

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## **Czech car workers stage warning strike**

Czech car workers at Skoda Auto staged a one-hour strike on March 30 to demand wage increases following inconclusive pay talks.

The work stoppage, which involved up to 12,000 workers, was held at Skoda's three plants in Mlada Boleslav, 40 kilometres (25 miles) northeast of Prague, Vrchlabi, 80 kilometres northeast of Prague and Kvasiny, 120 kilometres east of Prague.

Skoda Auto, a unit of German manufacturer Volkswagen AG, is the Czech Republic's largest exporter. Management has proposed pay rises in line with inflation of about three percent for 2005, but the unions are seeking around 10 percent.

## **Icelandic journalists threaten industrial action**

Journalists working at the national broadcasting service in Iceland are threatening industrial action over what they claim is political interference in the appointment of a new chief editor of radio news.

Members of the Icelandic Union of Journalists at the national broadcaster (RUV) are saying they will refuse to work alongside the new appointee to take charge of radio news on April 1.

Their threat was made after several well qualified journalists recommended for the post by the head of RUV's news division were passed over in favour of a recommendation from a political committee that oversees the station's work.

The journalists allege that the committee's recommendation was determined by the candidate's connections with the Progressive Party of Icelandic Prime Minister Halldor Grimsson, rather than his credentials for the post.

The final decision is taken by the head of the RUV, who is politically appointed, and who decided to go with the recommendation of the political committee.

## **Scottish housing workers strike**

Five hundred workers employed by Glasgow Housing Association are on strike against threatened job cuts.

The workers voted on March 30 by two to one in favour of the action against plans to withdraw rent collection facilities from 14 centres, which it is feared will lead to 28 job cuts.

## **UK banking staff ballot on industrial action**

Workers employed by HSBC bank are to ballot on industrial action after the company cut cashiers bonuses.

The ballot, to be held next month, is being organised by the Amicus trade union, which has called for a one-day strike on May 27.

## **Egyptian asbestos workers continue long running dispute**

Workers at the Ora Misr asbestos factory north of Cairo are continuing their strike which began in November 2004 after the company sacked 52 workers who had raised health and safety concerns.

According to an article in the *Khaleej Times Online* workers at the factory, which is jointly Spanish/Egyptian owned, were made to handle asbestos with their bare hands. A former engineer at the factory, Mohammed Ahmed Jaafar, told the *Times*, "Reports warning of the effects of asbestos were deliberately concealed by management, which bribed the doctors who examined us ... bosses also allowed the dumping of the factory's waste in the area without precaution, which poses a serious threat for the 30,000 workers employed in the vicinity."

When the workers action drew attention to the situation in the factory, its manager Ahmed Luqma closed the facility. The workers are now demanding unpaid wages and compensation.

According to the *Al-Ahram Weekly* nearly 50 of the small work force have developed cancer related to working with asbestos. A further eight have already died of asbestosis.

### **Israeli university lecturers strike**

Senior faculty members at universities and several colleges throughout Israel were to strike this week in support of student protests against higher education budget cuts.

Boaz Ben-David, a spokesman for a junior faculty organisation, explained, “The struggle is not only about the budget, but also about how the universities are managed and student-faculty relations.”

A general strike is planned for Tel Aviv University and Ben Gurion University in the southern Negev desert after the junior faculty decided to join the protest. Junior academic staff at both universities planned to strike, protesting poor working conditions.

Students built a protest tent at the Technion, announcing that they would not leave it until “the prime minister sees fit to come and talk to us.”

### **South African miners continue strike**

The strike by miners at two of South Africa’s major gold producers is to spread to other mines, the National Union of Mineworkers has announced.

Some 20,000 gold miners have been on strike at two sites owned by Harmony in the Free State, in a dispute over housing, racism and planned redundancies. Harmony cut 8,000 jobs last year and is planning to eliminate a further 5,000 this year. Strike action is now to be extended to cover all of Harmony’s 50,000 employees over the next week.

A strike by miners at Gold Fields has also been extended to cover the companies 30,000 workforce. The action is over demands for an increase in the living-out allowance, which allows miners to live away from the single-sex hostels provided by the company. Gold Fields management has said the strike is illegal and has applied for a court order to get the miners back to work.

### **Nigerian oil workers threaten “warning strikes”**

Nigerian oil workers are to stage a three-day “warning strike” on April 11 after talks between government negotiators and the trade unions broke down earlier this week.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers have protested government plans to sell-off the Port Harcourt Refinery. They are calling on the government to retain a controlling share in the company, and to set out workers employment conditions under privatisation.

### **Ugandan university staff begin walk-out**

Administrative staff at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda began strike action earlier this week in pursuit of a pay rise.

The staff are members of the Administrative Staff Association (ASA). The University has an ongoing financial crisis and had threatened not to re-open earlier in March unless funds were forthcoming from the Ugandan finance ministry.

### **Kenyan teachers to walk off the job**

Members of the Kenyan National Union of Teachers have threatened national strike action for May 13 unless the government implements a new scheme of service for non-graduate teachers. The union has also demanded a timetable be drawn up detailing the next round of promotions of non-graduate teachers.



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