

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.

Ireland: Elevator workers strike over redundancy issues

Lift services at major public facilities across Ireland were disrupted July 12 due to a strike by members of the Technical Electrical and Engineering Union (TEEU).

According to the *Irish Times*, "It is the latest development in a dispute which led to the sacking of 17 lift engineers on June 26 by Otis Lifts, the largest lift company in Ireland."

Among facilities affected were hospitals, shopping centres, apartment and office blocks, the Criminal Courts complex in Dublin and industrial plants.

The TEEU assistant general secretary, Arthur Hall, said, "The Labour Court issued a recommendation on May 21 detailing how redundancies should be implemented. We deferred industrial action for a week to facilitate talks with the company but these proved futile."

The company had ignored the court's recommendation, which proposed that it seek voluntary redundancies in the first place and if compulsory redundancies were deemed necessary then the principle of first-in, last-out would apply. "This is the norm throughout the lift industry in Ireland, and one accepted by its major competitors," said Hall.

Otis intends to impose compulsory redundancies.

Due to an injunction taken out on them at their picket in Dublin Airport, TEEU members held a mass picket July 14 at Otis Head office in Bluebell.

The picket in Dublin Airport received support from other workers, some of whom had been supported by Otis workers when they were on strike.

According to the *Irish Independent* up to 500 contractors refused to pass pickets lines on the second terminal at Dublin airport.

Ireland: Factory workers in dispute over Irish Open

Workers at Killarney's biggest factory and employer, the German-owned Liebherr Ireland Container Cranes, are in dispute with the tourism industry over a decision to protest during the Irish Open golf tournament.

The company wants to force workers to take two days' holidays to facilitate parking for the public at the event, held in the town between July 29 and August 1.

Members of the SIPTU and TEEU trade unions at the plant, which employs 500 people, voted July 12 to hold a protest. The event, sponsored by telecom company 3, is forecast to bring in €30 million for the tourism industry.

After the strike ballot was taken, Donal Tobin, branch organiser with SIPTU in Killarney said, "The decision by the company will result in loss of income and major inconvenience for our members in planning for holidays in 2010.

"Members were willing to participate in using shuttle buses from a designated car park.

"As the number of holidays available to employees are limited, the overwhelming majority of members would have already planned their holiday year, as a number of days are committed to public holiday weekends and the Christmas period. These two days closedown will now be deducted from the employees' holiday entitlement."

Ireland: Strike looms over refuse collections

Over 18,000 homes in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in Ireland are expected to be affected by the decision of the SIPTU union to serve strike notice on the county council from next week.

The strike notice is over plans by the local authority to outsource refuse collections to a private company, Panda. SIPTU branch organiser Ramon O'Reilly said the county manager had taken a unilateral decision to discontinue waste collection by direct labour, in contravention of a Labour Relations Commission agreement.

Italian journalists strike over new wiretap law

On July 9, most Italian newspapers and news bulletins closed down for the day, as journalists went on strike over government plans to restrict reporting based on material gained from police wiretaps.

The *Herald* reported that "the bill, due to be voted on in parliament July 29, would tighten conditions under which magistrates can order a wiretap and ban newspapers from using transcripts until preliminary investigations are complete, something which can take years."

The country's main journalists' union FNSI said the legislation would "severely limit the right of citizens to know how judicial investigations are proceeding, imposing serious limitations on the free circulation of information."

Among the few papers on newsstands were *Il Giornale*, owned by the prime minister's brother, and *Liberio*, a pro-Berlusconi daily that said that

“the true obstacles to justice are uncontrolled wiretaps.”

The *Herald* said, “The government says the wiretap law is needed to protect the privacy of individuals from arbitrary investigation, but critics say it will hamper both the fight against organized crime and press reporting on corruption.

“The issue has galvanized opposition to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi at a time when he faces a split in his centre-right coalition and a fight to pass a €25 billion austerity package aimed at shoring up Italy’s strained public finances.”

Several high-level corruption cases have been exposed by Italian newspapers with material from transcripts from police wiretaps before they are produced as evidence in court.

UK: College staff strike over pay changes

The University and College Union (UCU) announced July 12 that its members at Croydon College would launch strike action the next day in a dispute over “controversial changes to pay.”

The dispute is focused on the college’s attempts to introduce performance-related pay linked to the number of students that gain a qualification.

The union says that the college’s new scheme is likely to penalise teachers who work with learners from the most difficult backgrounds and “raises uncomfortable questions about the college’s commitment to education.”

UCU said that paying staff based on the number of people passing a course could discourage the college from offering chances to students “who want to turn over a new leaf.”

The union said the college could face further strikes if it pushes ahead with the plans.

UK: Tank track factory workers in walkout over pay

On July 8 around 200 workers walked out of the Astrum plant in Stanhope, England that manufactures tank track. The protest was over the lack of a pay rise this year, after being subject to a pay freeze since 2008.

An overtime ban has been in place at the plant for over a week, and another one-day strike is planned for next week. Workers voted to take industrial action against Astrum following the rejection of the company’s offer of a pay rise, and after talks broke down without resolution.

Turkey: First ever workers’ strike in IT sector

The first strike in Turkey’s fledgling IT sector was launched July 9 in the Aegean province of İzmir, as collective bargaining failed and 37 workers took action.

The Sosyal-İş labour union, affiliated to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions, or DİSK, has implemented a decision to strike at the Ünibel company, which provides IT services to İzmir Metropolitan Municipality.

The president of Sosyal-İş, Metin Ebetürk, said, “The workers at Ünibel are providing software, hardware and IT services to the municipality and its sub-units. Their salaries are way below the salaries of workers that are employed at other companies of the municipality. We have raised this issue previously, but our demands were not met.”

Ünibel workers receive 30-35 percent less money than those who work in other municipal companies, according to Ebetürk. The union is demanding a 200 Turkish lira increase.

Ünibel was founded in 1994 to serve the IT needs of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and the Aegean University. Two of its shareholders are municipal companies, İZBeton and İZulas.

Egyptian textile workers resume protests over unpaid wages

Workers employed at the Amonsito textiles company have resumed their protests, after pledges of redundancy payments remain unpaid four months later.

On July 12, workers gathered at the headquarters of the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) and began a sit-in in the building’s lobby. Around 100 workers were there the next day, according to *Daily News Egypt*.

In 2007, Amonsito’s owner, Syrian-American businessman Adel Agha, fled Egypt leaving the textile factory heavily debt-ridden. Since then, Amonsito’s workers have not received regular wages.

In March, following a 21-day sit-in by workers outside parliament, an agreement was reached between the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration and Bank Misr, which as creditor is responsible for liquidating the company’s assets whereby workers would be paid LE 106 million.

When this agreement was not upheld workers resumed their sit-in.

The offer of LE 106 million was subsequently reduced to LE 50 million in May, when the workers’ two-week sit-in outside parliament was forcibly dispersed by security bodies.

“A month ago [EFTU president] Hussein Megawer told us that he wouldn’t be able to give us pay packages based on our gross salaries. He said that he would give us the base salary plus [the social insurance], three or four months for each year served,” Abdel-Meneim explained. “We agreed. He proposed LE 86 million, we said OK. He said, ‘but no protests because of our image in front of the world’, we said OK”.

According to *Daily News Egypt*, “Workers were then told to wait for a month while Hussein Megawer travelled abroad to accompany his wife who was undergoing surgery.

“According to Abdel-Meneim, officials have reneged on their promise of LE 86 million and workers are again being offered LE 50 million.

“Where do we go? What are we supposed to do? Who do we talk to? [Manpower Minister] Aisha Abdel-Hady lies. Hussein Megawer lies,” said Abdel-Meneim, who has been with Amonsito for 18 years.

“Should people who have been with Amonsito for 28 years accept [a redundancy payment of] LE 25,000?”

According to union committee head Khaled El-Shishawy, Abdel-Hady appeared on the Mehwar channel’s “90 Minutes” talk show and said, “They are entitled to LE 86 million but I can only give them LE 50

million.”

El-Shishawy said that workers have proposed that raw materials worth roughly LE 20 million seized by Bank Misr when Amonsito was brought under administration be sold and the proceeds go to workers.

Namibian diamond workers union settles on eve of strike

Members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) were due to start strike action July 12. The miners work for Namdeb, a diamond mining company. It is jointly owned by De Beers and the Namibian government and has a 1,600-strong workforce. A majority of those in the union had voted for the strike action in pursuit of a wage claim.

The workers were angered by the fact senior management had awarded themselves pay and allowance increases, but were telling the workers their claim could not be met because of the impact of the global economic crisis.

A deal was struck at the last minute, after a high-powered delegation met with the MUN and Namdeb management. According to the web site Diamond Intelligence, the deal is for two years backdated to April 1 this year. They state that “the agreement include[s] a 10 percent wage increase, a 10 percent remote allowance on midpoint of salary scales, a 9 percent housing allowance.”

A dispute about levels of leave will be discussed later. In a vote just prior to the settlement, the miners had rejected a 10 percent pay offer by the company and were seeking 13 percent plus increases in other allowances.

Ugandan dam workers strike

Construction workers building the Nyagak mini hydroelectric dam in Zombo District went on strike last weekend. The casual workers and support staff struck over pay arrears owed to them by Reincon, a subcontractor at the site. Reincon’s contract has finished and the work is due to be taken over by Spencon India. The workers were set to continue their action until the arrears of pay had been paid.

Nigerian doctors vow to continue strike action

Nigerian doctors organised in the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) began strike action at the end of June to put pressure on the government to implement the previously agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Structure. Their demands also include payment of arrears and improvements to hospital infrastructure.

A recent meeting held by NARD delegates voted in favour of continuing the action. Dr Ibrahim Sanusi Mohammed, president of the Maiduguri Teaching hospital NARD chapter, told the press, “The outcome of our meeting was that the strike should continue... Nothing has been done about our salary arrears which is our minimum demand.”

Two more Nigerian states join Oyo state teachers strike

Teachers in the Abia and Rivers states of Nigeria have joined with teachers in Oyo state, taking strike action over their state governments’ refusal to honour the Teachers Salary Structure (TSS) that would give them a 27.55 percent increase.

The Oyo state teachers began their action last week. The Nigerian Union of Teachers has said the action will continue in the three states until they honour the previously nationally agreed TSS.

Kenya: Nairobi city hall staff threaten action over “ghost” workers

Members of the Nairobi branch of the Kenyan Local Government Workers Union have agreed to take action, subject to approval by the National Union, over an audit report drawn up by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

According to the *All Africa* news web site, the report, “prepared after an audit to flush out ghost workers, saw genuine employees being sent home.”

Union branch secretary, Festus Ngare, stated, “We will be having a go-slow or a major strike to protest against the faulty document.”

This takes place just days after the city hall human resources director, Jennifer Nyaga, had to admit that 145 employees had to be reinstated after initially being struck off the payroll.



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