

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 August 2017

Protest by striking Egyptian textile workers

Striking textile workers at the Egyptian Spinning and Weaving Company at Mahalla city in the Nile Delta area held a protest outside the company's headquarters in Cairo Tuesday. The thousands of workers began their strike last week demanding payment of promised bonuses and food allowances as well as a ten percent basic pay rise.

As many as 16,000 workers are on strike in an action that poses a challenge to the Egyptian military dictatorship. Protests in the city of Mahalla helped spark the 2011 revolution. All of the company's factories are now involved in the strike.

The strike broke out as the Egyptian inflation rate jumped to 33 percent in July, up from 29.8 percent in June. Egypt also raised fuel prices in July.

Israeli government orders end to nuclear scientists' go-slow action

The Israeli government has acceded to a request from the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission to implement emergency legislation to issue back to work orders to nuclear scientists at Israel's nuclear research centre at Dimona.

The scientists have been undertaking a three months-long go-slow action at the site to press for a pay increase. The 50 scientists involved have been issued with the order, which stipulates they must return to full duties within three months.

Israel bank staff end strike

Workers at Israel's fourth largest bank, the Bank Mizrahi-Tefahot, have ended their strike, which began at the start of August. The bank's 4,000 plus employees were demanding the bank implement new contracts. The strike ended after the bank brought in new contracts, which will be retroactively effective from 2016 and will last until 2021.

Call for march in Moroccan capital

A national rally is to be held in Rabat on August 27. The march is to protest the death of a demonstrator and the arrest of hundreds at a march in the Rif area of northern Morocco that took place in July. Hirak, a protest movement, has been calling protests in the Rif area over lack of

jobs and desperate social conditions in the area.

The protests have taken place since October of last year when fish vendor Mouhcine Fikri died when he tried to retrieve a fish from a garbage truck compactor. Police officials had confiscated the fish, claiming Fikri did not have a licence to act as a fish vendor. His death sparked off protests against his death and the marginalisation of people in the area.

Tunisian union calls for boycott of C-Star ship

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) has called on its members to prevent the docking of the ship C-Star if it tries to dock in the country. C-Star is run by the German far-right Generation Identity group, which scour the Mediterranean to intercept humanitarian ships offering support to refugees trying to cross to Europe. Fishermen in Zarzis in the southeast of the country have already prevented the ship docking.

UK union closes down Birmingham refuse collectors strike

On Wednesday, the Unite union suspended the nearly two-month strike by refuse collectors in the midlands city of Birmingham. The council is seeking to restructure the refuse collection service, which would lead to the loss of around 120 jobs and pay cuts of up to £5,000. The partial strike was initially set for two hours a day then stepped up to three hours. The refuse collectors determined fight led to an enormous backlog of uncollected rubbish in the city.

Unite was due to begin balloting its membership on Thursday to extend the strike until Christmas. The union suspended the action after the intervention of the government mediation services, Acas. According to press reports the council will not go ahead with pay cuts, at least for now, but Unite has recommended refuse collectors accept the changes in the work pattern wanted by the council, which includes a five-day working week instead of the current four-day schedule.

UK warehouse staff walk out

Around 1,000 staff at five Argos retail distribution centres began a three-week strike on Tuesday. The members of the Unite union at Basildon, Castleford, Bridgewater, Heywood and Burton-on-Trent have taken the action in opposition to the outsourcing of 500 jobs at the Lutterworth

depot in Leicestershire in which the jobs were transferred to Kettering in Northamptonshire.

The dispute also concerns the refusal of Argos to guarantee the protection of future terms and conditions in a redundancy agreement. The supermarket retail giant, Sainsbury, now owns Argos. The union claims the moves are part of a cost-cutting exercise initiated since Sainsbury took over.

Job centre staff in Sheffield begin two-week strike

Job centre staff at its Eastern Avenue office in Sheffield began a two-week strike on Monday. The members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) are opposing the closure of the office due to take place in March next year. Its services will be transferred to two other existing job centres making it difficult for its many users to access services.

The closure is part of a plan by the Department of Work and Pensions to close around 80 job centres across the country.

UK: Doncaster care staff to be balloted over new contract blackmail

Around 250 care staff in the northern English city of Doncaster are to be balloted by their union, Unison, for possible strike action. The ballot was called after the care staff's employer, Runwood Homes, which runs seven care homes in the city, tried to impose new contracts on the staff that would lower their pay and impose worse conditions.

Nationwide strike by Finnish train drivers

A 30-hour strike by the Finnish Locomotive Drivers' Union, which began at 6pm on Monday night, brought local and long distance as well as freight trains to a standstill--the only exception being two services connecting Finland and Russia. The drivers took the action in opposition to government plans to open up the state owned rail company VR to competition.

Portuguese airline cabin crew strike

Cabin crew working for the Portuguese airline SATA, that services the Azores region, began selective strike action on August 10. They are protesting breaches of contract violations by the airline. The selective action will be followed by an all-out strike from August 23 to 26.

Baggage security checking staff strike at Barcelona airport

Staff who do security checks on baggage at Barcelona-El Prat airport held a 24-hour strike that began at midnight on Monday. The staff are

seeking a €250 payment, 15 times a year, and have turned down a €200 a month offer from their employer. The Spanish government called in police to run the baggage checking service. The all-out strike followed partial strikes over the previous few days.

Protest by French Deliveroo staff

Cycle couriers working for the takeaway delivery service Deliveroo held protests in Paris, Bordeaux and Lyon on August 11 against plans to be paid per delivery only. Deliveroo, a UK firm, began a subsidiary in France in 2015 and agreed to pay its delivery staff an hourly rate of €7.50 an hour plus an amount per delivery ranging from €2 to €4.

From September last year, it began paying new staff on a per delivery basis only, the rate currently being €5.75 in Paris and €5 outside Paris. Existing staff remained on the old arrangement. However, on July 27 the company emailed staff employed on the old arrangement saying they too would be paid on a per delivery basis.

Swaziland bank employees continue their strike

Swaziland employees at Nedbank, who have been on strike for four weeks, are refusing to negotiate with their employer at the branch level. The bank workers are striking against a seven percent wage offer and are seeking a 10 percent rise.

Although the bank employers know local negotiation is a violation of employer/union agreements, the employers have attempted to undermine workers' demands by pressing for separate negotiations.

Swaziland Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers Union (SUFIAW), the bank workers union, are also in negotiation with First National Bank over a similar pay claim, with the same response.

The banking system does not have national rates of pay and negotiations take place with separate banking companies. Other bank employees also making claims are lining up to come out with Nedbank workers.

South African worker shot dead in employment dispute

A member of the public was shot dead by security forces as he and a relative were passing a demonstration by members of the local community. The demonstration in a suburb of Rustenburg was in response to community members being left out of job allocations.

The local community claim that they had not been incorporated into the job consideration process when a SMME (small, medium and micro enterprise site) for a shopping mall had been inaugurated.

Second South African miners' union calls for demonstrations and strikes

South Africa's leading mining union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), has followed the National Union of Mineworkers in threatening a general strike.

Preceding a rally commemorating the five-year anniversary of the Marikana massacre, in which 34 miners were shot dead, the union president Joseph Mathunjwa said a march on the Union Buildings (South African Parliament) in Pretoria would be organised.

Then, depending on the response to the union's demand to halt the announced destruction of 20,000 jobs so far this year, the AMCU would decide whether to apply for a certificate to strike nationally.

The union said it opposed the publication of the new mining charter, which increases black ownership of mines from 26 to 30 percent. The legislation also proposes a one percent privileged premium payout for Black Empowerment Investors, as part of a package to increase the benefits to black employers.

Mining unions are calling for the removal of the minister of resources who introduced the legislation, called the Mining Charter 111. Major mining corporations are also hostile to the published changes and say they were not consulted.

South Africa taxi drivers blockade roads and rail

South African taxi drivers demonstrated in Tshwane on Wednesday and blocked major motorways out of Mabopane.

The drivers turned the police back at their road blockades, even though the police had declared the prospective strike illegal the previous day after the taxi drivers failed to apply for permission to demonstrate.

Taxis converged on the Mabopane Township blocking routes out to the R80 highway; they also picketed the railway station, turning commuters away.

The demonstration was sparked off by the police blocking the taxi drivers' licences, taking away their ability to earn a living.

The taxi drivers planned to hand a memorandum to authorities at Tshwane House complaining about the police actions.



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