

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Europe

## Protest of Greek workers over labour mobility scheme

The civil servants' union ADEDY held demonstrations in various Greek cities on Monday against the government's labour mobility scheme. Under this scheme, public sector workers are paid only 75 percent of their current salary for eight months, after which they are sacked if an alternative post cannot be found for them. This is mostly affecting already low-paid workers.

Part of the protest was a support rally of sacked government cleaners outside the Finance Ministry in Athens. The nearly 400 cleaners have been protesting outside the ministry for months. At one point they won a court order for them to be rehired, which the government ignored and which subsequently was overturned by a higher court.

The local authority workers' union POE-OTA also called a planned protest for the same day with a rally outside the Administrative Reform Ministry.

ADEDY has called a further one-day general strike of public sector workers to be held on July 9.

## Rolling strikes by Greek power workers

Staff employed by the state-owned electric power company PPC began a series of 48 rolling strikes Wednesday to coincide with the beginning of a debate in parliament to partially privatise the service by 2015. The privatisation is one of the requirements of the European Union-led troika's loans to the Greek government.

The main union representing the PPC employees is GENOP-DEH, which held a rally on Wednesday in the northern town of Amyntaio.

## Strike of Greek aviation workers called off

A planned 48-hour strike by Civil Aviation Authority staff organised by the OSYPA union has been called off after appeals by the tourism and airline associations to the prime minister and the Transport Ministry. It was due to take place Monday and Tuesday.

OSYPA is concerned about the deterioration of the infrastructure at

Greek airports and the implications for flight safety. The union has said it will file charges against the Transport Ministry at the Supreme Court in relation to the deterioration of the service.

The union said it called off the strike "because it is not our intention to cause trouble for local communities hoping to make a living from tourism nor to passengers, the national economy and the country's image".

## Belgian railways shut in 24-hour protest

Belgian railway employees held a 24-hour strike on Monday. Most services did not run, according to the railway operators, NMBC/SNCB, with major cities being completely cut off.

Their union, ACOD/CGSP, called the action to protest understaffing on the rail network, saying the understaffing means workers are unable to take planned days off.

## Temporary workers demonstrate in Istanbul

Temporary workers demonstrated Monday in front of the building of a company that supplies temporary staff for the Istanbul Waterworks Authority.

They were protesting delays in payment of salaries and the company's non-payment of severance pay when their contracts finished.

## UK glass workers strike

Around 100 glass workers employed by Tyneside Safety Glass began a two-week strike on Monday. They are members of the Unite union based at two sites in North East England. They are seeking a pay rise and have rejected the management offer of 3 percent in the first year followed by 2 percent for the next two years. According to Unite, the offer had strings attached to make it a self-funding pay settlement.

Workers are angry that while they are being offered paltry pay rises, the highest paid director of the company has awarded himself a 14 percent pay rise and put £750,000 into a trust fund to his benefit. They held a one-week strike in the middle of June over the same issue.

## Midwives in UK vote for first-ever industrial action

Midwives and maternity support workers, members of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), have voted by a 94 percent majority to consider taking some form of industrial action. This is in response to the National Health Service (NHS) only offering a 1 percent pay increase, rejecting the advice of an independent NHS Pay Review Body.

Just under half of those eligible took part in the vote, which is being used as an indicative vote. The RCM board will now have to decide when it meets if it will move to a formal ballot.

### **Ambulance staff in Yorkshire, UK, to strike**

Yorkshire ambulance staff are due to strike July 5 and 6 in an 18-month dispute that has seen several days of action already. The ambulance workers are opposing introduction of a new shift system they say could mean working for up to 10 hours without a break, affecting patient safety.

They are members of the Unite union and are employed by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS). Unite members represent a minority of YAS staff, just under 10 percent. The majority represented by UNISON are not involved in the dispute. The YAS does not even recognise Unite for purposes of negotiation.

A major media outcry met the call to strike over the weekend of July 5-6, as it coincides with the Grand Depart of the Tour de France, which this year begins in the Yorkshire city of Leeds and will take part on roads within Yorkshire over the next few days.

The YAS announced in mid-June that it would allow ambulances on red (emergency) calls to go out staffed by just two emergency care assistants (ECAs). ECAs are not clinically trained and are not able to administer medication, undergoing a six-week training course. Previously, ambulances would carry at least one emergency care practitioner or trained paramedic. Paramedics undergo a two-year university course and are highly trained.

### **Strike of Irish refuse workers continues**

The strike by more than 70 refuse workers employed at the Greyhound waste collection plant in Clondalkin continues. They were locked out on June 17 when they refused to sign a new contract that would have cut their pay by up to 35 percent.

The company, Greyhound Household Ltd., sought court injunctions to stop the members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) calling the dispute a lockout and from maintaining picket lines at their two sites. These injunctions were overruled by a High Court ruling Tuesday.

The company is using temporary agency staff to carry out bin collections. A march has been arranged for July 7 to lobby the monthly meeting of Dublin City Council.

Middle East

### **Iranian miners end sit-in**

More than 5,000 miners employed by the Bafgh Central Iron Ore Mine have ended their more-than-five-week sit-in. They were protesting plans to sell nearly 30 percent of the company to the private sector. They

wanted the company to retain the shares and plough back profits to improve the city of Bafgh.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade had agreed that the decision to sell the shares would be revoked. However, the miners continued their protest, as nothing had been put in writing. Following a visit last week by the governor of the central province of Yazd, with a written order, the miners ended their sit-in.

### **Strike by Bangladeshi migrant workers in Iraq**

Bangladeshi migrant workers employed on the Bismaya New City Project in Baghdad ended a strike and returned to work Sunday. The several-hundred staff hired by the South Korean Hanwha Engineering and Construction company began their strike Saturday.

They were responding to the arrest and assault of one of their colleagues by the police. He was arrested over alleged links with Sunni rebels but was later released.

### **Strike of Kuwaiti civil servants enters fifth week**

Employees of the Public Institution for Social Security have been on strike for more than a month. Their dispute is in response to the decision of Finance Minister Anas Al Saleh to block an agreement made between staff and management on salary benefits. Al Saleh has refused to negotiate until they return to work.

In a separate dispute, around 60 workers held a second sit-in at an Education Ministry office after storming it. They are protesting the ending of contracts with food suppliers to provide lunch meals to elementary schools. The ending of the contracts led to the loss of 800 jobs held by women.

### **Strike by Oman supermarket workers**

Around 1,300 staff employed by the Lulu hypermarket chain went on strike Thursday of last week, but returned to work Sunday following negotiations. The Lulu chain operates more than 100 stores throughout the Middle East and India.

Talks brokered by the Ministry of Manpower were held between Lulu management and employee representatives. The workers initially had a list of seven demands, including a pay rise and provision of health insurance on being employed. In the negotiation, the company agreed all workers would be given health insurance coverage from day one of their employment and would look at the wages question.

The agreement also covered a plan for the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions (GFOTU) to arrange training in line with the needs of the company.

Africa

### **Nigerian doctors strike**

Nigerian medical doctors came out on strike Tuesday, July 1. The Nigerian Medical Association, NMA, is striking for a resolution of its 24-point demand on the federal government. Among other issues, doctors say they are excluded from skipping at least one pay grade, a concession granted to other categories of health workers.

The NMA has been criticised for taking strike action because it is not a union. The president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN), Olumide Akintayo, said the doctors' demands were illegal because the NMA, National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) and similar platforms are professional groups and therefore cannot legitimately assume the responsibilities of trade unions, which engage the government in labour disputes.

### **NUMSA members in South Africa on strike**

The 220,000 members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) embarked on strike action July 1 against the Metals and Engineering Bargaining Council, which represents 10,500 employers. NUMSA is demanding a 15 percent one-year wage increase, a total ban on labour agencies and a R1000 (US\$93) housing allowance. The Bargaining Council is offering a three-year deal of between 7.0 and 8.5 percent.

Eskom, the South African power-generating company, which employs NUMSA members, offered a less than inflation pay rise of 5.6 percent. This prompted NUMSA to call a one-day protest march to its offices on Wednesday. Eskom responded by taking out a successful court order to stop the workers from coming out. The union has ignored the court verdict and continued with the strike call to its members.

### **South African nurses' protest attacked by police**

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA) has complained of riot police using rubber bullets and live ammunition against protesting student nurses, comparing it to the shooting of Marikana miners.

The student nurses' protest on Wednesday, July 2, was opposing funding decisions that resulted in the closure of Mmabatho Nursing College in Mafikeng South Africa. A new bursary system was introduced, which replaced reimbursement of travel costs with five 22-seater buses to transport the nurses.

The nurses say the use of the buses means the 300 student nurses cannot get to the areas to carry out their work in good time. This causes the nurses to be late and miss changeover times and miss important patient documentation being passed over from the previous night shift. As a result, the nurses are then reprimanded.

### **Swazi sugar workers end strike**

The six-day strike at the Tambankulu sugar estate in Swaziland has been resolved, with workers getting a 10 percent wage increase and incremental increases. The Swaziland Agricultural Plantations Workers Union (SAPWU) conceded on a key demand for a subsidy of E2,200 (US\$204) to each family towards education expenses for their children. Meanwhile, the dispute at Big Bend's Ubombo Ranches has gone into arbitration, and

negotiations are continuing at the Tambuti sugar estate.

### **South African Sun City workers strike**

Sun City resort workers in South Africa are out on strike, demanding the reinstatement of sacked fellow workers. Three hundred employees hired by labour brokers have been discharged and others suspended on accusations of theft. After the company installed cameras everywhere—in the toilet, in the fridge, kitchens and rest rooms—workers were accused of stealing and spending too long resting.

They have been on unprotected strike since Friday of last week. A chef on suspension for eating an apple said, "I work with food; I was never told I was not supposed to eat when I first started."

### **Workers at Swazi Wire end strike**

Workers employed by Swazi Wire, which manufactures wire, fence and other steel products, were sent back to work last week following a nine-day strike. They went back, having to accept the original company offer of a 7.6 percent pay increase and under the threat of prosecution. The 7.6 percent was agreed Thursday of last week and the workers were back at work June 27.

Workers were accused of trying to poison the tea of those who continued to work throughout the strike. They have also been accused of burning five of the company's fencing poles. Police are to investigate these events.

A deal was struck between the Swaziland Processing and Allied Workers Union (SPRAWU) and management. Management stated, "We have also agreed with the workers' union that the company will alert it when an employee who is also a member of the union faces charges. We agreed that the company will not take action without alerting the union and in the case where there will be an employee who is supposed to be taken to the disciplinary committee, the union will decide whether it wants to be present or not."



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