

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

9 September 2011

Athenian transportation workers call four-hour stoppage

Workers on the ISAP electric urban railway and the Athens metro called a four-hour stoppage for September 7 to protest “government plans to streamline their sector,” according to Greek daily *eKathimerini*.

Staff at the Metro and overland rail transportation networks struck for 24 hours in protest against mergers in Athens’ public transport last week.

Greek cabbies strike over deregulation

Taxi drivers and owners (approximately 30,000) called a 24-hour strike for September 8 to oppose the government “deregularisation of their profession,” according to *The Greek Reporter*.

Taxi drivers carried out almost two weeks of industrial action last month over the same issue.

According to the *Ana* press agency, the strike will end at 5am September 9. The drivers are to hold a general meeting and plan a protest at the Thessaloniki International Fair.

Helicopter engineers strike against British military subcontractor

Civilian engineers servicing Apache helicopters at Wattisham air base in Suffolk, used by the British military in Afghanistan and Libya, took industrial action September 7 in a dispute over pay differentials.

The workforce voted 71 to 14 in favour of a strike, while 81 were in favour of action short of industrial action.

Unite, the union which has paid up members of at least 100 at the air base, said a work-to-rule and overtime ban which started at 6am on Wednesday will last for an indefinite period.

The union says Wattisham staff received about £3,000 less a year than their counterparts in Hampshire who are employed by the same company, Morson Wynnwith.

Workers at British Fujitsu site in action over union rep’s dismissal

TheManufacturer.com announced September 2 that workers at

Fujitsu Services have voted in favour of industrial action and action short of a strike over the dismissal of a Fujitsu worker and union representative at the Crewe site.

The manufacturing news source reported, “The industrial relations breakdown has come as a result of continued dissatisfaction over the treatment of a Unite union member Alan Jenney.

“Workers feel the union representative was unfairly dismissed by Fujitsu due to his position as a union representative. During headcount cuts being made at Fujitsu other staff members were redeployed. Workers feel Mr Jenny has been unfairly targeted by management.”

In June, workers at the Fujitsu Crewe site carried out a one-day strike in protest over the forced redundancy. Jenny has worked for Fujitsu for 17 years and his employment tribunal took place recently.

Unionised staff voted by 85.6 percent for action short of a strike and by 56.4 percent for industrial action. The union has not yet set strike dates.

Scottish social care staff to strike over cuts

Hundreds of staff at Quarriers, one of Scotland’s largest social care charities, will hold a 24-hour strike over cuts.

Last month, a ballot of Unison members resulted in a 76 percent vote for industrial action, with 85 percent in favour of action short of a strike.

Over 560 workers would have their pay cut by 10 percent, while others would lose up to 23 percent under the proposed plans.

There are also proposals to cut sick pay, increase pension contributions as well as the removal of other benefits.

Quarriers has 100 projects in the UK helping to support and care for adults with a disability and people with epilepsy. The charity said the proposed changes were in direct response to the “unprecedented economic challenges” it faces.

Members are to picket workplaces across Scotland and hold a rally at George Square in Glasgow.

Thousands march against austerity measures in Madrid

Thousands of workers marched through Madrid September 6 to protest against austerity measures and changes to the constitution to cap government spending on social programmes.

Reuters reported that “workers and members of the youth Indignados movement gathered in Puerta del Sol square—ground zero for anti-government protesters in Spain—in the evening carrying

banners reading 'I don't want any change to the constitution.' ”

Union leaders said 25,000 people took part.

“As a result of the labour reform and the proliferation of temporary contracts, there are not going to be any workers with permanent jobs,” Luis Gomez, a 59-year-old mathematics teacher, told Reuters news agency. “Young people have been given a real kick in the teeth.”

The protest occurred the day before Spain's Senate was due to change the constitution to limit structural deficits in central and regional governments.

Youth unemployment tops 40 percent in Spain and one in five workers are jobless, the highest rate in the European Union.

Bulgarian workers protest sale of cigarette maker

At least 200 workers protested September 2 in the capital, Sofia, against the sale of the country's main cigarette producer Bulgartabak to a unit of the Russian state VTB bank.

Some of the workers carried banners saying, “Stop the theft” as they demonstrated in front of the agency.

One worker at Bulgartabak, Maria Todorova, told Reuters, “We are worried for our jobs. We are worried that this company which no-one has heard about is getting the mills for peanuts and may close them down, or who knows what.”

BT Invest, an Austrian-registered company controlled by VTB, was the sole bidder after British American Tobacco withdrew from the race for two cigarette mills and a tobacco processing unit in the country where over 40 percent of the adult population smokes. The company won a tender to buy a 79.8 percent stake in Bulgartabak for €100 million (\$145 million) and has 15 days to conclude a contract with Bulgaria's privatisation agency.

Kenyan teachers strike goes ahead

The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) went ahead with its proposed strike over the government's refusal to proceed with its previous proposal to hire thousands of new teachers for the new school year.

Originally the government said the money set aside for hiring the extra teachers had been re-allocated to the ministry of defence. The union is now accusing Kenyan MPs of hijacking the money, funnelling it to the Kenya Revenue Authority to pay taxes owed by MPs.

KNUT has said if the government does not fund the extra teachers, it will mount further protests and issue a call for the government to call an election.

Kenya shoe company workers strike

Around 250 workers at Foot Plus, an outsourcing company making shoes for the Bata Shoe Company in Limuru, refused to enter the

factory on Monday. Instead they surrounded the building and called on the managers to come out and discuss with them.

Their grievance is over low piece-rate work. One worker explained to reporters, “I have now worked for this company for the past six years and we have never been given a basic salary. All they do is pay us in terms of piece rate and we are now tired of just working for nothing.”

Zambian construction workers strike

Over 1,000 construction workers employed by China Nonferrous Metals Mining Corporation, constructing the Muliashi copper mine, went on strike Monday. They were demanding a paid lunch allowance rather than the poor food offered by company, along with proper transport to the workplace rather than the current practice of carrying the men in open trucks.

On Tuesday the company issued an ultimatum saying the men must return to work or face being sacked.

Ugandan teachers strike

Teachers in the Uganda National Teachers Union are striking in support of a 100 percent pay increase. Some teachers did not return to work when the new term started this month.

The government threatened teachers who did not return with firings, but in spite of the government threats many schools did not open or were not fully staffed.

Nigerian journalists in Lagos strike over minimum wage

Journalists, members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists in Lagos State, began a three-day strike on Monday over non-implementation of the national minimum wage of N18,000. They picketed television and radio premises.

After intervention by the state minister of information and the heads of the radio and television services, the union leadership tried to call the strike off. But an emergency meeting of the striking journalists voted to continue the strike.



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