

# 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

## UK civil servants stage 24-hour walkout

Around a quarter of a million UK civil servants held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. The members of the Public and Commercial Services Union were protesting the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition's imposition of a two-year pay freeze in 2010 followed by a 1 percent pay cap. They have also lost money through imposed increases to payments they have to make towards their pensions.

Among the services affected by those on strike were job centres, museums, courts and social security offices.

## Refuse workers in Brighton, England, begin three days of strikes

Refuse workers in Brighton and Hove, England, held a strike Thursday in a dispute over pay. Further strikes are to be held on Friday and on October 20.

Since September 12, the refuse workers have been involved in a "continuous work to rule". The strikers are demanding the council recognise the professional qualifications of lorry drivers when evaluating their grade. The GMB union represents 38 HGV drivers it wants to be on a higher pay grade than six street cleaning staff.

Last year, refuse workers were involved in a bitter five-week dispute with the Green Party-run council, with the strike eventually called off in a sell-out deal by the GMB trade union.

## Greek workers continue strikes against austerity

On October 10, members of the General Confederation of Employees of Greece (GSEE) private sector federation held a strike and protest.

Members of the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY) also protested outside the Greek Council of State in Athens against the administrative reform ministry's decision to hold a national public sector employee evaluation. ADEDY has appealed the evaluation, including the government's plan to convert fixed-term contracts to indefinite ones, as well as measures introducing the individual appraisal of teachers' performances.

Members of ADEDY in all public services in the greater Athens region stopped work from the beginning of the shift until noon. Members of the municipal employees' union POE-OTA held a strike of a similar duration.

## Fourth round of industrial action by German train drivers

Train drivers in the GDL union working for the German rail operator Deutsche Bahn held a fourth round of strikes Wednesday, with a 24-hour walkout. GDL represents train drivers, but the union also called on staff such as train attendants to join the action.

The train drivers are seeking a 5 percent pay increase and a reduction in working hours from 39 to 37 hours a week.

## German Lufthansa pilots take strike action

Pilots in the Cockpit Union working for Lufthansa's budget offshoot, Germanwings, held a 12-hour strike Thursday.

Pilots have held a series of strikes to oppose Lufthansa's plans to scrap their financial assistance that allows them to retire at 55 years of age. Effectively, they will be unable to retire until they reach the age of 60. Their action to date has led to the cancellation of 4,300 flights.

## General strike call by Italian union confederation

The leader of Italy's biggest trade union confederation, CGIL, called on Monday for a general strike following a planned rally on October 25. The rally will be jointly held by CGIL and the metal workers' union FIOM. It is to protest the Italian government's plans to change Article 18 of the 1970 Workers' Statute, which protects employees against unfair dismissal.

## Proposal to sack Rome Opera musicians is condemned

The International Arts and Entertainment Alliance has condemned the plan by Rome Opera to end the permanent contracts of all its 182 musicians by the end of the year. Earlier this month, management announced its plan to sack the musicians and outsource the service in the

future.

Middle East

### **Moroccan unions call national strike**

Morocco's three largest unions, the Moroccan Labour Union (UMT), the Democratic Labour Federation (CDT) and the Democratic Federation of Labour (FDT), have announced a 24-hour strike beginning October 29.

The strike will include public sector workers, those in the private sector and agricultural employees. It is to protest the Moroccan government's plans to reform the pension system, which will cut retirement income. The government is also seeking to cut subsidies, which will impact living standards.

Following the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, the Moroccan government had increased subsidies to head off any movement in the working class, but now wants to claw back the concessions it made.

Africa

### **Strike by Ebola health workers in Liberia ends**

The National Health Workers Association called off after two days a strike by Liberian health workers to demand payment of promised safety bonuses. Liberia is the West African country suffering most deaths from the Ebola crisis. Up to October 13, there had been 2,300 deaths from the Ebola virus in Liberia, of which 95 were health workers.

The Liberian Health Workers Union says the strike call was "massively" supported. Health workers in the capital, Monrovia, had already been on a go-slow for three days prior to the strike at Island Clinic, which is the largest government-run Ebola clinic. The Island Clinic is supported by the World Health Organisation. A patient at the clinic said that no staff were taking care of them and that those who can walk are trying to escape over the fence.

The health workers' union chairman said that apart from the non-payments of bonuses, many of the workers are not being paid their regular wages. Health workers in Sierra Leone, Liberia's neighbour, where 97 health workers have died from the virus and have responsibility for burying Ebola deaths, have been on strike from last week over late payment of bonuses.

### **Nigerian teachers in River State demand Ebola preventative measures**

The Nigerian teachers' union has advised its members not to return to work before Rivers State government has distributed Ebola virus protection materials in all its schools. The Rivers State administration has declared its receipt of N200 million (US\$1.2 million) of Ebola Virus Disease money in August.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) issued the directive, saying it was not happy with the administration's implementation of the precautionary measures. The NUT said that its investigation revealed that only 5 out of the 23 local government areas in the state had installed the Ebola preventive measures. The union has instructed its members to stay at home until kits consisting of a thermometer, soaps, hand sanitisers and

buckets.

### **South African paramedics protest**

Paramedics at Gauteng Emergency Medical Services, South Africa, went out on strike on Monday demanding overtime payment and better working conditions. A paramedic at Prinshof ambulance station said he regretted putting patients at risk, but they had been demanding better working conditions and payment of overtime for four years. He said the paramedics were putting in 192 hours in a month, but are only contracted to work 160 hours, and were not paid overtime for the extra hours. Other areas involved are Soshanguve, Hammanskraal, Temba, Cullinan and Ekangala.

The paramedics' spokesperson went on to say that the fire brigade and ambulances had no running water at their stations, and at their site 18 staff had to use the same toilet. He said 14 advanced support technicians had left to the private service because of poor working conditions. He referred to the ambulances as hearses, saying, "What do you do with an ambulance with no oxygen cylinder?"

### **South African postal staff oppose redundancies**

The Communications Workers Union (CWU), on strike for 10 weeks at the South African Post Office, has condemned management for imposing compulsory redundancies.

In response to management's demand for a further 106 job cuts, the union says workers should be placed in jobs advertised in the post office or located in positions left by oversubscription. The CWU has accused management of shady dealings and incompetence and demanded the government replace them.

### **Kenyan flower growers demand hygienic work conditions**

Some 2,000 Kenyan workers at Karutura Flower Farm (rebranded Twiga Roses) have gone on strike demanding the provision of soap. One worker explained the farm is obliged to provide the soap but has failed to do so for the last five months.

A representative of the Kenyan Agricultural Workers Union said the soap was only a minor issue and that the company was sitting on a time bomb. He followed up by saying the company had not passed on union subscriptions for the last five months.

### **Kenyan teachers walk out of talks**

Kenyan teachers' unions walked out of negotiations with the Teachers Service Commission (representing government) Tuesday, demanding it meet their claims or they go on strike. The Kenyan Union of Post Primary Teachers (KUPPET) secretary general said the negotiations had collapsed and that the government negotiating committee had come with no offer, and not even with the document sent from the union for discussion.

The walkout of the KUPPET delegation was followed by the Kenyan National Union of Teachers (KNUT) delegation. The unions cover around a million students expecting to sit their exams next week, which the teachers would normally invigilate.

The enraged KUPPET secretary general announced they would call a meeting of its national governing council within 24 hours and most likely issue a strike notice. The unions had been demanding between 200 and 300 percent increases while the government were offering between 50 and 60 percent. However, according to the KUPPET secretary, the government's offer seems to have disappeared from the table.

KNUT has since organised further discussions, saying the meeting will be the last if not among the last with the government and went on to promise the exams would not go unsupervised.



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