

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

7 September 2012

Strikes by Greek firefighters, coast guard, garbage collectors, school teachers against pay cuts

On Friday August 31, firefighters and coast guard officers held a protest rally outside the Ministry of Finance in Syntagma Square, to protest further wage cuts.

According to *To Vima*, the uniformed services will see additional cuts in annual wages of up to 45 percent, depending on grade and years of service.

Protesting police officers also joined the rally.

On August 29, municipal garbage collectors took a 48-hour industrial action in protest against reduced wages. During the protest, riot police used tear gas on the striking workers.

Primary school teachers have also announced a 24-hour strike for September 12, one day after the schools reopen following the 13-week summer holidays.

Ekathimerini reported that union leaders were seeking an agreement with the very institutions behind the relentless drive to enforce austerity measures on Greek workers—the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Italian coal miners end barricade after pit reprieve

Coal miners who barricaded themselves in at Carbosulcis mine in Sardinia with explosives to protest its closure ended their protest September 3 after the Ministry of Industry reversed its decision and said the mine would instead be updated.

Around 100 miners went on strike at the country's only coal mine last week. The mine employs around 500 and is now to be upgraded in line with the latest technology in order to make it economically sustainable, according to the ministry.

The striking miners were protesting 370m (1,200 feet) below ground with hundreds of kilograms of explosives. According to media reports, the miners wanted the coal pit to be diversified into a combined mining and carbon capture site. Officially, state funding is potentially available for carbon capture—a process of storing polluting emissions underground to help prevent global warming.

Irish council workers strike

Around 350 outdoor staff of Mayo County Council voted overwhelmingly to undertake industrial action over the loss of subsistence and meal allowances.

Officials of the local authority are currently preparing a detailed report on plans to deal with further budgetary cutbacks over the coming months. Recent departmental revenue streams have witnessed unprecedented cuts.

Figures released by Claremorris Chamber of Commerce show the local authority is on target to lose at least €40,000 this year alone.

“The council would sooner throw town centres into an unmarked grave than admit they’re losing this money,” said Claremorris Chamber president Jimmy Flynn.

Russian metalworkers rally against aluminium plant closure

Around 1,000 metalworkers rallied Sunday September 2 against the closing of aluminium production at the Bogoslovsky plant in Krasnoturyinsk (Sverdlovsk Oblast).

The company, which is part of the Rusal group, signed an agreement in December on the modernisation of the plant. But Rusal management decided to close aluminium production at the Bogoslovsky plant in August this year, due in part to the rise of energy costs and a decline in the world price of aluminium.

Overall it employs 3,700 people, 950 in aluminium production.

The closure of the plant is devastating for the town of Krasnoturyinsk, where every third family has one or more members involved in production.

Sergey Lazarev, a master at the plant, said, “The closing of aluminium production at the Bogoslovsky plant is a tragedy for my whole family. Five family members, my two daughters, my son-in-law, my wife and me, work in the aluminium shop at the plant. Finding a new job for five people in our town is simply impossible.”

Slovenian construction workers strike over unpaid wages

Around 400 builders at construction firm Cestno podjetje, in Ljubljana (CPL), went on strike last Thursday, August 30 over the failure of the management to pay wages for the month of July.

Possible Norwegian oil service workers strike over wages and benefits

Around 360 oil services workers from five companies are expected to go on strike if negotiations fail on wages and benefits.

Arild Theimann, spokesman for the largest oil workers union, Industri Energi, said Tuesday, "If a strike happens, construction and exploration is most likely to be hit, not production."

A strike by offshore workers shut down 13 percent of Norway's oil output and a significant part of the country's gas production in a 16-day strike in July. The workers only returned to work after the government declared the strike illegal and companies threatened a lockout.

Norway is the eighth largest oil exporter in the world and Europe's second biggest gas supplier after Russia.

Sympathy strike by 160,000 in support of Norwegian nursing assistants

According to the Public Services International (PSI), "the biggest sympathy strike ever" was announced Tuesday when 160,000 workers mooted industrial action in support of the 79 workers in private nursing homes that are striking for equal pay and pensions.

The 79 nursing assistants went on strike August 22.

UK disabled workers at Remploy launch five-day strike to fight closure of sites

Disabled workers at Remploy sites in Glasgow, Scotland and Chesterfield, England have launched a five-day strike.

It follows a series of strikes across the country over the closure of many of Remploy's 54 UK factories.

At least three other sites are expected to close later this year.

A total of 24 Remploy factories closed last month under government plans to switch spending to supposedly help individual workers find jobs in the "mainstream" sectors.

East Yorkshire butchers strike over pay cuts

Butchers employed by Cranswick Country Foods in Preston, near Hull in East Yorkshire, are to take action this week over the imposition of new terms and conditions that could mean a pay cut of up to 30 percent.

The proposed pay cut is on top of an eight year pay freeze, during which time inflation has increased by 42 percent. On 29 August, 80 permanent staff at the meat processing plant took a one day strike in this dispute.

One worker, who asked not to be identified, told KCFM, "We'll be striking every Thursday Friday, Saturday Sunday if we have to."

The Hull food plant is one of several owned by Cranswick Country Foods. The company has contracts with Simply Sausages, Weight Watchers, Jamie Oliver and Reggae Reggae.

Egyptian factory workers protest outside presidential palace

Workers from the Nasr Automotive, Ideal and Steam Boilers factories

staged protests outside the presidential palace in Cairo on Tuesday, demanding early pensions and a share in company profit.

Following a ruling in September to invalidate its privatization contract and return it to state ownership, the Steam Boilers factory stopped operations.

Nasr Automotive has closed down five factories. The workers are demanding they be reopened.

South African textile workers may strike

Textile workers in the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union have declared a formal wage dispute after talks with employers broke down this week. They oppose the terms of a new wage model and the offer made to workers in rural areas.

The union will now ballot its members with the result to be announced next week.

Kenyan teachers strike

Teachers in the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) went on strike Monday whilst teachers belonging to the Kenya Union for Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) began their strike Wednesday.

KUPPET is seeking a 100 percent pay increase whilst KNUT has demanded a 300 percent increase.

The government body, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), went to court last week and was granted a court order demanding the unions suspend their strikes until Friday when the court will rule on the legality of the action. However, the strikes are continuing in defiance of the order.

Kenya faces action by workers in runup to election

With a general election due in six months Kenyan workers are launching strikes to push their demands. In addition to the teachers' action described above, University lecturers in the Universities Academic Staff Union were set to begin a strike Thursday over salaries and allowances.

Workers at Airtel, Kenya's second largest mobile phone company, staged a sit-in on Tuesday after the company outsourced its customer services operation.

Around 400 registrars at the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), striking to receive an allowance previously agreed by the government, have been suspended by the Medical Services Ministry. The minister, Professor Nyong'o, placed a newspaper advert giving them a month's notice to vacate KNH premises.

Malawi: City council workers strike

Council employees in Blantyre, Malawi's second city and commercial centre, went out on strike Monday seeking a 150 percent pay increase to counter the rapidly increasing cost of living. Police responded by arresting

their leader, a Mr Kamowa.

They are also demanding the resignation of the executive committee of the Workers Union, describing them as “a bunch of helpless and corrupt minds.”

They are calling for the dismissal of the council’s director of administration, Alfred Chanza, accusing him of corruption and nepotism, alleging he has employed many members of his extended family, bypassing normal recruitment processes. Chanza is currently under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Bureau.

Malawi: Water workers strike

Workers employed by the Water Board in Malawi’s capital Lilongwe (LWB) came out on strike at the end of last week. They were angry that a 30 percent pay increase agreed by LWB management in July this year had not been paid. They are responsible for deliveries of water throughout the city of 1 million residents.

Although the board had agreed to the 30 percent increase, following government intervention the rise was reduced to five percent. The Malawi Labour Minister, Eunice Makangala, personally visited the LWB workers to ask them to suspend their strike, but they refused to meet with her.

They ended their strike on Tuesday after the government agreed to pay the 25 percent shortfall.



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