

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to: editor@wsws.org

Europe

French emergency doctors strike

On March 7, staff at two-thirds of the emergency facilities at private hospitals in France held a 24-hour strike to demand shift pay and compulsory work payments for doctors.

The action, which was called by the Syndicat National des Urgentistes de l'Hospitalisation Privé trade union, was supported by an estimated 70 out of 90 emergency units.

Research workers in France hold day of action

On March 9, workers employed in the public research sector participated in a national day of strikes and demonstrations. Some 5,000 gathered near the Sorbonne University to protest growing insecurity and funding cuts.

Scientists point out that private interests are increasingly dominating research in university education and public research. They are demanding that the results of research be accessible for all and that research should be conducted according to social need not profit.

Earlier in the week, the scientists and researchers issued a statement signed by more than 50,000 supporters, which stated in part, "The sectors that are thought not to be profitable immediately—from entire human and social sciences sections to mathematics—will quickly be doomed".

This week's action is the latest protest by scientists and researchers. On February 4, 5,000 demonstrated in Paris.

European railway workers hold protest against rail "liberalisation"

Railway workers throughout Europe demonstrated in France on March 7 against the restructuring of European rail passenger services. Some 800 workers from France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Greece participated in the protest.

The European Union plans to open up the continent's rail passenger services to private competition by 2010. The demonstration was organised in the town of Strasbourg, where deputies at the European Parliament were discussing additional plans to open international passenger traffic to competition.

Doctors in Italy strike in dispute over contract

Doctors in Italy staged a one-day strike on March 4 to protest a three-year delay in renewing their work contract. The

industrial action was the fourth such stoppage in the health sector in the past 13 months and resulted in the cancellation of thousands of operations and hospital visits.

An estimated 90,000 operations were postponed as a result of the strike, with doctors' trade unions saying that the staff would only guarantee emergency treatment. At least 150,000 doctors, surgeons, vets, and hospital administration staff are involved in the dispute.

The doctors' contracts expired at the end of 2001. The government plans to renegotiate them on the basis of increasing the working week to 40 hours from 38.

Public transport workers strike in Italy

Public transport workers in Italy participated in a 24-hour national public transportation strike on March 9. In the capital Rome the strike was held from 8:30 am - 5 pm and from 8 pm - midnight local time.

An estimated 29 percent of workers participated in the strike in Rome and 26 percent outside the city. Many traffic jams formed from early morning as the strike hit, with the areas of Porta Maggiore and San Giovanni particularly affected.

On March 11, auto workers employed by FIAT are expected to protest in Rome with a demonstration beginning at the Piazza della Repubblica at 9 am local time.

Hospital workers in Belgium strike in contract dispute

On March 3, hospital staff in Belgium held a further 24-hour strike in a dispute over working conditions. The employees are demanding more rights in relation to working time for those nearing the end of their careers, and a 13th month salary (the year-end bonus).

The stoppage affected many hospitals nationwide. In Brussels, staff struck at the facilities in Sainte-Elisabeth, Saint-Michel, Erasme and Cesar de Paepe, the Saint-Jean clinics and at the Chirec group of hospitals at Parc Leopold, Cavell and Basilique. Strike action also took place at in Wallonia, at Namur's St Martin institute and Mont-Godinne hospital.

Workers also participated at hospitals in Dinant, Bouge, Brabant Wallon, Nivelles, Tubize and Braine l'Alleud.

Miners in Cyprus strike over unpaid wages

On March 8, some 50 copper miners struck at the Skouriotissa mine in Cyprus in protest at not being paid for the last three months. The miners claim that they are owed approximately £165,000 in back salaries from the Hellenic Copper Mines Ltd.

The staff are also protesting that £324,000 has gone missing

from the company's provident fund and that the firm is paying off its debts using money from the fund.

Production at the debt-laden company has been decreasing over the last year with only 100 tonnes of copper produced over the last 12 months. Last year the company made 15 miners redundant. They have yet to receive their full redundancy packages.

Africa

South African truck drivers strike settled

A strike of South African truck drivers, which began on February 27, has been called off after ten days. The action involved over 35,000 workers, who were demanding a wage increase of 9 percent across the board and 10 percent for workers earning the minimum wage. The five main transport unions involved have agreed to a 7 percent increase for all drivers and 7.5 percent for drivers earning the minimum wage. According to *Business Report* of March 8, the increases will not be paid until June, but the agreement includes allowances to compensate for the delay.

During the course of the strike there were widespread protest demonstrations throughout the country. The police attacked strikers in Johannesburg and elsewhere. On March 4, security guards shot four demonstrators outside the gates of Cargo Carriers in the Vaal Rand area.

The dispute affected half of South Africa's transport businesses and had a considerable impact on the economy of the country. The retail and manufacturing industry were affected, with the delivery of rice, meat sugar and beverages to supermarkets disrupted. There was also a run on petrol that left some petrol stations without fuel.

Zambian Copperbelt workers strike continues

The strike of Zambian Copperbelt workers continues in the face of opposition from the leaders of the National Energy Sector Workers Union (Nesawu). The strikers, who are employed by Zesco, are protesting against the continued delay in payment of salaries and are demanding the removal of managing director Rodney Sisala. They are also calling for the reinstatement of Humphrey Zulu, Kitwe branch chairman of Nesawu.

On March 1, strikers locked the offices of the Kitwe regional headquarters and prevented anyone from entering. The riot police, who were called by management, were forced to seal the premises.

According to *Daily Nation*, workers in Solwezi, in the North Western province, have joined the strike, demanding the unconditional lifting of the suspension of Zulu. Solwezi branch chairman Joseph Kabwe issued a statement that the workers had resolved not to return to work until their demands are met. Unionised workers in Lusaka have also joined the strike action to demand the removal of Sisala.

On March 5, Eddie Chla, Lusaka province co-coordinator for the Power Generation and Allied Workers Union of Zambia, told the *Post* that demanding Sisala's removal without

discussing improvements was inappropriate. He urged Zesco employees to return to work "for the good of the company".

Two days later, Nesawu general secretary Yotam Mtayachalo issued a press statement calling for a return to work at Zesco. He said, "We therefore appeal to all workers countrywide to immediately report for work while the issue of the managing director is critically being looked at by the board."

A meeting will be held next week between energy minister George Mpombo, labour minister Mutale Nalumang, and leaders of the unions.

Burundian nurses take strike action

Hospital nurses in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, began an indefinite strike on March 7 to demand better pay and working conditions. They are calling on the government to implement an accord signed in December 2004, following a series of strikes by nurses to demand overtime pay, the consideration of their professional risks, free medical care and the payment of bonuses.

The chairman of the nurses' trade union, Mélance Hakizimana, told IRIN that the accord should have been implemented in January. "We have waited for months, but as nothing came, we decided to suspend work." He added that nurses would not resume work unless the accord was totally implemented.

Public Health Minister Jean Kamana has claimed that the strike is unjustified. He told IRIN that by the time the accord was signed, the government's budget was already under analysis at the National Assembly and "it is not easy to revise it".

Cameroon printers call for international support

Workers are on strike at the Cameroon National Printers. In a statement posted on the Internet they describe the serious situation they face: "unpaid salaries, pressure, intimidation and threats from management, dreadful working conditions."

In some provinces, such as Garua, in the northern part of the country, the printers have not been paid for more than ten months. According to the statement, management has frozen family allowances for 17 years and union affiliation dues, collected from workers' pay has not been handed over to the union for over 20 years.

Since the action began, management has taken disciplinary measures in an attempt to intimidate the strikers. The strikers have made an appeal for international support.



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