

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 September 2012

## Peugeot Citroën workers to strike near Paris

Workers at the PSA Peugeot Citroën plant in Aulnay-sous-Bois, near Paris, are threatening imminent industrial action over plans to shut the plant with the loss of at least 3,000 jobs.

If they do, it will have to be in a political struggle against the Socialist Party government and the trade unions.

The government originally opposed Peugeot's announcement in July that it would cut 8,000 jobs in France and close the Aulnay-sous-Bois plant in 2014. This week, the government now states, "[T]he need, in principle, of an industrial reorganisation and job cuts is sadly not contestable."

Peugeot has also said it aims for an "exemplary" dialogue with unions and has hired outside companies to help employees find jobs, Reuters reports.

## Rome: Hundreds protest closure of Alcoa plant, clash with police

Hundreds of workers from US aluminium maker Alcoa's Italian plant protested in Rome Monday over the planned closure of a Sardinian factory.

The protests resulted in clashes with police. Workers threw firecrackers and tried to break through a barrier outside the economic development ministry.

The plant is a major employer in the region that has already been badly hit by unemployment. The shutdown would threaten 2,000 jobs. One worker, Paolo Manca, 47, said, "If the factory closes, the whole of the south of Sardinia will die."

The UILM metalworkers' union is preoccupied with the lowering of energy prices to make the factory competitive on a European level.

Talks also took place this week at the economic development ministry over the planned closure, following rumours that either Swiss industrial group Klesch or the commodities giant Glencore could take over the site.

The government said in a statement published late Monday that it would ask Klesch and Glencore "to rapidly start talks." But Alcoa has already begun to close down the plant, blaming "factors beyond our control", including "the economic situation and the burdens imposed by the European regulatory system."

Alcoa posted a net loss of US\$1.151 billion (approximately €900 million) in 2009.

## UK Amnesty International staff strike against jobs threat

Staff at Amnesty International UK are to take industrial action this week to protest against the refusal of senior management to enter into "meaningful negotiations" over a cost-cutting programme that could result in job losses.

The employees say they fear that "international human rights work" will suffer. Amnesty International, a multimillion-pound concern, says it needs to make £2.5 million savings.

## Czech agricultural workers call for general strike

The Prague *Daily Monitor* reported that agricultural unions issued a call on their members and all other employees to join a two-hour general strike against Czech government policy, to be held on September 27.

The agricultural trade unions are members of the second biggest trade union umbrella organisation, the Association of Independent Trade Unions (ASO).

The finance ministry has submitted a budget bill for next year to be debated at the ongoing session of the Chamber of Deputies. As part of its austerity budget measures, the government plans to increase VAT and to reduce pensions.

## Strike notice served on Dublin Airport Authority

Notice of industrial action has been served at the Dublin Airport Authority in a dispute over pensions.

The Labour Relations Commission (LRC) confirmed talks on the €700 million deficit in the Irish Aviation Pension Scheme for the two companies had been adjourned. If the dispute is not resolved, industrial action could take place on October 1.

The SIPTU trade union said the action will take the form of two staggered two-hour work stoppages on a location-by-location basis.

## Israel: *Maariv* staff protest and *Haaretz* employees begin open-ended strike

Staff at the Hebrew language daily *Maariv* burned tires and chanted slogans outside the newspaper's office building in Tel Aviv Tuesday to protest work conditions, unpaid wages and job threats.

According to the *Times of Israel*, "Two thousand employees are set to be laid off as part of the company's austerity measures. In addition,

workers' representatives reported that some employees did not receive August salaries. Workers said they feared the company would default on their pension payments."

Attempts at a corporate purchase of the paper have hit obstacles and *Maariv*'s financial situation was revealed as worse than previously thought, leading to doubts that the September payroll could be paid.

Staff at *Haaretz* started an open-ended strike Tuesday, after management refused to disclose details of planned cuts and austerity measures to rescue the struggling newspaper. On Tuesday morning, hundreds of employees staged a protest demanding that executives put together an emergency plan to increase revenue.

Reporters have said they will not hold interviews or write news stories, and photographers will not be sending photographs to the news desk. *Haaretz* is the country's oldest newspaper, founded in 1918.

### **Egyptian public transport drivers to strike**

The Public Transport Authority (PTA) threatened Tuesday to stage an all-out strike coinciding with the start of the school year, to demand that control of the PTA be transferred to the Transportation Ministry from the Cairo Governorate.

Demands also included the dispersal of bonuses that had been agreed on with the PTA, as well as an improvement in working conditions. Twenty-eight PTA garages are to participate in the strike, starting Saturday.

### **Teachers from across Egypt protest in Cairo**

Around 2,000 teachers and academic employees from several governorates across the country protested in the capital for a third day on Monday.

The education workers brought their protest outside the Cabinet on Monday, "calling for higher salaries and improved working conditions, among other demands," said the *Egypt Independent*.

The protests were called by the Independent Teachers' Syndicate and the Federation of Egyptian Teachers, and a number of educational institutes. The official Teachers Syndicate, of around 1 million members, did not endorse the protests.

Teachers and education employees have threatened strikes on September 16, the start of the academic year. Their demands include a fixed salary scale starting with a minimum wage of LE1,200 for custodial workers, LE2,000 for administrative employees, and LE3,000 for full-time teachers, an incremental pay raise scale, full-time contracts for full-time work, restructuring the Ministry of Education and purging it of corruption.

Aside from the increasingly common practice of private tutoring, some teachers work as taxi cab and tuk tuk drivers after their classes in order to supplement their income.

### **EgyptAir flight attendants end strike**

Five hundred EgyptAir flight attendants ended their strike Monday after their representatives met with Civil Aviation Minister Samir Embaby Metwaly. He reportedly agreed that more flight attendants would be hired, and attendants who were found unable to travel for medical reasons would

be transferred to administrative positions.

Several EgyptAir flights had to be cancelled or delayed when the strike began last Friday.

"Gamal Abdel Nasser, the secretary general of the Flight Attendants Syndicate, also said that Metwaly made a landmark decision to allow EgyptAir flight attendants to wear hijabs while in uniform," reported *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. Nasser added that negotiations for a pay rise have been "postponed."

### **Algeria civil servants strike**

Last week, civil servants in the FNSC workers' federation began an eight-day strike to push for a pay increase. Commodity prices are rising sharply in Algeria, reaching nearly 9 percent in June, just prior to the high spending month of Ramadan.

Algeria, a country with 70 percent of the population under 35, has a youth unemployment rate of around 20 percent. Commenting on the highly explosive social crisis being stoked, the International Crisis Group's North Africa spokesman, William Lawrence stated, "The country has a huge economic cushion with its oil and gas reserves. But...the money does not trickle down to the people. There is an extra layer of frustration when you know your government is rich."

### **Namibian bank workers' strike**

Workers at the Agricultural Bank of Namibia (Agribank) walked out this week, refusing management's offer of a 6 percent pay rise. They are members of the Namibia Financial Institutions Union (NAFINU) and had been seeking a 12 percent pay increase.

Management had made a higher offer but wanted to make it performance-related, which the staff rejected.

### **Kenyan dockworkers threaten solidarity action in support of teachers**

Workers in the Dock Workers Union (DWU) this week gave seven days' notice to the government to meet striking teachers' demands. Otherwise they will come out in solidarity strike action.

The government had been given an order by the Industrial Court ruling the teachers' strike illegal. DWU general secretary Simon Sang noted, "If the government continues chest-thumping and misinterpreting what it means to declare a strike illegal, the rest of us will protest on behalf of the working fraternity."

### **Kenyan council staff strike**

Workers employed by Bungoma County Council went on strike Monday over salary arrears. They are owed Sh12 million (US\$143,000) for July and August. A spokesman for the striking employees questioned why the council did not have the money to pay wages, noting it received Sh7 million (US\$83,000) in revenues each week from markets and bus parks

and had recently been given a Sh79 million (US\$940,000) local authorities transfer fund payment.

The council had offered to pay one month's arrears, but this was rejected by the strikers, who demanded the full amount.

### **Kenyan lecturers strike**

Around 11,000 lecturers and non-teaching staff at more than 30 universities throughout Kenya came out on strike at the end of last week.

Represented by the Universities Academic Staff Union and the Universities Non-Teaching Staff Union, they are seeking a new four-year collective bargaining agreement to include a big increase in pay and allowances.



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