

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

French media workers march

More than 4,000 workers demonstrated November 28 in Paris against recently proposed laws on public audiovisual services. The laws threaten the financial sustainability and broadcasting independence of France Télévisions, the French public service broadcasters.

A delegation led by EURO-MEI President Marc Kerki, from the VRT union ACOD, joined their French colleagues. "We are in favour of measures to ensure a dynamic, financial sustainable and independent public audiovisual service in all European countries," Kerki said. "The signal the French government is sending is dangerous for the sustainability and quality of public service broadcasting in Europe."

The government plans to cut advertising from France Télévisions from January 2009 and abolish it from 2011.

It will create a single company structure under the chairmanship of someone appointed by the president of the republic. The changes will inevitably be accompanied by attacks on jobs and working conditions. Media workers across Europe have held demonstrations in support of their colleagues.

UK workers march over job cuts

Hundreds of workers marched through the centre of the historic city of York on November 28 in a demonstration against a spate of recent job cuts across North Yorkshire.

According to the BBC, the protest follows the closure of 22 post offices in the county and the closure of York's Remploy factory, with the loss of 50 disabled workers' jobs.

The protesters were opposed to proposals to close and privatise job centres.

European steel workers protest job cuts

The Associated Press reported that around 5,000 steel workers from across Europe protested outside the European Union headquarters in Brussels, December 2, to demand the steel industry be exempt from planned pollution caps they fear will lead to job losses.

Europe's steel industry employs some 650,000 people.

AP said that unions from across the 27-nation bloc are backing steel companies to pressure EU governments to water down rules to cut pollution and carbon dioxide emissions, which they insist will lead to higher production costs and job losses.

EU governments are currently negotiating a plan which will force heavily polluting industries, like steel and cement, to sign up to a cap-and-trade emissions program, which could impose €54 billion (\$68.8 billion) a year in polluter fees.

Major polluting companies already trade carbon permits, effectively enabling them to buy more pollution allowances or upgrade their plants.

Unions fear that steel companies like ArcelorMittal SA and ThyssenKrupp AG could move production out of Europe as a result. EU governments and the European Parliament have already provisionally agreed to water down separate plans to curb emissions from new cars.

Egyptian textile workers continue sit-in

Workers at the Ghazl El-Mahalla spinning factory have rejected an offer by management and the head of the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) and vowed to continue the sit-in they began November 30 in protest at the transfer of five workers to different departments.

The workers and some of their children spent the night of the protest sleeping in the lobby of the EFTU building.

Amal Said and Wedad El-Demardesh were transferred to the company's nurseries, while Karim El-Beheiry, Mohamed El-Attar and Wael Habib have been moved to the company's Cairo office.

El-Attar told *Daily News Egypt*: "We demanded the reversal of the transfer orders, a stop to the issuing of fresh reversal orders in the future and the halting of disciplinary investigations which are

currently being carried out with 180 workers in the factory...

"After the meeting we consulted Mahalla workers about the offer and 99 percent of them said that they wished to continue the sit-in. We came here on the principle that we would either leave with the reversal of the transfer decision or sit here for months."

Five workers at the Tanta Linen Company who were sacked after a July protest inside the company ended the sit-in they began in EFTU at the same time as the Mahalla workers. During the July protest, workers demanded the payment of a meal allowance and profit shares, which they say haven't been paid for three years.

Gamal Othman, one of the sacked workers, told *Daily News Egypt*, "It was agreed that we will receive salaries but not return to work until the court issues its verdict in the case we have raised against the sacking."

Israeli teachers' association threatens strike

YNet news.com reported November 30 that the chairman of the Teachers' Association, Ran Erez, said the Education Ministry was trying to impose a wages plan and employment clauses on its 700 members without the association's consent

Only the Israel Teachers Union has agreed to the plan.

The Middle and High School Teachers' Association declared an official dispute November 30 and has threatened to launch a strike within the next two weeks over the Education Ministry's reform plan, dubbed "New Horizon."

A statement issued by the association read, "As of August 2008, members of the Association are being employed without a collective agreement. Our attempts to negotiate with the Treasury and Education Ministry were rejected."

Nigerian judiciary staff on strike over pay

A nationwide strike by judiciary staff in Nigeria has led to the closure of most of the country's courts since December 1. The strikers belong to the Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) and they are striking to demand an end to the discrimination shown by the gulf between their own pay rises and that of the judges.

On December 1, all the high courts in the capital, Abuja, were closed by the strike. Many courts throughout the country were kept locked.

One striker told *The Punch*, "A graduate judiciary worker earns less than N20,000 [US\$166] per month while a judge earns between N700,000 [US\$5,816] and N800,000 [US\$6,647] per month. While we were agitating for the salary increase and improvement in welfare, judges' salaries have been increased thrice..."

The strike is the second this year by judiciary staff. The previous

one was in February.

Burundi: Health officials strike

Health officials in the central Africa country of Burundi have been on strike for a week. The strike follows the failure of the government to pay an agreed salary increase.

The government claims that it cannot meet the workers' demands until the country's donors grant them debt cancellation.

The Physicians Union says that its members are providing a minimum service to patients at public hospitals.

Pensioners protest in Nigeria

Nigerian pensioners blocked the gate to the Oyo State Government offices on Wednesday, December 3. They were protesting the non-payment of their pensions. They blocked traffic and government workers were prevented from reaching their offices.

"In Nigeria, rights are not given unless they are fought for on the streets, creeks, valleys and mountains and this is what has brought us here today," pensioners' spokesman Alhaji Lateef Adegoke told reporters.



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