

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 September 2015

## Europe

### **Finnish workers hold one-day strike and demonstration**

Finnish workers are holding a one-day strike with a mass protest in the capital, Helsinki, Friday. They are protesting plans by the right-wing coalition—in power since May—to attack working conditions, include cutting Sunday bonuses, overtime and sick pay. The government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä plans to slash labour costs by 5 percent in order to increase the competitiveness of the economy. Workers are expected to join today's action in large numbers. Trade unions representing more than 2.2 million people are involved in the dispute. Many schools and day care centres are expected to close. Teachers with permanent posts are expected to join the protest, even though under Finnish law they are not allowed to join political labour strikes. Their union, OAJ, announced it would be willing to pay any fines incurred by teachers for joining the strike. The *Financial Times* noted that the action would be, “biggest strike in decades”. It added, “Finland's last major labour protests date back more than 20 years with a one-day protest in 1992 drawing 300,000 people. But the last declared general strike was even further back in 1956, gathering 400,000 protesters.”

### **UK government scientists strike**

UK government scientists working for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) held a half-day strike Monday. Around 200 walked out. They are represented by the Public and Commercial Services and Prospect unions. Around 75 percent of all the union members voted by a 75 percent majority for the strike. Until 2010, NERC employees pay was negotiated with the NERC. They were then reclassified as public-sector workers and have suffered pay freezes followed by a one percent pay cap. They have also seen their pension

contributions increased. The real value of their take-home pay has fallen, while prices have risen over the last five years. The remuneration of NERC scientists has fallen in comparison to scientists in universities doing similar work.

### **Belgian taxi drivers demonstrate against Uber**

Belgian taxi drivers organised a protest convoy of around 1,000 taxis in the capital, Brussels, Wednesday. The protest convoy took place around midday, starting at the Brussels North station to Place Schumann. It was followed by a press conference. The taxi drivers were protesting the launch of a new app by Uber, UberX, which allows private car owners to carry passengers. A similar protest was held the same day in New York.

### **Strike by Spanish bakery workers enters second month**

Around 20 workers organised by the CNT union employed by the Mariel Bakery in the Spanish city of Alcoy struck August 10 demanding four month's pay arrears. The strike is now in its second month. The stoppage has affected the bakery and three shops in the city, which sell its products. The company recently fired 13 workers, in some cases with no notice.

## Middle East

### **Egyptian metal workers sit in**

A union committee at the Iron and Steel Company in Cairo called for a sit-in on September 12 and urged workers to join it to demand they be paid a Eid al-Adha (religious holiday) bonus that had previously been agreed.

### **Protest by Qatar airline crew member at London**

An aircrew member from Qatar Airways protested outside the World Low Cost Airlines Congress in London Wednesday, where a Qatar Airways executive was

speaking. The air crew member, wearing a mask, was protesting against crew being denied the right to form a union and for being subject to punishment for making public statements related to working conditions.

### **Tunisians march against corruption**

Hundreds marched through the Tunisian capital Tunis on Saturday to protest a law being introduced giving an amnesty to those accused of corruption. The marchers chanted their opposition shouting, “No to despotism and reconciliation with corruption.” The march was originally banned by the police but it went ahead anyway, although under a heavy police presence.

## **Africa**

### **Poultry workers in Botswana face sack after strike**

Thirty-nine workers at The Poultry Company in Notwane, Botswana who went on unauthorised strike at the beginning of September face losing their jobs. They struck over unpaid overtime and poor working conditions. They hoped to resolve the situation by joining a trade union. A worker speaking anonymously said, “We are not allowed to join any workers union and management threatened that any employee who joins a union will be fired. Workers are also victimized for complaining about exploitation.” Other complaints are that most staff are not employed under a contract and have no job description. The workers took their complaints to the Minister of Labour. The company produces 60 percent of Botswana’s poultry.

### **Kenyan teachers continue strike**

The strike by Kenyan teachers has entered its third week. The 280,000 teachers are members of the Kenya National Union of Teachers and the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education. They are striking in pursuit of a 60 percent pay increase. The Teachers’ Service Commission (TSC) went to court Tuesday in an attempt to get the strike declared illegal. The court refused TSC’s claim.

### **Kenyan health workers strike**

Health workers in six counties in Kenya are on strike over discrimination and late or nonpayment of salaries. Nairobi nurses are the latest to strike, coming out on Monday, September 7, and having their strike declared illegal. The Nairobi County government has threatened nurses with the sack if they do not return to work. Most hospitals in the capital have been paralyzed. Patients, who

have been forced to attend private hospitals, were not allowed to leave unless they had paid their bills.

### **Nigerian state workers fight for arrears**

Nigerian public-sector workers in Osun state have rejected an offer of half payment of wages by the government for the month of March. The several unions involved say the offer breaches the Memorandum of Understanding that was agreed to and was the reason the previous strike was called off. The unions are demanding that all the money paid out by the central government to bailout the states should be released to fully fund the March debt.

### **South African fruit farm workers continue strike**

One thousand members of the South African Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) are continuing their strike for a 12.5 percent wage increase. They say the average income of R400 (\$30) a week after deductions is not enough. The workers went on strike last week against the Ceres Fruit Growing Company, one of the country’s largest apple and pear packing companies. The union has planned a protest march this week on the company if they do not up the offer from 7.5 percent. The union says it has the support of the local townspeople of Ceres and intends to incorporate them into the demonstration. Workers are burning tyres to block the road to the company.

### **South Darfur doctors strike**

Cleaners at Nyala Teaching Hospital in South Darfur, Sudan began a strike, while doctors have gone on a partial strike, demanding the payment of outstanding wages. The non-specialist doctors at the teaching hospital say they will not go back until they have been paid their financial dues of shift incentives and housing. The Nyala Teaching hospital doctors have not been paid overtime for June and July and go home at 3pm, leaving the hospital without doctors. Nurses have to do cleaning while the cleaners are on strike.



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