

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## Italian workers stage mass protest in Rome

On April 4, hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrated in Rome against the government of Silvio Berlusconi. The demonstration was called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGIL).

According to the CGIL, up to 2.7 million people participated in the demonstration. These included those arriving in 40 trainloads, nearly 5,000 buses and two ships from all over Italy. The police said they estimated the demonstration numbered 200,000.

The protesters marched in five processions through the city and large sections of Rome were blocked off to traffic.

According to official figures the country entered into recession in the third quarter of last year, while gross domestic product contracted by 1 percent. In what has been described as the worst economic crisis since 1975, a total of 370,500 layoffs were announced in January and February, up 46 percent from the same period last year.

The employers' organisation Confindustria has estimated that more than 500,000 workers will lose their jobs in the two years up to mid-2010. The CGIL predicts that 1 million more workers will be unemployed by the end of 2010 than before the crisis began.

## Greek workers stage 24-hour strike

Thousands of workers in Athens, Thessaloniki and other major Greek cities and towns took part in a 24-hour national strike on April 2. The stoppage was called by the General Confederation of Workers and the Civil Servants Council—the two largest trade union federations. An

estimated 10,000 to 15,000 people marched through Athens.

The strike was called to protest government policies freezing wages in public and state-run companies. The government of Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis has stepped up its attacks on workers after announcing a €28 billion bailout package for the banking sector in January.

Air traffic controllers, bus drivers and civil servants took part in the strike, as did teachers at state schools, hospital workers and journalists. Hospitals affected by the industrial action were only able to function with skeletal medical services. The strike led to the closure of many public utility services as well as air, train and sea transportation services for several hours.

## Bulgarian steel workers protest in Sofia

On April 8, up to 1,000 workers at the Kremikovtsi steel plant, Bulgaria's largest, demonstrated to protest unpaid wages and to demand the government find a new owner for the factory.

During the day workers from the plant blockaded major thoroughfares in Sofia, resulting in large traffic jams in the city. More than 5,000 workers are employed at the plant, which was declared insolvent last year.

*Greece: Technical staff and journalists strike *Phileleftheros* newspaper*

Technical staff and journalists employed at the *Phileleftheros* newspaper in Cyprus walked off the job on April 7 to protest four of their co-workers being laid off.

According to the *Cyprus Mail*, the employees stopped work for 15 minutes and then returned to work, describing the action as an "informal protest." One worker explained, "I think the people got their [redundancy] notices at around midday and then at around 3:30 p.m. people just started to walk out. No one really knew about it because it wasn't planned."

## Teachers demonstrate in Latvia

On April 2, thousands of teachers participated in a demonstration in the Latvian capital Riga in opposition to pay cuts being imposed by the government of new Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis.

The government is carrying out widespread budget cuts in order to meet the requirements for a \$10 billion financial bailout agreement orchestrated by the International Monetary Fund and other international lenders.

All public sector workers are having their pay reduced. In January, teachers' pay was cut by 15 percent and is set to be reduced by a further 20 percent in June. Teachers also face losing their medical insurance benefits, as well as a cut in holiday pay.

Teachers' unions have warned that strike action would be considered in the future if their members continued to face the brunt of cuts.

## Hundreds of Nigerian nurses protest dismissals

Hundreds of nurses from the Ebonyi State University teaching hospital demonstrated April 3. They were opposing the sacking of 18 colleagues. The nurses, marching in their uniforms, brought the hospital to a standstill.

The nurses' action follows the threat of resident doctors at the hospital to begin indefinite industrial action. Their threatened action is against the state government's refusal to implement an agreed salary structure.

Speaking to the press, the chair of the local chapter of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Mrs. Anthonia Arua, condemned the sackings. She added the hospital already faced a shortage of nurses because it refused to implement agreed nurses pay and conditions agreements.

She added that the gross understaffing of nurses had resulted in the hospital losing its status as one of the best teaching hospitals in the country.

Arua warned hospital management that the nurses would begin indefinite strike action on April 13 if the sacked nurses were not re-instated and the nurses' grievances addressed.

## Nigerian bus drivers on strike

Bus drivers employed by LAGBUS, which serves the

whole Lagos Metropolitan area, began indefinite strike action April 7.

The action is in support of enhanced pay and conditions. Amongst their demands are for a day off duty on alternate days.

LAGBUS was brought in by the Lagos state government in March 2007. Steven Joseph, spokesman for the drivers, said following the introduction of LAGBUS that hours were increased and drivers had to work two consecutive days before being able to take a day off.

Joseph warned, "We work from morning till late night every day of the week without rest. It is affecting our health and it could endanger the lives of the passengers as a tired driver could doze off on the wheel."

## South African transport workers strike

Around 30,000 truck drivers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) began strike action April 7. The action took place following eight months of negotiations with the employers' body, the Road Freight Employers' Association (RFEA).

The union is seeking a 37 percent pay increase for long distance heavy truck drivers and a 13 percent across-the-board increase for other drivers.

SATAWU spokesman Tabudi Ramakgolo said the union held marches in different parts of the country on the first day of the strike. He pledged the action would continue until its demands were met.

Fuel distributors have warned the strike could quickly have a big impact if it lasted several days. Construction companies have said that the building of football stadiums in preparation for the 2010 football World Cup could be affected.



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