

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

## Belgium: Rail strikes disrupt Eurostar

All signallers and station staff walked out late evening November 4 in a 24-hour stoppage in opposition to the restructuring plans within the freight division of the Belgian national railway operator, the SNCB.

Eurostar announced the cancellation of all services between Britain and Brussels for November 5, due to industrial action, along with all other domestic and international services in and out of Belgium, including hi-speed TGV, ICE and THALYS trains to France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Last month cleaners on Eurostar trains threatened to strike over the use of fingerprints to clock in staff.

## Airport workers in Italy protest layoffs

The decision by the aviation company Aviapartner to lay off 24 workers prompted a protest on November 3 at Turin-Caselle airport.

Flights were cancelled and delayed due to the industrial action.

According to *Avionews*, among the delayed flights was that carrying Juventus Football Club to Tel Aviv for the Champions League match against Maccabi Haifa.

Aviapartner works for the German airline Lufthansa and Air France, while ground services for other airlines are managed directly by SAGAT, Turin airport's operator.

## French dockworkers strike

The *Journal of Commerce Online* reports that France's biggest dockworkers union called for a 24-hour strike at country's seven largest ports today in the latest protest against government plans to privatize container handling.

The journal says that the CGT (Confédération générale du travail) accuses the government of renegeing on a pledge to create new jobs as part of its port reforms, centred on transferring around 2,000 container crane operator jobs from port authority payrolls to private stevedores.

Dockers staged three months of rolling strikes last year to oppose the reforms, but they halted their action after the legislation was approved by parliament.

Another issue in the strike is opposition to government plans to reduce compensation for dockworkers for exposure to asbestos.

The other ports facing strike action are: Dunkirk, Rouen, Nantes Saint-Nazaire, Bordeaux and La Rochelle.

## Refuse collectors in UK vote for strike action

Refuse workers in Brighton and Hove have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action in a dispute over pay. At issue in the dispute is a pay proposal that could see 800 workers lose up to £8,000 a year.

Hundreds of refuse collectors working for Leeds City Council are in their eighth week of strike action in a similar dispute over pay.

The GMB union, whose members voted by 96 percent in favour of taking industrial action, plans to hold a week of action starting from November 9 and said it would be urging its members to "work to rule" from November 5. Dustcarts, recycling lorries and street cleaning vehicles blockaded Brighton and Hove city centre in July and brought traffic to a standstill.

## UK: Superdrug depot staff to strike

Workers at one of Superdrug's three national distribution centres are to begin an indefinite strike over changes to pay and conditions from November 4, reports the BBC.

The Unite union said its 261 staff at the facility in Pontefract, West Yorkshire are striking due to cuts in shift pay and other entitlements.

The firm, which is owned by Chinese investment group AS Watson, has two other distribution centres in Avonmouth and Dunstable. In June, the company announced a review "to realign terms and conditions of colleagues" across the three centres.

The health and beauty chain has over 900 stores across the UK.

### **West Yorkshire gritting lorry drivers in pay dispute**

According to a BBC report November 3, gritting (sanding) lorry drivers in parts of West Yorkshire have refused to work in protest over a new pay policy.

“Every year about 50 highway workers from Kirklees Council volunteer for a rota to cover gritting duties, but this year no one has signed up.

“Workers said they were angry about new rules to only pay them from when they start gritting instead of when they start driving to a job,” said the report.

The 24-week road gritting season officially began from October 30 for Kirklees Council, which covers Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley. Drivers usually sign up for a voluntary rota, meaning they are on standby for gritting for the season.

Paul Holmes of Unison said, “Pest control workers get paid from the moment they set off, but not gritters.

“A lot of disputes are on at the moment, be it the bins in Leeds, the fire strike in South Yorkshire or the gritting in Kirklees. They’re all about the same thing—somebody wants somebody to do something that they’ve done in previous years, but for less money.”

The union says drivers are losing up to £25 per job under the new pay scheme.

### **South Essex drivers turn down pay offer**

Bus drivers in south Essex have rejected a three-year pay deal following talks with the bus company, First.

Workers at all First depots in Essex had been due to take a 24-hours strike action last week for after they were offered no pay increase by First Group. But following a three-year pay offer Basildon and Hadleigh workers suspended the strike to hold a ballot on whether to accept the deal.

Drivers rejected the deal. It is not known if they will strike again.

### **Zambia: Plastic products workers strike**

Around 500 workers at Lamasat International in Lusaka took strike action Monday, November 2. The company manufactures plastic products, including piping for irrigation. Workers staged a demonstration outside the company offices.

The company is currently involved in discussions with the workers’ unions over a new collective agreement and the protest was over the slow progress of the discussions.

Amongst the workers’ demands are claims for a 40 percent pay increase and for better conditions. A worker who spoke to the *Times of Zambia* explained, “We work with no protective clothing... management has stopped giving us milk and there is a choking smoke from the products we produce. The environment inside these buildings is inhuman... [we] want better working conditions.”

### **Nigeria: Petroleum regulatory agency staff protest**

Staff from the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) in Abuja took strike action Monday, November 2. The agency comes under the remit of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Association of Nigeria and is responsible for payments of the Petroleum Support Fund—paid to petroleum importers to cover the difference between landing costs for petroleum products and the government’s official price.

The workers disconnected the power supply to the PPPRA premises and formed a cordon around the building, preventing visitors from entering.

According to a report in *This Day* newspaper, the workers took the action after accusing management of incompetence. They called on the federal government to sack the remaining management after they previously sacked the former executive secretary of the agency, Dr. Oluwole, and two other managers.

### **Judiciary staff in nationwide action in Nigeria**

Court workers belonging to the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) recommenced their nationwide strike action November 1. All states except Adamawa, in the northeast, will be affected by the action. The work of the courts will stop as a result of the strike.

The action is over the failure of states to implement the Consolidated Judicial Salary Staff Structure (CONJUSS). Adamawa state is exempt as it has brought in the CONJUSS pay structure. The union had suspended their previous action, but issued an ultimatum stating the action would recommence if there was no agreement to implement CONJUSS.

Following intervention by government ministers, involving discussion with the JUSUN leaders, the strike action did not go ahead in the federal capital Abuja. However, the union has said strike action will commence there today if the salary structure is not brought in.



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