

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 December 2005

Europe

Italian metalworkers' strike in pay and contracts dispute

Italian metal workers struck on December 2 for better pay, job security and a new national collective agreement. The collective agreement covering metalworkers expired almost one year ago. The workers are calling for a monthly pay increase of €105. The metal workers' employers have offered an increase of €70.

Thousands of striking workers participated in a march and rally in Rome as part of the day of action. Some banners read, "From the plants to the offices—We're all united."

Seat autoworkers in Spain continue dispute over job losses and restructuring

Autoworkers employed at Spanish carmaker Seat held their second strike in a month on December 2. The workers are protesting plans to cut costs, affecting more than 1,300 jobs. The firm, owned by Volkswagen, is to shed the jobs of about 9 percent of its workforce.

The strike was held at the Martorell plant in northeastern Spain and was supported by a majority of the plant's 12,000 staff. Workers last took industrial action against the planned cuts on November 10 and further strikes will be held over the coming weeks, according to auto unions at Seat.

During the day, Seat workers held a rally in Barcelona.

Seat condemned the stoppage, saying that it had put at risk €700 million of investment announced last week by Volkswagen. The investment is part of a restructuring plan entitled "New Seat," under which the company intends to produce a new model of its Ibiza car and another new model at Martorell from 2008.

Seat said the cuts were necessary to stem a drop in its car sales in Europe this year. Its Spanish plants have

produced 13 percent fewer cars than in the same period last year, according to figures from the national manufacturers' association. Seat added that losses would increase to €518 million up to 2009 if its plan to cut costs were not implemented.

Bus drivers in Aberdeen, Scotland, strike

On December 3, more than 400 bus drivers in Aberdeen began strike action for 48 hours in a dispute over pay. The First Bus company workers are demanding a 5 percent pay increase.

The strike was organised by the Transport and General Workers' Union following a 96 percent vote in favour of industrial action.

The company is seeking to tie in a pay deal with productivity increases.

The workers are set to hold further actions later this month that could result in widespread disruption over Christmas.

Postal workers in Torquay, England, strike in dispute over Christmas holidays

On December 1, 140 postal workers employed at a Royal Mail depot in Torquay, Devon, staged a short strike in a dispute over Christmas holidays. The action lasted four hours, after which staff returned to work following negotiations between Royal Mail management and the Communications Workers Union.

Middle East

Bahraini workers in jobs protest clash with police

Workers protesting against unemployment clashed with police in the Bahraini capital, Manama, on November 30. Protesters threw stones and petrol bombs, setting fire to two police cars, after officers moved in to disperse them, Bahrain's official BNA news agency reported.

The protest was the latest in a series against unemployment in Bahrain, the least wealthy of Gulf Arab oil producers. At least 15 protesters were injured

in clashes with police during a demonstration in July.

Africa

Ghanaian bank workers defy ban and strike over union rights

Staff at the SG-SSB Bank Limited have launched a nationwide strike against management attempts to stop them joining a union of their choice, in spite of the strike being declared illegal by the government-backed Labour Commission.

The strikers are demanding that they be allowed to join the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) without facing reprisals from management. The general secretary of the ICU, Napoleon Kpoh, said the bank workers had the right to join an association of their choice under articles of the Ghanaian Constitution and ILO Conventions.

Public sector workers on strike in Nigeria

On December 4, all employees of the government and parastatals (partly government-controlled agencies) in Nigeria struck to protest the government's broken promises on "monetisation"—the conversion of benefits such as houses and cars into cash payments.

During a protest at the ministry of finance in Abuja at the end of November, workers heckled the finance minister, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and pelted her with sachets of water. The workers are angry that while they are yet to receive any housing allowances, the government has already started auctioning their houses.

The strike is the second to affect the public sector in three months over these issues.



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