stated that doctors will return to work according to contracts that were established in 1977 and last signed in 2000.

According to the news source, "As part of the strike, the association will prohibit rotations of specialists (apart from in delivery rooms), and will allow up to six rotations for residents. Specialists, apart from those who are on-call, will be prohibited from remaining at hospitals past 4 p.m., regardless of need".

The medical association was quoted in a statement as saying, "After 10 months of fruitless negotiations, the health system will start working according to the agreed-upon standards. The doctors are not willing to continue to try and solve systematic problems".

Madagascar custom workers strike

© World Socialist Web Site

Custom workers in Madagascar have gone on strike to oppose the illegal exports of rosewood. The strike began in the eastern port of Toamasina on July 1 and then went nationwide. The illicit trade in rosewood is having a devastating impact on the unique environment of Madagascar.

According to an undercover investigation last year, the sale of illegally sourced rosewood generates around half a million dollars a day. The investigation also found that the illegal trafficking of the wood was sanctioned by the government.

Talks held between union representatives, the director general of customs and a government minister to avert the strike failed.

Namibian airport workers demonstrate

Airport workers for Namibia Airports Company at Hosea Kutako International airport have begun holding daily lunchtime demonstrations.

They are protesting against unhealthy working conditions, the rate of housing allowances, overtime payment issues and bad relations between management and the workforce.

Following last Friday's demonstration, the workers met with a representative of the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU), but some stormed out of the meeting accusing the union of not addressing the issue.

Nigerian Medical Centre Staff strike

Health workers including nurses, pharmacists and technical staff, represented by six unions, began strike action Tuesday at the Federal Medical Centre in the city of Bida, Niger state, in Central Nigeria.

Amongst their grievances are the poor condition of the centre, lack of staff welfare and the failure by hospital management to abide by an agreed fair promotion system.

South Africa metal workers strike

Around 170,000 metal workers went on strike on Monday in pursuit of a 13 percent pay increase. The workers are represented by several unions but many belong to the Nation Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA). NUMSA members held a march in Johannesburg on Monday to publicise their demands.

Strikes were taking place in Port Elizabeth, East London, Cape Town and in other centres, as well as in Johannesburg.

Amongst the workers' other demands are a two-year pay agreement as opposed to the current three-year contract, medical tests, a 20 percent night shift allowance, as well as an end to the practice of labour brokers supplying labour at reduced pay and conditions.

The strike went ahead after the employer's body, the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa, failed to get the Labour Court to issue an interdict to prevent the strike. The employers had offered a 7 percent pay increase.

South African plastic workers strike

Around 5,000 workers employed in plastics manufacturing went on strike on Tuesday in pursuit of a 13 percent pay increase. They're also seeking a 20 percent allowance for night shift work and other benefits.

On Sunday the Labour Court rejected a move by the employer's body, the Plastic Convertors' Association, to ban the strike.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site