Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 October 2012

French energy sector workers in 24-hour strike against job cuts and plant closures

A 24-hour strike Monday by workers in the energy sector against job cuts and plant closures cut production capacity at some thermal electricity plants.

The strike follows an announcement by President Francois Hollande that he would close France's oldest nuclear power station at Fessenheim near the German border in 2016.

German power group E.ON announced last year that it would close four out of seven coal plants that it operates in France. E.ON also has two gas-powered plants in the country.

Thousands march in Spanish cities against latest austerity measures

Thousands marched in cities across Spain Sunday to oppose the latest government austerity measures. An estimated 60,000 people marched in the centre of Madrid. Some held banners proclaiming: "How can there be peace without bread?" and "Their plunder, my crisis."

Hundreds of thousands of Spanish workers have taken to the streets in almost daily protests over the past few months, against the relentless demands of international investors for increased social austerity.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced €13 billion in additional cuts in last month's budget.

Portuguese transport workers take industrial action against the latest austerity measures

Transport workers across the country took industrial action October 4, against the government's latest austerity measures.

The Lisbon subway closed during the morning rush-hour and suburban bus services were disrupted. Rail services were also at a virtual standstill due to a strike by engineers.

The government announced Wednesday steep increases in income taxes next year to meet financial targets being demanded in return for the €78 billion ($100 billion) bailout of 2011. Finance Minister Vitor Gaspar said the increases would be "enormous," according to the Associated Press.

The government of Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho predicts the economic contraction across Portugal will extend into 2013—a fourth year of recession in five years—and unemployment will rise to 16.4 percent.

Greek shipyard workers attacked by police as they demand payment of wages and employment

On October 4, 350 Greek shipyard workers from the Skaramangas Shipyards demonstrated outside the Defence Ministry in Athens, demanding new orders and the payment of their wages. Workers at the yard have not been paid in months. Most of their employment comes from contracts from the Greek military.

When they reached the grounds of the ministry, the workers crossed the courtyard and blocking the entrance to the general staff building. They were then brutally attacked by riot police using tear gas and batons.

Police made 106 arrests. In response another demonstration was organised outside the police headquarters, which was met by police using pepper spray against protesters.

Electricity board workers in Greece protest austerity programme and tax cuts for the wealthy

On October 7 Greek police broke up protests by electricity board workers protesting against a deeply unpopular property tax collected through electricity bills and tax cuts for the rich. This included the sit in-occupation of a data centre of the Public Power Corporation (PPC) utility firm in the north-eastern Athens suburb of Holargos.

Reportedly, 18 people were arrested and detained. On Monday the workers were charged with breaching the peace.

It is claimed by the GENOP power workers trade union that the PPC had doctored the electricity bills of large firms to enable them to pay lower property tax.

Farmers in Crete protest Greek government austerity measures

Hundreds of farmers on the Greek island of Crete held an anti-austerity protest on October 4, including an attempt to halt the operation of the terminal and the runway of Iraklio airport. Police dispersed the demonstrators with tear gas.

Staff at Amnesty International in London strike over cuts to UK office, risk to future

© World Socialist Web Site

Staff at Amnesty International in London went on strike Wednesday and held a protest outside the organisation's headquarters in the capital, over cuts to the UK office which employees say are putting its future at risk.

The current strike is the first industrial action at the organisation for 20 years.

Some protesting workers displayed placards reading: "Workers rights = Human Rights."

The *Guardian* quoted one protesting employee, Maggie Paterson, who has worked in publishing at the charity for 15 years: "None of us want to damage this organisation, we care too much about it, but when you see the whole thing being damaged it really feels like there is no alternative," she said.

The paper said: "The battle between Amnesty's management and its UK workers stems from a decision last year to restructure the charity, opening more offices in far-flung regions using local workers. It is moving from a centralised structure with resources concentrated in richer countries to the creation of regional hubs."

The UK section is one of Amnesty's biggest offices and fundraisers, and is to increase its contribution to global operations from 30 to 40 percent of its income. Consequently, the London management argues that in order to do this, cuts of £2.5 million have to be made, with around £1.25 million already having been slashed off costs.

The remaining cuts are expected to come at least in part from compulsory redundancies among the 200 part-time and full-time workers.

James Savage, who works in the "activism team" and has been at Amnesty for 13 years, said the majority of workers in the UK office agreed in principle with the shift in the organisation but argued they were opposed to the manner in which it was taking place.

"How could we be opposed to growing the organisation where it is needed?" he told the *Guardian*, pointing out that staff voted for a pay freeze last year in an attempt to help the situation. "Staff cuts raise the question of how effective we can be as a campaigning organisation. There may have to be redundancies but the scale and pace at which they want to make these changes mean they are inevitable, and we don't think they are."

Paterson added: "I have supported Amnesty all my life, but my fear is that what is happening to the organisation is wilfully endangering its future...Amnesty is being treated like a balance sheet or a multinational corporation and it is so much more than that."

Truck drivers at a Tesco distribution centre in South Yorkshire, England in 48-hour strike over possible job cuts

Around 180 truck drivers employed by the haulage firm Eddie Stobart at a Tesco distribution centre in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, England walked out on a 48-hour strike Tuesday in a dispute over possible job cuts.

Earlier in the day, over 100 drivers marched from the Tesco distribution depot on Middle Bank, at Doncaster Carr, to the company's store at Church View, near the town's transport interchange, before heading to the Tesco store to hand out leaflets to shoppers.

The drivers' dispute is over planned cuts to operations at the site. An estimated 90 percent of drivers voted in favour of a strike last month after Eddie Stobart, which took over operations from Tesco at the Doncaster site in August, announced a reorganisation.

Capita staff at Criminal Records Bureau in Liverpool, England vote to strike over pay

Staff employed by the Capita firm, at the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in Liverpool, have voted to strike over pay. In a ballot, the low-paid staff voted 91 percent for a strike and other forms of industrial action on a turnout of 82 percent.

The Capita employees have rejected a below inflation pay offer that would only mean an average of £5 extra a week.

"As well as now considering strike action, other industrial action could include a refusal to do overtime or any work outside the strict terms of contracts, and a general withdrawal of goodwill and co-operation," said a statement of the Public and Commercial Services Union.

The Home Office recently announced that Capita had lost the CRB contract to Tata Consultancy Services.

Finnish chemical plant workers strike to protest plans to cut jobs

120 workers at the Finnish firms' Kemira's chemical plants in Oulu began a strike Monday to protest against plans to cut jobs. The chemical plants have been taken offline.

Tomi Juntunen, the representative of the labour union, told Reuters the workers would not return to their jobs until the company began "true negotiations."

Due to unmet financial targets, Kemira argued in July that it would cut 600 jobs, up to 12 percent of its total workforce.

Egyptian doctors' strike in second week over wage rise, security, increase in health budget

Doctors across Egypt are involved in the second week of industrial action over demands of salary rises and a 15 percent increase in the health budget.

Daily News Egypt reported : "To escalate their action without harming patients, doctors have implemented a "free treatment strike," whereby patients at state-run Ministry of Health hospitals are treated and examined for free in the emergency or reception departments."

Outpatient clinics, which patients are charged for, are being closed during the strike.

"The latest figures from 22 governorates published by the committee elected during the general assembly of the Doctors' Syndicate last month show that 100 per cent of doctors are striking in the governorate of Port Said and 95 per cent in Suez," said *Daily News Egypt*.

The doctors are demanding the passing of a new wage law which gives doctors a minimum wage of EGP 3,000 per month; greater security at hospitals; and an increase in the percentage of the budget allocated to health care.

Staff at *Haaretz* newspaper in Israel in one-day strike to protest planned dismissal of up to 100 employees

Journalists and other workers at *Haaretz* newspaper launched a one-day strike October 4, in protest over the planned dismissal of up to 100

© World Socialist Web Site

employees and the claim that management is not negotiating with them over the firings and other cutbacks.

The strike forced the leading daily Hebrew newspaper to cease publication for the first time in 30 years.

The strike came in response to cost-saving plans by the paper's owners, who are reportedly seeking to make up to one in five employees at the paper redundant.

The London *Financial Times* said: "The paper's financial problems are emblematic of a broader crisis engulfing the Israeli news media, which has forced some of the biggest names in the business into a struggle for survival. Most at risk is the right-leaning Maariv daily, the third-largest Israeli paper by circulation, which is currently in receivership, and facing an even more uncertain future than Haaretz."

Maariv's current owner, the debt-laden IDB conglomerate, announced last month that it was selling the daily to the publisher of a small, rightwing newspaper that caters to Israel's settler community in the occupied West Bank. Protests took place last month by *Maariv* staff outside the Israeli prime minister's office after the prospective buyer announced he intended to take on no more than a few hundred of the current staff of 2,000.

"Analysts say Israeli newspapers face much the same headwinds as papers elsewhere—including a sharp fall in advertising revenue and a rise in readers who shun printed newspapers in favour of online news. But Israeli dailies have also had to contend with the entry into the market of Israel Hayom, a ubiquitous free newspaper funded by Sheldon Adelson, the US casino billionaire," said the *FT*.

Founded in 2007, Israel Hayom has now surpassed all other Israeli papers in circulation by drawing both readers and advertising revenues away from established dailies such as *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Maariv*.

Tamir Sheafer, a professor of political science and communication at Hebrew University in Jerusalem said: "We are currently talking about at least two or three names—Maariv, Haaretz and Channel 10 [an independent television station]—that are on shaky ground. If these media were to disappear, of course it would be damaging to Israeli democracy.

"My concern is that the huge economic pressure causes two things: one is that there is less of a budget for real journalistic work, such as investigative journalism. The second is that it creates fear of writing about companies and individuals that advertise in the media."

Ugandan bus workers strike

Around 200 drivers and conductors working for the private Pioneer Easy bus company in the Ugandan capital of Kampala began strike action Wednesday over non-payment of two months' salary. The strike has heavily impacted movement in the city centre and suburbs.

They have encamped at the Namboole national stadium where the buses are garaged. They have vowed to maintain the strike until their demands are met.

Tunisian transport workers strike

Public transport workers, working for the Tunis Transport Company in the Tunisian capital of Tunis, began a wildcat strike Wednesday, bringing all public transport to a halt. They demanded the release from arrest of a bus driver who had been arrested the previous day when his bus was in a collision with a car.

Strike by Nigerian Plateau state teachers enters seventh month

The strike by public school teachers in Plateau state in Nigeria has entered its seventh month. According to the News Agency of Nigeria, many of the schools have begun to be overgrown by weeds and provide cover for birds and animals.

The Plateau state Parent Teachers Association says many parents have enrolled their children at private schools. Gunshin Yarlings of the Plateau state Nigeria Union of Teachers chapter explained the teachers would maintain their strike until their grievances were addressed, saying, "we only want to be paid the N18, 000 ($115) minimum wage like any other worker in Nigeria. That is not too much to ask for."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site