

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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SNCF rail workers strike in France to protest threatened job losses

Employees of the French state rail company SNCF took strike action on October 20 to protest restructuring plans. The action was called by three trade unions with members at SNCF.

Workers fear the plans will lead to job losses at the freight division. Some trade union estimates calculate that up to 6,000 jobs are threatened.

SeaFrance staff strike in France to protest job losses, restructuring

Workers employed by of SeaFrance, a division of the French state railway company SNCF, struck for 24 hours on October 16 in a dispute over job losses and restructuring plans. The stoppage was called by the CFDT trade union and resulted in passengers being blocked from disembarking or boarding ferries between Calais in France and Dover in England.

According to press reports and the CFDT, workers blocked four SeaFrance ferries during the morning and prevented ships run by P&O Ferries from letting passengers on or off.

SeaFrance plans to slash 543 jobs as part of the restructuring and will then transfer 400 posts to SNCF. The CFDT has demanded a state mediator be called in to discuss the plans.

Ceramic workers protest in Saint-Ghislain, Belgium

On October 19 around 500 ceramics workers demonstrated in front of the headquarters of Preiss Daimler, in the city of Saint-

Ghislain in Belgium.

They were protesting the loss of 173 jobs after the firm, which produced refractory ceramic products, went into bankruptcy in September. As a result of the plant's closure, 136 manufacturing and 37 white-collar workers will be laid off. They also did not receive their wages for September.

The company said that the closure was due to increasing financial losses it faced and a decrease in demand from the glass sector.

Hungarian rail workers, firefighters protest

On October 19, Hungarian rail workers and firefighters were involved in strike action and demonstrations to protest cuts planned in the government's draft 2010 budget.

The rail employees struck for nine hours while several thousand firefighters participated in a demonstration outside the parliament building in Budapest. Up to 2,000 firefighters and a convoy of some 50 fire engines marched to the parliament building to protest funding cuts of over 5 percent.

According to the Free Union of Rail Workers, the government plans to close many railway lines to achieve planned savings of 40 billion forints (\$224 million). The union represents roughly a quarter of state railway employees.

The budget cuts are part of a massive retrenchment against the public sector being carried out by the government of Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai. Under the plans of the draft budget, public spending will be reduced by 400 billion forints (\$2.24 billion) next year. The cuts have been demanded by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. The new cuts follow the 900 billion forints in cutbacks already imposed this year, which have included attacks on pensions and public sector wages.

Avtovaz auto workers protest in Tolyatti, Russia

Hundreds of workers employed by the heavily indebted auto maker, Avtovaz, demonstrated in the town of Tolyatti in Russia

on October 19 to protest threatened job losses.

According to a trade union estimate, around 2,000 workers and their supporters took part in the protest. Workers are putting forward several demands, including no mass layoffs, for wages to be increased to 25,000 roubles (\$800) per month, a return to full-time work from November, and the nationalisation of the company.

Avtovaz has confirmed that it is to lay off 5,000 employees, but workers fear many more jobs could be lost. The department of Health and Social Development Ministry reported that 36,000 jobs were to go.

A report published in the *Moscow News* said that the company reached a tentative agreement with the official trade union Yedinstvo to axe 27,600 jobs. According to the report Yedinstvo then received a notice of 17,700 job cuts, which was hastily withdrawn the next day.

Earlier this month the Deputy Industry and Trade Minister Andrei Dementyev said that 55,000 jobs would have to go if the firm did not carry out a restructuring programme. The firm's debt will reportedly exceed 76 billion roubles by the end of this year.

Avtovaz has agreements with auto firms Renault and Nissan to produce cars in Tolyatti. By 2013 the company is scheduled to manufacture 70,000 Nissan cars a year and up to 130,000 Renault vehicles.

Nigeria: Doctors strike over fee hike

Resident doctors at the Oyo state capital of Ibadan University College Hospital began all-out strike action on October 20. This is to protest the increase in treatment charges paid by patients, the second such rise this year. The action was also against the 700 percent increase for accommodation and a similar rise in utility service charges being asked of the resident doctors.

Representatives of the doctors have met several times with management, but to no avail. According to one of the doctors, they have been asked to quit their hospital-provided accommodation whilst it is renovated. The doctors have not been offered any alternative accommodation whilst the renovation takes place.

Nigeria: Steel workers lobby the National Assembly

Steelworkers, including retirees from the industry, lobbied National Assembly members at Abuja on October 20. The workers are members of the Iron and Steel Staff Association of

Nigeria and were protesting the non-payment of salary arrears and severance packages due to retired steel workers.

The government announced last week plans to lay off 5,000 workers at the Ajaokuta Steel Company and the sister company, National Iron Ore at Ita-kpe in Kogi state. The government plan is to privatise the enterprises, retaining only a small number of the workers to maintain the facilities whilst a buyer is found.

Nigeria: Teachers and academics in strike action

Teachers belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools (ASUSS) in the central state of Benue began a five-day strike action on October 19. The strike is in pursuit of a 27 percent pay increase and improved conditions.

Members of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in both primary and secondary schools in Benue state had previously taken action to achieve increased pay and conditions.

Separately, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) at Cross River State University of Technology (CRUTECH) have begun indefinite strike action. It comes after a three-month national strike by ASUU was suspended two weeks ago.

The Cross River strike has been joined by members of the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), Senior Staff Association of Universities (SSANU) and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NATT).

Dr. Nsing Ogar, ASUU chairman at the university, said the strike was in protest at poor pay, poor conditions, disintegrating infrastructure and lack of government response to the pleas of the CRUTECH staff.



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