

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

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## **Italian railway workers strike to demand safety improvements**

Railway workers in Italy held strike action on January 17 to demand an improvement in safety. During the 24-hour strike only “essential services” ran, according to Italian authorities.

The stoppage follows a crash between two trains near Bologna on January 7. The collision resulted in the deaths of 17 people, including five rail workers. The cause of the accident has not yet been determined but there have been suggestions that one of the two trains involved in the crash failed to stop at a red signal.

## **Underground workers in Glasgow, Scotland to strike this week in pay dispute**

On January 20, Underground workers employed on the subway in Glasgow, Scotland are to hold industrial action in a dispute over pay. Workers, including drivers, ticket collectors and safety workers, are to walk off the job between 14.30 GMT and 18.30 GMT. The action was called by the Transport and General Workers Union following workers’ rejection of a two-year pay deal worth an extra 5.9 percent. Workers have also voted to hold further industrial action over changes to holiday periods.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Director of Operations Douglas Ferguson said, “That is the final offer on the table for subway staff. Not all of our staff are TGWU members and we will attempt to provide a limited service during the strike period”.

## **Strikers in Sierra Leone ignore union call for return to work**

Hospital workers on strike at the Makeni Government Hospital in Sierra Leone have refused to obey an instruction from the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) to return to work. The strike is in support of a demand for improvements in conditions.

One of the strikers told the *Standard Times* that they had been experiencing problems with bad conditions and poor management, and they were worried that if they failed to confront the situation now more patients’ lives would be lost in the district in future.

In spite of efforts by the paramount chief and elders of the Makeni township to secure a return to work, the strikers are adamant that they will not return.

A delegation from the government and the SLLC were in Makeni, looking for ways to end the strike.

Meanwhile, 520 staff members at the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone have gone on strike to demand payment of salary arrears. The strikers, who are members of the Junior Staff Supporting Association (JSSA), claim that the University of Sierra Leone owes them Le405.6m (\$172,000).

A senior member of the JSSA told the *Standard Times* that the college administration had “resorted to soliciting the services of prisoners from Pademba Road prison to clean the college”.

## **Radio workers strike in Sierra Leone**

Workers at the Sierra Leone radio stations, SKYY FM106 and KISS FM 104, have taken strike action over salary arrears. They have not received any pay for four months.

Strikers claim that whilst they have been going without pay, relatives of the Director of the Station Andrew Jeneka Koroma, have been receiving theirs promptly at the end of every month.

One of the strikers told the *Standard Times*, “He preaches against such ills in society but he perpetrates the same thing on his workers.”

## **Kenyan council staff strike over salary arrears**

More than 13,000 Nairobi City Council workers have been on strike for several days to demand the payment of their October, November and December salaries, amounting to Sh667 million (\$8.6m). They threatened to march to the State House to see President Kibaki

unless their arrears were paid by January 19.

Local Government Workers Union secretary Kent Mukoya appealed to the government to intervene. On January 16 he told *The Nation*, “Let it be known that we shall only call off the parade if and only if all payments are made in full”.

Addressing strikers outside the City Hall, he accused the government of not stepping in to help because the strike mostly affected services needed by the poor. “We are surprised that the government has turned a deaf ear to our genuine cry and, instead, furthered the abuse of law with impunity in the name of sustaining class interests.”

The strike has affected the health service, collection of garbage and other council services.

### **Liberia: Go-slow at the Cocopa Rubber Company**

About 500 employees at the COCOPA Rubber Company in Nimba County are operating a “go slow” action in support of a demand for four months’ wages owed them by the management. They are also demanding the removal of the present management team headed by Dr. Roland Massaquoi, former Agriculture and Planning Minister in the NPP-led government of exiled President Charles Taylor.

In an interview with *The Analyst* (Monrovia), a spokesman for the workers, Alexander Kuma said, “Massaquoi along with his co-workers are only exploiting and cheating the workers in particular and Nimbaians in general.” He said that the workers were finding it hard to make ends meet, especially after a recent increase in the price of rice. “As a result, there will be no work until government can take serious measures against the management.”

Kuma also denounced the management for carrying out arbitrary dismissals. According to him, the Physician Assistant at the only clinic has been sacked, leaving nobody to take care of the clinic.

### **Strike threat by Nigerian steel workers**

Workers at the Ajaokuta Steel Company, Nigeria, are threatening strike action in support of their demand for the payment of “severance and disengagement benefits” due to well over 1,000 colleagues who have recently been sacked. Some workers are owed salaries for several months. The workers are members of the Iron and Steel Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ISSAN) and Steel and Engineering Workers Union of Nigeria.

The affected workers ~~Dave~~ told the (Lagos) that they no longer have faith in their union leaders, who have “gone to Abuja for over two months without achieving meaningful success”. The leaders are also accused of failing to keep their members informed.

According to the paper, plans for the development of the company have received a major setback, as staff vowed to “make the steel plant ungovernable until their severance and disengagement benefits were fully paid by the federal government”.

Meetings have recently taken place behind closed doors between representatives of the Federal Ministry of Power and Steel and the unions.

Employees of the company are also concerned about the on-going privatisation of the industry, which could lead to factory closures and the layoff of more than 20,000 steel workers.

Last month the Minister of Power and Steel, Senator Liyel Imoke, claimed that government had finalised arrangements for the settlement of workers’ entitlements.



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