

Workers Struggles: Europe, Africa & Middle East

29 July 2011

Taxi drivers in Athens continue protests

Taxi drivers in Greece have entered their second week of protests against the government deregulation plans for the taxi sector. On Tuesday thousands of Greek taxi drivers marched in central Athens. On Thursday some 2,000 striking drivers gathered at the port of Piraeus, at the cruise ship terminal to continue their protests. Transport Minister Yiannis Ragousis is set to meet representatives of the drivers union Friday.

The taxi industry is one of the 135 protected professions that are being deregulated to improve “competitiveness”. The social democratic government is to introduce legislation allowing people to purchase a taxi license for a small fee. The deregulation has been demanded by the European Union and EU and the International Monetary Fund as a condition for the government to secure loans to pay off the Greek national debt.

Around 3,000 drivers participated in the rally outside the parliament building.

Last Sunday drivers also occupied ticket offices at the Acropolis archaeological site and allowed many tourists free entry.

Last week cab drivers blocked access to Athens international airport, causing large traffic jams. Temporary blockades at the ports of Piraeus and Patras forced some cruise ships to re-route to other harbours.

Greece: Hellenic Seamen's Union calls off planned strikes

Last Friday the Greek Hellenic Seamen's Union (PNO) announced it would not organise strike action at the country's ports during the tourist season. The government is planning to cut the social security and pension benefits of seamen.

Following a meeting of the Alternate Merchant Marine Minister Haris Pabouki with the PNO, the planned action was called off. This decision was imposed by the union after Paboukis merely suggested freezing the proposed changes.

The union said it would reconvene to consider the dispute at the end of August.

Oil company in Kazakhstan continues to sack striking workers

Kazmunaigas Exploration Production (KMG EP), a large oil producer in Kazakhstan announced Wednesday that it had sacked 30 more striking workers. The firm has already fired 373 workers.

Workers at the company have been striking since May to demand increased pay and enhanced working conditions. The industrial action has led to a severe drop in oil output of 366,000 tons at the firms Uzenmunaigas facility in the western Mangistau region.

The company has denounced the strike as an illegal protest. Hundreds of staff remain on strike, with the company reporting that 748 employees struck on Wednesday.

KMG EP is run by state-owned Kazmunaigas and is one of the three main oil and gas producers in Kazakhstan, one of the world's main producers.

Commenting on the action, Galym Ageulov, an activist with the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, said the mass sackings “could lead to conflict, a social explosion and politicisation of the issue. He noted, “The workers have always insisted that this was a labour dispute and nothing more, but now they may start making political demands, and the situation will escalate”.

Earlier this month British singer Sting refused to play a concert in the Kazakhstan capital, Astana, due to the “unacceptable treatment being meted to these Kazakh oil and gas workers”.

Polish national airline flight crew ballot to strike

Flight crew at Poland's national airline, LOT, are being balloted for strike action after management put back an agreed plan to allow staff an extra day off due to transatlantic flights and other journeys involving significant time zone changes.

LOT's supervisory board had agreed the new system would take place in late June but has now delayed this until the end of August.

The workers have until July 29 to complete the ballot.

Engineering workers strike at plant in Huddersfield, England

Two hundred shop floor staff at the David Brown Gear Systems engineering plant in Lockwood Huddersfield struck for 24 hours last Friday. The workers struck to demand a pay increase in line with inflation and rejected the firm's offer of 2.5 percent rise and 2 percent bonus.

The workers are members of the Unite trade union who said the firm were also planning to review job rankings, terms and conditions and make adjustments to its pension scheme.

Some 250 non-union members are also employed at the company, which

specialises in gear manufacture.

UK Public and Commercial Services Union calls off strike of Steria workers

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) called off a planned strike by its members at the Steria company due to be held Monday and Tuesday. More than 160 staff are employed by the company for the UK's Identity and Passport Service. The employees are to be balloted on a new offer from Steria.

Earlier this month, staff voted in a ballot to reject a pay rise below the level of inflation that was equal to an average of around £180 pro-rata over a nine-month period.

The PCS noted at the time that the 160 workers employed at passport offices were paid just £13,500 a year.

Library assistants in Sandwell, England, vote for work to rule

Library assistants in the borough of Sandwell in the West Midlands, England, have voted for a work to rule by a majority of 97.5 percent in favour. The workers are members of the Unison public sector trade union and have been subjected to "single status" job evaluations by the library service. Staff are angry that the evaluations did not take into consideration the many duties they perform.

Earlier this month it was reported that libraries in Sandwell could close or be moved into shops and community buildings. These moves are being considered due to the councils cutting its budgets by almost £1 million.

Currently Sandwell runs 19 libraries, with 126 full-time staff. The council is planning to recruit more volunteer staff at the library. Last year volunteers did more than 4,009 hours of unpaid work.

Workers strike Egypt ceramics producer Lecico

Workers at ceramics maker Lecico in Khorshid in Alexandria, Egypt, began a strike Tuesday leading to a halting of production. Strike action occurred at the firms' sanitary ware and tile factories.

These plants manufacture 30 percent of Lecico's sanitary ware and 74 percent of its tile production.

The workers at Lecico were among the many who struck during the mass protests that led to the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak.

Textile workers in al Kut, Iraq, hold a one day protest

On Monday hundreds of textile workers in the southern Iraq city of al Kut staged a one day protest in pursuit of better, safer working conditions. They are employed at the al Kut National Textile Company and are also demanding the removal of the firms' company director.

The protest was held outside the local provincial council and also drew attention to health problems being suffered by some of the workers. According to a General Federation of Iraqi Workers report there are some

75 cases of kidney illness from pollution caused by waste left by cotton. Staff are also calling for the payment of dangerous work allowances.

Strike continues at Abu Dhabi Reem Island building site over unpaid wages

More than 400 construction workers in Abu Dhabi employed at the Reem Island building site began a strike last week after not being paid for nearly three months. The workers are employed in the construction of the residential and commercial Tameer Towers project.

The building contractor Al Rajhi Projects sacked around 30 workers last week according to a Ministry of Labour official. An article in the *National* reported that on Wednesday, "the workers on the Tameer Towers project received salaries owed for the month of May but did not return to work on Thursday as the developer had expected". It added that last month's wages would be paid this week.

A labourer cited in the *National* article claimed that more workers had been fired. He said, "No one has come back to work. They are on strike until they are paid, but 50 staff—engineers, foremen—were terminated after the strike".

The report added, "The Ministry of Labour said workers who did not receive their pay for more than 60 days were entitled to transfer to another establishment without permission from their employer, but some workers last week said they could not leave because Al Rajhi had their passports". The ministry said that sacking workers following a strike was not illegal "depending on the workers' contract".

Strike wave continues in South Africa

Strikes are continuing nationwide in South Africa. Although a strike by 170,000 engineering workers ended last week, other large sections of workers are now involved in strike action.

Around 200,000 gold miners organised by the National Union of Mineworkers were set to strike this week following the failure of talks with management.

The gold miners are seeking a 14 percent pay increase. The various employers are offering between 7 and 9 percent. South Africa is the fifth largest gold producer in the world.

The gold miners join 150,000 coal miners and 5,000 diamond workers already on strike. The coal miners began their strike Monday over a demand for a 14 percent wage increase. Diamond miners working for De Beers began their strike last Friday, seeking a 10 percent pay increase against a company offer of 7 percent.

The ongoing strike by workers organised by the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union is particularly affecting fuel supply distribution with petrol shortages at many filling stations.

Water supply workers organised by the South African Municipal Workers Union are also likely to strike after their wage negotiations reached deadlock.

There was a record 14.6 million strike days in South Africa last year. A study by accountants, Price Waterhouse Cooper, showed that the median salaries of executive directors of South Africa's 40 largest companies increased by 23 percent last year whilst bonuses rose nearly 60 percent.

According to South African treasury figures, the country has a Gini coefficient of 0.68 (A measure of inequality), showing South Africa to be one of the most unequal countries in the world, being more unequal than

when apartheid ended.

Nigerian judicial workers strike

Judicial workers belonging to the Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria in Ogun state began strike action Monday. Their action led to court hearings being cancelled.

They are striking against the state revoking a 65 percent increase in their allowances that had been paid them from May to December last year. They pledged to continue their action until the amount of the allowance is restored.

Nigerian college staff strike in salary structure dispute

Teaching staff in tertiary institutions in Yobe State, Nigeria, organised by the Joint Academic Staff Union of Tertiary Institutions have begun an indefinite strike. The strike follows the failure of the state government to implement the agreed Consolidated Polytechnic and College of Education Academic Staff Salary Structure (CONPCASS).

Kenyan dockers strike over pay

Thousands of dock workers at Mombasa Port, Kenya, began a five-day strike last Saturday. They are protesting plans to reorganise the workforce in preparation for privatisation. They are also protesting the widespread casualisation of the work. Dock workers union General Secretary Simon Sang said more than 3,000 of the dockers had been employed on a casual basis for more than 15 years. He added that under the Kenyan constitution any worker employed on casual terms for more than three months should become part of the permanent workforce.

Kenyan council workers strike

Council workers in Nambale, Kenya, have struck to protest seven months' salary arrears. Some of the council workers had lost their homes after failing to repay loans, because their salaries had not been paid.

The workers protested one month ago against the non-payment of salaries, and the council agreed to address their grievances but failed to do so. As well as strike action, the council workers have also refused to hand over collected revenues to the council.

Zimbabwe cotton workers strike over non-payment of wages

Workers at the Chinese-owned cotton firm Sino-Zimbabwe Cotton Holdings based in the Zimbabwe capital Harare, went on strike at the weekend to protest the non-payment of wages. The workers marched from the factory in a suburb of Harare to its headquarters in Harare city centre.

Ugandan medical interns strike

Over 200 Ugandan junior doctors held a three-day strike that ended Tuesday. The doctors were protesting a government proposal to increase their internship period by an extra year.

Currently to become a doctor they must complete a five-year course followed by a one year internship.

The doctors currently coming up to the completion of their one year internship were due to receive their licence to practice as medics next week. A report circulated by the National Internship Committee proposed extending the internship period by another year. This was mainly an attempt to address shortages of medical staff, particularly in rural areas.

The interns have now been assured they will receive their licences as expected but have vowed to go to court if they do not.



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