

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

## Hungary: Possible resumption of strike action at Budapest airport

Airport workers at Hungary's main international airport have signalled that they are considering resuming a strike suspended before Christmas, according to a January 9 report on *caboodle.hu*.

Attila Csorba, head of the union LESZ, said that workers felt they were being "stabbed in the back" after the operator of the Budapest Ferihegy International Airport indicated that it was prepared to employ airport staff from Greece.

The strike of December 10-22 was suspended on condition that an agreement with managers was reached by January 6. The union is demanding changes to their collective agreement, freezing layoffs and paying benefits retroactively.

## Ireland: Threat of public sector strike if pay cuts imposed

Independent.ie reported January 14 that services could be "crippled" after trade unions warned they intend to ballot for "wide-scale industrial action" if the government imposes pay cuts of up to 10 percent.

The Civil Public and Services Union (CPSU) said its 13,000 members would not be "scapegoated" for the economic crisis. The CPSU said it would "play a constructive role" in discussions with government, but "any attempt to unilaterally impose pay adjustments would be met with wide-scale industrial action in the civil service."

The CPSU threat came after the Public Service, Executive Union, which has 10,000 executive and administrative members, also warned of industrial action.

## Community service supervisors continue strike in Glasgow

Twenty-one Glasgow community service supervisors continued their indefinite strike against Glasgow City Council in Scotland this week. The strike action over pay and hours began on January 6.

The employees are members of the public sector union, Unison. The workers supervise more than 200 offenders who receive training or carry out unpaid community employment, such as gardening or cleaning up litter. A community service order is imposed as an alternative to jail.

According to Unison, a recent regrading of the supervisors' positions could mean that some are set to lose up to £1,500 a year, while others are

to be paid more but will have to work an additional day each week.

On January 12, the strikers and supporters lobbied Glasgow city chambers and held a rally.

## Council employees in Merseyside, England protest planned closures of services

On January 10, up to 1,000 employees held a march and rally in the Wirral area of Merseyside, England. The workers are protesting the closures of 13 branch libraries, 22 community centres, seven youth clubs, five leisure centres and two museums by Wirral borough council.

The march was called by Unite trade union and demonstrators marched between the towns of Wallasey and Birkenhead. A second march and rally, including a lobby of the full council cabinet, was scheduled to be held January 15.

## England: Care home staff to ballot on strike

Members of the public service unions, UNISON and Unite, are being balloted on strike action over the decision of Southampton City Council to close two elderly residential care homes.

The authority says it is to close the two, Birch Lawn and Whitehaven Lodge, on cost grounds. It claims it will save £500,000 and a further £400,000 on necessary repairs by transferring the 62 residents into private accommodation.

There have been previous protests by staff over the decision.

## Staff at 11 colleges in England set to strike in pay dispute

Staffs at 11 colleges in England have voted to strike in an ongoing pay dispute. On January 15, the University and College Union announced that its members who are employed in the colleges had voted for industrial action. The staff voted in favour of industrial action, with 68.9 percent of respondents voting for strike action while 86.4 percent of respondents voted in favour of action short of a strike.

The colleges balloted were: Nelson and Colne, Croydon, Greenwich, North West London, Dearne Valley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Evesham, Sandwell, Sussex Downs, and Askham Bryan.

According to the union, the decision to hold a strike ballot was as a result of the colleges refusing to implement a 2004 national pay deal for teachers in further education. In total, 90 of England's 376 colleges have not yet awarded the pay deal. Had the agreement been implemented, a mid-ranking lecturer at the colleges would now earn £4,511 more per year.

The union said this week that a date for a scheduled strike is to be announced next week.

### **Germany: Deutsche Bahn workers threaten strike**

Workers employed by Germany's state-owned rail operator Deutsche Bahn AG will take strike action unless an agreement on wages and conditions is reached with their employer, the Transnet union has threatened.

Negotiations are under way between management and unions representing 130,000 workers. Transnet has said it is seeking a 10 percent pay rise and limitations on night and weekend shifts. The GDL engineers' union is involved in separate talks over a 6.5 percent pay claim for 20,000 train drivers.

Existing pay agreements run out at the end of January, while working-time contracts expired on December 31. The railway has thus far offered the equivalent of a 2.7 percent to 3 percent wage increase.

### **Paris: Train drivers strike after violent attack on driver**

Train drivers at the Paris' Saint-Lazare station in France struck January 13 in an unofficial action. The workers, who are employed by the state-run railway operator SNCF, walked off the job Monday night following an attack on a driver by six drunken youths.

The strike led to the closure of the Saint-Lazare station and the suspension of all traffic from there from around 10 a.m. The station serves mostly suburban trains.

### **Namibian fish factory workers continue strike, defying court order**

Namibian workers at the Pescanova fish factory in Lüderitz have been on strike since December 9, in spite of the use of anti-union laws in an attempt to stop any effective picketing. On December 12, a court order was issued banning strikers from coming within 400 metres of company premises.

Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union (Nasawu) branch organiser Petrus Shiyandja and another striker were arrested on January 7. Shiyandja was denied bail and will be kept in custody until at least February 2. The police have stated that his arrest was "because of the union's defiance with the court order issued on December 12."

Nasawu has countered that the company's use of additional workers from Pescanova's associated companies—Lalandii (handling crayfish and white fish) and Coastal Marine—is illegal. The union says the law prevents companies from hiring outsiders when the workforce is on strike legally. The Nasawu President told the media that Shiyandja's arrest was politically motivated since he had committed no crime.

Nasawu is demanding a pay rise of 7.5 percent, whereas the company is refusing to offer more than 5 percent.

The Namibian-based *New Era* reported on January 9 that around 450 workers are defying the court order and are continuing to picket the work premises.

### **Nigerian civil servants on indefinite strike**

Members of the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN) are on indefinite strike to demand government action over their grievances. The ASCSN secretary-general said that the action was getting the total compliance of the union's members. He said the government had not addressed the union's demands.

"As we speak, all the four Federal Government Colleges in Lagos had been shut down. Returning students who were expected to resume schools on January 9, 2009 were turned back."

### **Health workers on strike in Bauchi state, Nigeria**

Health workers in Bauchi state, Nigeria are on strike to win a pay rise of 15 percent. The state hospitals are at a standstill, with many that would normally attend as patients staying away because they are aware of the strike.

The government response has been to threaten the strikers with dismissal.

### **Miners in South Africa strike over pay and jobs**

Approximately 4,000 workers at Simmer and Jack's Buffelsfontein mine are on strike over pay and possible job cuts, the National Mineworkers Union has reported.

Wage negotiations were due to have been completed on December 31. The workers are demanding a 30 percent pay rise, but the company is offering only 5 percent.

Simmers had threatened in November to lay off 500 workers at the gold mine by the end of this month unless productivity increased.



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