

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

## France: press distribution workers go on strike

*Le Monde* reported that staff at Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne (NMPP), the largest press distribution company in the country, staged a 24-hour strike October 28, severely depleting newsstands across France.

The industrial action, which followed a call by the trade union SGLCE-CGT, is the latest in a series of strikes to protest plans by the paper, including the closure of the

Combs-la-Ville magazine distribution centre, with the loss of a number of jobs.

## Italy: transport workers strike

Transport workers across the country staged a 24-hour strike October 23 to demand improved wages and better working conditions, and to protest layoffs and cuts. The walkouts were scheduled at separate times from city to city. Unions said they would guarantee a minimum service in rush hours.

The *Associated Press* said Italian carrier Alitalia had cancelled six domestic flights because its workers were staging a four-hour strike.

The strike was called by the Cub, Cobas and Sdl unions. The major union confederations are not participating.

## Belgium: BASF workers take strike action

BASF declared “force majeure”—a break in its contractual obligations—at its 115,000 tonne/year maleic anhydride (MA) plant in Feluy, Belgium due to strike action, a company source said, according to ICIS news.

The workers walked out following BASF’s announcement that it intended to pull out of the MA market at the end of 2009 and withdraw all

activities from the site, endangering at least 133 jobs. The German chemicals giant cited poor profit margins and the failure of restructuring attempts.

ICIS news said: “The European MA market was already suffering from low availability due to a number of recent and continued production issues. The force majeure at Feluy was expected to further tighten supply and push spot prices higher.”

## Spain: strike at major airline

Cabin crews at Iberia airlines took two days of strike action last week in support of wage demands.

The strike has been called by unions representing around 4,300 staff, who want an end to a four-year pay freeze. According to an AP article on October 25, the unions say other Iberia workers, such as pilots, have had wage increases.

A statement on the Iberia web site said the 48-hour stoppage would affect domestic, European and trans-Atlantic flights, about a quarter of Iberia’s flights. Further stoppages are planned for November 10 and 11.

Like its counterparts, Spain’s aviation sector has been badly hit by the international economic crisis.

## Hungary: rail strike halts system

A two-hour warning strike by rail workers paralyzed rail traffic nationwide early on October 27. International trains had initially been halted at the border.

Striking workers were protesting against government plans to close down 33 spur lines, deemed uneconomic, on the state-owned railway.

Unions stated that the strike was intended as a message to the government. The five railway unions that organized the latest strike have scheduled to continue negotiations with the government next Monday.

## UK: BA staff to be balloted on strike action

The Unite union has announced it will ballot 14,000 cabin crew over whether to launch a campaign of industrial action in protest over the

British Airway's planned changes, aimed at "slowing significant losses for a second year running."

"The UK flag-carrier infuriated staff earlier this month by cutting 1,700 jobs, imposing a two-year pay freeze and changing working practices, without any agreement from the union and despite months of negotiations", reported the right-wing *Telegraph* newspaper.

Workers are expected to gather at an emergency meeting at Sandown Racecourse in Surrey next Monday, said the paper, to discuss the changes, which are due to be instigated from November 16.

At centre of the airline's plans is to cut the number of crew on BA's 57 Boeing 747 aircraft from 15 to 14, and require the most senior crew member, who presently has a supervisory role, to start serving passengers.

Given the legally binding consultation periods, any strike would be likely to take place over the Christmas period.

### **UK: second strike by fire crews**

Hundreds of fire fighters in South Yorkshire staged a second 24-hour strike on October 23.

The strike action took place after 744 employees were threatened with the loss of their jobs if they did not accept new employment contracts requiring that they work 12-hour day and night shifts.

The fire authority is pushing for crews to work the new shifts in place of the

current nine-hour days and 15-hour nights, but fire fighters have argued this would result in many problems, especially for workers with families, such as difficulties with childcare arrangements.

The county's fire authority said fire engines had attended 17 incidents, with a further 28 incidents attended by small fires units. The strike saw managers and volunteers at South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service manning 16 front-line fire engines, with various other appliances being used for minor incidents.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is planning to hold five further strikes. According to the BBC, the union said fire crews planned to walk out from 1600 BST to midnight every night from October 31 until November 4.

### **Sheffield, UK: second city bus strike**

Bus drivers in Sheffield, working for the company First Bus, took part in a second, two-day strike this week in a long-running dispute over disciplinary issues. A 24-hour strike which affected all commercial bus services in the city took place last week.

The dispute centres on disciplinary issues at Sheffield's Olive Grove bus depot. About 750 drivers are taking part in the strike.

The Unite union said the issues included grievances over the way the company handled workers who had taken sickness leave and First's "attitude to disciplinary action", reported the BBC.

A walkout by drivers in Doncaster and Rotherham was cancelled last week after First offered a 3 percent pay rise by 2010. The new pay deal is to be put to union members in a ballot next week.

A further bus strike is planned for October 31.

### **Egypt: Co-op workers protest against corporate control**

Around 300 workers at the state-run Nile Co-Op Company staged a sit-in on October 25 to protest a plan to rent out a company outlet to a private businessman. Employees claim that the businessman in question already owes the company some LE7.5 million, according to *Almasry Alyoum*.

According to trade union member Gamal el-Zomor, the outlet now being considered for rental had been the source of "considerable revenue", which had previously been used to pay workers' bonuses.

*Almasry Alyoum* cited company syndicate member Ahmed Youssef as saying that the rental contract had been for the period from 1999 to 2004, but that the outlet was never returned to the company, he explained, because the relevant authorities failed to carry out court orders issued to this effect.

### **Ugandan Clay workers strike over unpaid wages**

Around 300 workers at Africana Clay took strike action last week over salary arrears, vowing to remain out on strike until they had been paid. The workers say they are owed wages for the months of July, August and September. The strike caused the company to suspend its operations.

The company makes ceramic tiles, roof tiles and ornaments.

One of the striking workers told the Ugandan *Daily Monitor* paper, "They are treating us like slaves. They don't want to pay us our salaries... We have families to look after; our children have been chased for school fees and the land lords are on our necks...."

The company director John Kikome Lubega said, that following a meeting with workers, the factory would reopen and that the arrears would be paid in the near future.

### **Nigeria: Polytechnic staff strike**

Academic and administrative staff belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Polytechnics (SSANIP) and the Non Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (NASUP) at the Delta state polytechnics in Oghara, Ogwash-Uku, Ozoro and the physical education college at Mosogar began strike action October 25.

According to ASUP chairman at Ozoro Polytechnic, Mr Ebiobi, their demands include payment of 28 days hotel allowance when first appointed and to stop pension deductions from their salaries. The unions are also seeking the reimbursement of pension deductions back to April 2007 and for the new salary structure previously agreed to be implemented together with arrears.

### **Nigeria: Doctors at Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital take action**

Resident doctors at the Edo state hospital in Irrua are taking strike action over terms and conditions. The Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) has demanded the re-commencement of sponsorship fees for doctors undergoing refresher training and exam fees.

They are also demanding renovation of their hospital accommodation. The ARD hospital branch chairman, Dr Samuel Aigere described the present condition of the accommodation as having cracks in the walls allowing infestation by snakes, rats and in some cases with bats flying around in the roof space.

Journalists attending a press briefing given by the resident doctors this week were manhandled by hospital security staff and had their equipment seized.



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