

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## France: Journalists strike over Sarkozy's television reforms

Journalists at France 3, the national network of regional channels, went on strike January 5; their colleagues at France 2, the main public-owned national channel, went on strike January 6.

President Nicolas Sarkozy is pushing ahead with reform of French public TV (France Télévisions) through parliament. The reforms aim to strengthen governmental control over France Télévisions by eliminating advertising, making public TV completely dependent on state funding, while also allowing the government—effectively, the president—to name its CEO.

The reforms have met with significant opposition amongst television journalists.

According to *Variety*, around 40 percent of France Télévisions' staff struck against the amendment on November 25. According to local news reports, the recent protest involved mostly local stations and suggests some 90 percent of regional staff did not report to work, disrupting programming and news coverage.

Sarkozy is seeking to dress his reforms as the setting-up of a commercial-free, government-supported public broadcaster modelled on the BBC in the UK. But TV workers fear it will strengthen Sarkozy's control over the media, by allowing the government to appoint France Télévisions' head, previously chosen by broadcasting regulator, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel.

In changes that Sarkozy has heralded as a "cultural revolution," advertising is now banned on public television from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m. until November 2011. Daytime advertising will continue until 2011, prompting the newspaper *Libération* to comment: "They're getting rid of ads for parents at night and keeping it for the kids in the morning."

The privately owned TF1, France's leading broadcaster, which belongs to Martin Bouygues, one of Sarkozy's closest friends, is expected to benefit from windfall profits as well as from changes to the viewing schedule in relation to TF1's main entertainment programme agenda.

Private channels will be allowed to broadcast up to nine minutes of advertising per hour, instead of the previous six.

Critics have accused the president of attempting to destroy public television, which he sees largely as an institution staffed by

left-wing journalists. According to the *Irish Times*, when a journalist at Radio France recently interviewed the Green deputy Noel Mamère, a critic of Sarkozy's, "two executives appointed by the president burst into the journalist's office demanding why he dared broadcast the interview."

## UK/Channel Islands: Woolworths' staffs protest after being told "no redundancy pay"

One hundred twenty workers employed by Woolworths in Jersey have launched a petition after being told they will not receive redundancy pay.

The workers were told that UK statutory redundancy payouts do not apply on the Channel Islands. According to the BBC, administrators did consider making a special payout to Jersey staff but decided it would set a "difficult precedent."

Over 2,500 people have signed the petition launched by staff at the King Street store in St. Helier. It was not known, at time of writing, whether the 73 former staff at Woolworths in Guernsey would also go without compensation.

One Woolworths' worker, Anne Marie Le Bloas, said workers were only told five minutes after the shop closed for the final time that they would not be getting a redundancy package. BBC business correspondent Martin Shanks said it is understood the administrators had already taken the decision not to make a special case of the Jersey employees.

The correspondent was told the firm could have paid for the redundancy themselves.

## UK: Bus drivers in 24-hour strike over pay

Around 300 bus drivers in parts of northwest London went on a 24-hour strike January 5 in a pay dispute.

The workers are employed by London Sovereign in Harrow and Edgware. The company operates 12 routes throughout northwest London.

The union Unite said its members earn £6,000 less than those working for other bus companies and want a pay rise.

## **Egypt: Strikes and sit-in by Nile cotton workers**

Around 180 workers at the Nile Cotton Ginning Company in el-Mahalla el-Kubra staged a sit-in at the company's headquarters on January 4, according to a report in *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. Around 200 workers in Eitay el-Baroud, in the governorate of Beheira, went on strike, while 350 protested in Menya City on non-receipt of their December wages.

Hundreds of workers protested in the company's Mahalla, Beheira and Minya branches.

Protesting workers in Gharbia called on President Hosni Mubarak, the prime minister and the manpower minister to intervene. A worker in the storeroom of the company's Mahalla branch told *Daily News Egypt* that around 126 workers began the sit-in this week.

According to the news reports, the workers are demanding the payment of their salaries no later than the 27th of every month, the payment of incentives, a rise in their social bonus from 10 percent to 30 percent like public sector workers, and the appointment of an auditor by the state to run the company and manage the workers' share of stocks (10 percent).

Rabea Ali Hassan, a member of the company's trade union, said that the company plans to pay out only half of the workers' entitlements in order to force them to resign ahead of the sell-off of the company's land and assets.

## **Nigerian doctors' strike goes ahead despite threats of dismissal**

Doctors in Lagos State, Nigeria, went on strike on January 5 after their three-week ultimatum ran out with no offer from the state government. The doctors are protesting their conditions of service and demanding the implementation of the Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Scale (CORTIS).

According to *allAfrica.com*, the strike was solid at all the state-owned hospitals across the area. Its correspondent at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Ikeja, reported that "activities were paralyzed due to total compliance by house officers while only a few consultants were seen attending to patients in critical conditions." At Massey Street Children's Hospital in Lagos Island, only a handful of senior medical personnel were seen attending emergency cases.

The State Health Commissioner, Jide Idris, had threatened to dismiss any doctor who complied with the strike call, but this had no effect on the doctors' determination to win their demands. Referring to the threats of dismissal, Doctors Guild Chairman Ibrahim Olaifa said, "Let him go ahead and do it if that is the best approach to solving a problem as serious as what we have."

Also in Nigeria, a national strike by judicial staff that began in November last year is still ongoing. Their union, Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), said that it had sent 20 letters asking the government to restart negotiations, but the government had not replied.

## **Tanzanian park workers threaten strike over unpaid pay**

Workers at the Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) have threatened to strike on January 6 unless management hears their grievances over pay, according to the *Citizen* (a Tanzanian daily paper) on January 5.

The workers are angry because they were promised a 50 percent pay increase in July 2008, which has not been delivered six months later. Workers told the *Citizen*, "We have asked the park warden to invite Mr. Bigurube [TANAPA General Secretary] so that he can tell us when the salaries will be increased as promised."

The workers reject management claims that they cannot afford to pay the salary increase, pointing out that members of the board receive as much as Sh27m (US\$27,600) in allowances per year. They also accused management of spending Sh145m (US\$111,000) on a visit to Malaysia last year.

They state that they work around the clock without being paid overtime. "We spend most of our time guarding the parks, yet we can't even pay for our children's school fees," complained one of the workers. At the time of writing, it is not known whether the strike went ahead.



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