

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Striking journalists protest in Doncaster, England

Striking journalists employed by Johnston Press in South Yorkshire, England held a protest in the town of Doncaster Saturday. The staff are members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and work for the *Doncaster Free Press*, *South Yorkshire Times*, *Epworth Bells*, *Selby Times* and *Goole Courier*.

The workers, on strike since July 15, are protesting 18 planned job losses. Around 100 journalists and their supporters marched through the town centre and held a protest in Doncaster Market Place.

On Thursday, one of the strikers, Jim Oldfield, the editor of the *South Yorkshire Times*, was made redundant, according to the NUJ.

French emergency social workers strike and protest cuts in budget

On August 2 French emergency social workers employed by the 115 organisation took strike action and demonstrated in 12 towns and cities nationally.

115 takes calls and provides care and assistance to people in distress in many areas, including remote villages. The government of Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy has slashed funding to the organisation for hotel accommodation under conditions where 115's shelters are full and they are taking an ever-growing number of calls.

Last month Xavier Emmanuelli, 115 president, resigned in protest.

France Info interviewed one of 115's staff in Lyon who said, "We regularly meet families on the street but we can only give them blankets and water—we cannot house them. They sleep in deplorable conditions. [Housing Minister] Benoist Apparu said no baby would be left to sleep on the streets, but that is clearly not the case."

Council workers in Shropshire, England to be balloted again for strike action

Council workers in Shropshire, England are being balloted for strike action in a vote organised by the Unison public sector workers trade union. Shropshire council is planning to sack its entire 6,500-strong

workforce on September 30 and only rehire them if they accept inferior contracts, including a 5.4 percent pay cut. The council is imposing the cuts as part of its overall £76 million cuts programme.

Unison is holding yet another ballot, despite workers voting in an "indicative ballot" in July by a margin of 75 percent in favour of strike action. Unison has sent new ballot papers to staff with the result expected at the beginning of September.

The union is not opposed to the plans by the council. Its collaboration with management at Southampton council resulted in the latter being able to impose similar drastic attacks on its local authority workforce. This included the union exempting some of its members from industrial action, in agreement with the council.

Port workers in Ljubljana, Slovenia end strike

Port workers employed by operator Luka Koper in Ljubljana, Slovenia ended an eight-day strike on August 6. Workers were demanding improved working conditions and an adherence to health and safety standards. The action began after talks between the union and management failed to reach an agreement.

Finnish steelworkers strike called off by trade union

Employees ended a two-day walkout at the Rautaruuki steel plant in Raahe, Finland on August 6. The strike by more than 1,000 workers was held to protest the non-payment of wages to Polish maintenance staff.

The YLE News site reported that a union chief shop steward, Mika Vuoti, said strike was called off "even though the Beroa company, suspected of using cheap labour, had still not provided assurances regarding the correct payment of Polish workers."

Vuoti said, "No new information has been received from Beroa Deutschland [the company involved]. They reiterate that the situation will be rectified when workers are paid next Wednesday. But we are sure that salaries were not paid last month".

Beroa Deutschland claimed workers had been paid and denied claims they had breached agreements on pay and conditions.

German air traffic controllers union calls off planned strike

A planned strike by German air traffic controller strike was called off

Tuesday morning by the GdF air traffic controllers' union. Around 5,500 members of the union had been set to strike from 6 a.m. to midday against the state-owned Deutsche Flugsicherung (German Air Traffic Control, DFS). The controllers are demanding better pay (the union has called for a 6.5 percent rise in annual pay) and improved working conditions.

The union called it off after the dispute was sent to be discussed at arbitration talks. DFS had attempted to have the action ruled illegal. During arbitration negotiations, industrial action is unable to be held for a four-week period.

Frankfurt airport reported that 30 to 40 flights had been delayed due to the strike threat.

The move to arbitration talks follows the ruling last week by the Frankfurt Labour Court banning a planned strike.

Athens taxi drivers union calls off strike

On August 2, taxi drivers protested outside an Athens government building against plans to open up their profession to more competition. The protest was the latest in a series by drivers who have taken strike action, beginning July 18, to oppose the changes. 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.

On August 5, the three-week-long strike was suspended by Association of Attica Taxi Drivers. The association was to "continue talks" with the transport ministry. The strike has been suspended until September 5.

The taxi owners are opposing attempts by the government to make it easier to obtain taxi licences and lift restrictions on the number available. The changes are part of a push to liberalize dozens of professions in Greece, one of the conditions for last year's €110 billion (US\$155 billion) European Union-led bailout.

Police forcibly remove striking road construction workers in Belgrade, Serbia

Police on Wednesday forcibly removed striking construction workers employed by the Nibens Group in Belgrade, Serbia from a road they were blocking. The workers were protesting the non-payment of wages.

The president of the Independent Union of Road Workers of Serbia, Sonja Vukanovic, said police came and dispersed the road workers around 3 a.m. She stated that police also guarded the headquarters of the five road construction companies of the Nibens Group—Backaput, Beograd, Kragujevac, Nis and Vranje.

The union said it would block the Horgos border crossing to demand the payment of unpaid wages. According to the Topix news web site, Nibens Group owes around €130 million to banks and that the latter "have pledged to unblock the accounts of all five road construction companies of the Nibens Group and secure the funds that will ensure the resumption of work and payoff of due incomes."

Lebanese power workers unions calls off strike

On Wednesday the Electricite du Liban's workers' union (EDL) called

of a strike by its members who are demanding a pay increase and improvement in transport and school benefits. The EDL represents 2,000 workers, including engineers and technicians.

The action had led to cuts in the electricity supply nationally as maintenance work was not carried out. According to the *Daily Star*, "The town of Riaq in Baalbek had reportedly been cut off from electricity and water due to a breakdown in the power grid there."

Following a meeting between union leader Charbel Saleh and Prime Minister Najib Mikati Wednesday, the stoppage was ended. The *Star* reported, "The union will grant the Cabinet a 'grace period' to look into workers' demands".

The EDL also apologized for calling the strike. "The citizen is in great need of electricity and we apologize for the Electricite du Liban labour union's role in suspending [supplies] to the citizen," said Saleh.

Teachers in Upper Egypt call for strike action in new term

A coalition of teachers in the Egyptian governorate of Asyut called for strike action to be held in the new term. According to Ahram Online, the "For Egypt's Teachers" coalition are calling for "a minimum wage and a pay rise, among other demands, in order to improve their standard of life."

South Africa diamond workers end strike

A strike by diamond miners ended August 5. This followed the return to work by striking gold and coal miners. Talks between the National Union of Mineworkers and the power utility company Eskom continue in an effort to avoid a further strike.

Cleaners strike escalates in South Africa

The strike by 6,000 cleaners, which began last week in pursuit of demands including aR4200 (\$625) minimum wage, a 13th salary cheque and a maximum of 40 hours work per week, has been joined by other cleaners, bringing the number on strike to around 100,000. The cleaners joining the strike belong to the National Service and Allied Workers' Union and five other unions.

Members of the South African Municipal Workers Union are set to strike next week. The workers are employed in 262 municipalities nationally. The workers' demand is for an 18 percent pay increase. The body representing the municipalities is offering 6 percent.

Kenyan Airways workers step up go-slow action

Workers employed by Kenyan Airways and members of the Aviation and Allied Workers Union have begun a go-slow action over grievances relating to conditions, contracts and retrenchment. Many of the workers taken on as temporary workers have still not been given permanent status even though they have long service.

They now intend to step up the action as negotiations with management have failed. Their action has been effective, leading to delays and cancellations. Management has tried to blame technical and “operational reasons” for the delays.

Kenyan flower workers sacked

More than 700 workers belonging to the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union struck last week over harassment and arbitrary sackings. After a negotiated return to work management sacked around 50 of those who had been on strike.

The flower farm in Eldoret in western Kenya is owned by former Kenyan president Arap Moi.

Nigeria workers demand minimum wage

Workers in Osun state, Nigeria began a strike on Monday after the state Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) failed to reach agreement with state officials. Workers in Anambra state, members of the NLC, began a week-long strike on Monday demanding the state pay the minimum wage.

The minimum wage of N18,000 (\$120), promised by Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in his recent election campaign and now written into law, is still to be put into effect. Following talks between the NLC, TUC and federal labour minister Emeka Wogu, an agreement was made that all workers would come under its terms from August 31.



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