

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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Europe

UK post office staff strike over working hours

On December 24, counter staff at a number of major post offices in the UK held strike action to protest changes in their working hours.

The action began following a demand by Royal Mail managers that staff at 294 “Crown Office” branches work until 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve. This was contrary to previous years when workers finished their shift at noon. Royal Mail said that the strike hit 45 of the Crown offices, which had to be closed by the action. At many of the offices they employed post office managers in place of regular workers in an effort to weaken the stoppage.

The Communication Workers Union said that an early finish on Christmas Eve was a traditional right that its members have enjoyed since the 1970s and that workers “deserve the time off to be with their loved ones and families”. Royal Mail management said Crown post offices were facing increasing competition from banks and building societies that were now open all day.

London Underground workers strike in defence of demoted colleague

London Underground (LU) staff employed on the Piccadilly Line section of the service took industrial action for 24 hours on December 24 in a dispute over the demotion of a colleague.

The workers are members of the drivers union ASLEF. Underground management said that the strike action stopped just half of the 50 trains on the line running on the morning of the action.

The driver around whom the dispute is centred was demoted after passing four red signals. ASLEF said that drivers were concerned by management’s failure to implement action plans following a signal passed at

danger and the manner in which the drivers’ disciplinary case was held. The union also raised concerns about the conduct of an appeal that occurred without the driver or an ASLEF representative being present.

Court action forces French warehouse staff to end blockade

Workers employed by the H&M chain store in France ended their industrial action this week following a court ruling. The strike began over a pay dispute on December 13. Since then workers have blockaded the central H&M warehouse in the town of Le Bourget, which supplies all the company’s 63 stores. Some 300 workers are employed at the Le Bourget warehouse and H&M employs a total of nearly 3,000 workers throughout France.

On December 28, some days before winter clearance sales begin in France, police broke up the blockade. On Christmas Day, the law court located in the town of Bobigny ruled that the workers end their industrial action before Monday at 9 a.m. In a ruling blatantly favouring H&M, the court also demanded that each striking worker pay a compensation fee about 1,500 Euro.

Following this ruling, unions representing workers called off the blockade and agreed to hold a mediation meeting on January 10 with management regarding the dispute.

Pay is generally very low for store workers at the Le Bourget depot with staff only earning 870 euros net a month.

Africa

Nurses on strike in Angola

Nurses employed by the Luanda Provincial Health Board have been striking in opposition to management’s refusal to pay their salaries. The action by over 2,000 nurses belonging to the Angolan Nurses Trade Union (SINDEA) was expected to restart on December 24.

SINDEA chairman Almeida Pinto told the Angola Press Agency that the dispute started after the government delayed paying the nurses, accusing 209 of them of having used fake certificates. It is currently unclear whether the 209 are to receive any salary payments at all. Pinto said that in spite of the strike, some of the main services would still be available for the public.

The strikers plan to hold a demonstration outside the Provincial Health Board offices. Pinto said that a meeting had been arranged between the union and the Luanda provincial government to find out if management intended to pay the nurses' salaries.

Nigerian oil workers end strike

Workers at the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) have suspended their indefinite strike following an agreement reached on December 22 between the union and management, in which management agreed to implement most union demands by December 24. The day before the settlement, union members had locked out the management who had intended taking over their jobs.

The Chairman of DPR chapter of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), Mohammed Bulama Saidu, told the Lagos-based *Vanguard* that the union had suspended the strike for two reasons. One was the acceptance of their demands by DPR management and the other was the appeal from the PENGASSAN national secretariat to resume work. The latter was based on an assurance from DPR management that they would not renege on their promises again.

Saidu said that management had agreed to implement eight of their ten demands by December 24, 2004, while the release of long service award gift items would be implemented within four weeks. The management also claims that it will bring in the Staff Home Ownership Assistance Scheme (SHOAS), another union demand, in the first quarter of 2005.

The DPR workers had begun an indefinite strike on December 21, 2004 over the management's refusal to implement various allowances and bonuses as laid down in their conditions of service. They accused the management of claiming that there was no money, whilst ordering around 30 new Toyota Avensis cars, each costing N5.9 million (\$US45,000).

PENGASSAN's aim was to stop all oil and gas

operations at petroleum import and export terminals across the country. The DPR workers are responsible for such things as recording and clearing the tankers that lift crude oil from the export terminals. They had also withdrawn their services from the jetties, oil depots and refineries.

Despite DPR claims that middle management could take over from PENGASSAN members, the strike had been expected to unsettle the oil market.



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