Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Europe

Germany: IG Metall trade union on rolling strikes

German engineering workers participated in a fifth day of rolling strikes on November 5 in pursuit of a pay increase. The one-day strikes began on November 1 and were called by the IG Metall trade union. Tens of thousands of workers have been involved.

The union has rejected a pay offer of 2.1 percent for 2009 plus a bonus payment of 1.6 percent. According to press reports the union's official stance is for a pay increase of up to 8 percent for its 3.6 million members.

On November 3 the Ford car plant in Saarlouis near the French border was struck, as was a Gillette razor manufacturing factory in Berlin. Fifty employees at BSH Bosch and Siemens Household Appliances GmbH in Dillingen in the southern state of Bavaria also struck. A hundred workers at the auto-parts maker Valeo SA in Wemding, Bavaria walked off the job at midnight.

Strike action was held by 200 workers at the auto-parts maker Helag-Electonic GmbH in Nagold in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. Workers at the saw manufacturer Stihl Inc in Waiblingen near Stuttgart also struck.

On November 4 some 400 workers staged industrial action at the Wadan Yards in Rostock-Warnemunde in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state. Further strikes and protests by 30,000 workers were held in Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Thuringia and Saarland. Workers protested in Bavaria and in states in the north of the country.

On November 5, the union reported that another 115,000 workers walked off the job to participate in rallies and protests. Among these were 10,000 at three Opel AG auto plants and employees at Porsche SE. Workers at machinery producers Deutz AG struck as did employees at auto firms Audi AG and Daimler AG.

Further strike action took place on November 6 at car manufacturers Ford and BMW.

The union is set to meet with the employers association on November 11 for further negotiations in an attempt to settle the dispute. Speaking on November 5, IG Metall's chairman Berthold Huber said, "We need an agreement on November 11 or there will be a fully-fledged strike."

The strikes occur amidst a deepening recession in the German auto industry. Firms such as Daimler AG, General Motors' Opel division and BMW have recently temporarily closed a number of factories in order to cuts costs.

This week BMW plants in Bavaria closed for five-days affecting 40,000 workers.

Workers strike in Greece to protest government policies

On October 30 members of trade unions in the transport sector in Greece took 24-hour strike action to protest the policies of the conservative government of Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis.

The strike resulted in the closure of the Athens Metro system. National rail services were also suspended for three hours as staff protested over pensions and a lack of safety measures, staff and infrastructure investment.

In a separate dispute, employees at Olympic Airlines in Greece took 24-hour strike action on October 30 in protest at the government's plan to sell the airline. The industrial action resulted in the grounding of nearly 100 flights and caused disruption to other air traffic. The airline was forced to suspend 48 return flights on domestic and international routes. Among those affected were those between Athens and Milan, Rome, Paris, Frankfurt, Brussels and London.

Karamanlis has set a deadline for potential investors to register their interest in the airline which is losing nearly 2 million a day.

Striking workers demonstrated at one of the two runways in operation in Athens. Management at the company said that some flights were diverted to the other runway.

Latvian health care workers stage two-day strike

Latvian health care employees held a two-day strike beginning on October 30. The action was called by the Latvian Health and Social Care Workers' Union and involved workers in the capital Riga and Saldus, Daugavpils, Jelgava and Rezekne. Workers are demanding more investment in the health service.

A total of 1,022 union members participated in the industrial action. Among the largest group of workers striking were those at the Gailezers Hospital in Riga as well as staff at the Latvian Oncology Centre. The strike was also supported by the Latvian General Practitioners Association who called on its members to treat only those patients requiring urgent medical aid.

Polish fishermen, miners and shipyard workers protest government

Fishermen, miners and shipyard workers in Poland took part in joint protests on November 4 to demand government action to increase employment, defend early retirement rights and to oppose the privatisation of healthcare.

Fishermen blocked three stretches of Highway 6 that link Szczecin and Gdansk in the north. Further blockades were to be held at Keblowo, Redzikowo and Biesiekierz in northern Poland.

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According to *Polskie Radio*, the action involves members of the Union of Polish Fishermen, the Free Union of Professionals from August '80 and the General Polish Fishermen's Protest Committee, and several other related organizations.

Workers at the Szczecin shipyard, which is threatened with closure, and miners from Silesia also supported the action.

Africa

Hotel and casino workers take action in Namibia

Angry workers at the Kalahari Sands Hotel and Casino in Windhoek mounted a demonstration through the city on October 29, marching from Windhoek Police Station along Independence Avenue. They handed a five-page petition to management, claiming widespread discrimination and victimization.

The workers are members of the Namibia Food and Allied Workers' Union (NAFAU). They complained of lack of proper payment for Sundays and public holidays, the indiscriminate use of casual employees and lack of provision of medical aid. They are demanding disciplinary action against two managers who are alleged to have used abusive language while speaking to them, and are also objecting to receiving pay slips in Afrikaans, which they describe as "the language of colonialism."

Nigerian transport workers oppose union's excessive tariffs

On November 3, members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) in Oyo State, Nigeria, staged a warning strike against the excessive tariffs being imposed by the union, as well as the local Agberos (motor-park touts) who operate throughout the state capital, Ibadan.

The drivers set out in the early morning and blocked major roads and parking areas around Ibadan. Most commercial bus drivers parked off the road and commuters were affected for several hours.

According to the *Daily Trust* the drivers declared that "it was high time the exploitation by the union leaders was stopped" adding that they had "virtually milked them dry". The paper reported the protesters were making efforts "to drag the union leaders before the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) over their financial recklessness."

Tea workers on strike in Kenya

Over 400 workers at the Mau Tea Multipurpose Cooperative Society in Kenya downed tools to protest the company withholding the monthly subscription payments to the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU).

The workers joined the union three months ago, but no payments through the check-off system have yet been made by the company.

The workers have asked the leader of the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU) to take up their complaint.

Cameroon: Douala II contract workers demand back wages

Twelve temporary workers of the Douala II council area, in Cameroon, have been on strike for a week to demand the payment of 12 months of unpaid salaries. The workers claim that they are owed almost US$10,000 in back pay. They have been picketing the entrance to the Town Hall to demand immediate action by the council.

The workers' representative, Simon Ngodikoundi, claims that the workers signed an agreement with authorities of the Douala II council in 2006, to work as airport patrol men for a French company, Aeroport du Cameroon. Despite the fact that the contract ended in June this year, their arrears have not been paid.

Zambian telecom workers continue to defy union call to return to work

The strike of 3,000 employees at the Zambia Telecommunications Company (Zamtel) in Kitwe has now entered its third week. The action is in pursuit of a salary increase and improved conditions.

Ever since the strike began the National Union of Communication Workers (NUCW) has been calling for a return to work, so that negotiations could begin, but the strikers have refused to comply.

On November 4, Alfred Mudenda, deputy secretary general of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) attempted to address the workers to persuade them to end the strike but he was asked to leave even before he could conclude his address.

Times of Zambia reported that the irate workers were gathered at the entrance to the premises where they closed the gate and refused clients' entry. "The workers, who sang and displayed anti-management slogans, refused to give Mr Mudenda attention, maintaining that ZCTU was not party to the negotiating team."

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