

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## Finland: Pilots threaten strike

According to *Reuters*, 800 pilots working for the national carrier Finnair are in dispute over the passage of a labour contract and “may go on strike on November 16 unless their employer comes to an agreement, the Finnish Air Line Pilots’ Association said.”

*Helsingin Sanomat* says, “the latest developments come after a lengthy period of tension between Finnair and its flight crew. There has been no valid labour contract since November 2008.”

The strike would disrupt Finnair’s domestic and international traffic.

## Finnish ski resort workers in wage strikes

Workers at several popular ski slopes in northern Finland took two days of strike action last week over a wages dispute. If a satisfactory wages deal is not reached, a strike involving thousands of workers could threaten the Alpine World Cup event in Levi on November 14 and 15.

Ski resorts in Levi, Pyhä, Rukka, Vuokatti and Tahko were affected by last week’s walkout. The resort workers are calling for a 3 percent wage increase, but the Finnish Tourism and Restaurant Industries Federation (MaRa) has offered an increase of just 0.5 percent, according to the *Helsinki Times*.

Finland’s Service Union United (PAM) director, Ann Selin, said, “Ski resort employees have to have a much higher raise than half a percent.... We’ve suggested three percent, which is more than reasonable given the good financial situation of the companies in the sector.”

Staff at the ski resorts have threatened to expand the strike to all of Finland’s slopes if their demands are not met.

PAM calculates that the average salary of a ski resort employee was €1,665 a month.

## Nationwide public sector strike looms in Ireland

A national strike by public service workers is scheduled for November 24 in protest of government proposals to cut pay for staff on the state payroll—reportedly saving the treasury €1.3 billion.

## Irish nurses vote on strike action

The *Irish Independent* reported November 10 that nurses across the country are to vote for industrial action over threatened government cuts. The government has made it clear it intends to slash €4 billion from public spending next year, with €1.3 billion coming from public sector pay.

The Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) said 85 percent of its members voted in favour of work stoppages to protect existing pay and conditions. The nationwide ballot would officially grant a mandate to nurses to withdraw their labour while maintaining all essential and emergency services.

Nurses staged a seven-week dispute over pay and conditions in 2007.

## Workers at Irish pharmacy chain vote to strike over pay cuts

Hundreds of employees at the high street pharmacy chain Boots could strike this month over pay cuts and changes to terms and conditions, after voting by a margin of 64 percent in favour of industrial action.

The trade union Mandate—the bargaining agent for 700 of Boots Ireland’s estimated 1,700 employees—served notice of industrial action November 10 and said workers would place pickets on all Boots stores in Ireland on November 28.

The union says Boots is demanding a 15.5 percent wage cut at the top scale of pay from €14.20 to €12 per hour, a 25 percent cut in bank holiday pay and Sunday premiums, and pressuring staff to work more weekend shifts.

## Greek dockworkers suspend strike after court rules walkout illegal

Fifteen hundred dockworkers suspended their strike November 11 at the Piraeus container terminal, after a Piraeus Court of First Instance ruled the ongoing rolling strikes illegal the day before.

The decision to suspend strike action was taken after talks between the boards of the Federation of Port Workers of Greece (OMYLE) and the Association of Dockworkers of the Piraeus Port Authority SA (PPA SA).

The court ruling was issued after the country’s chambers of commerce and 48 businesses filed a class action lawsuit against the striking dockers, claiming their “financial interests” were being hurt.

The dock workers’ union opposes implementation of a privatisation plan that will hand over control of the Piraeus container terminal to Chinese multinational Cosco Pacific, the world’s seventh largest port operator.

## **Spanish cabin crew strike grounds hundreds of flights**

A two-day strike by cabin crew, in dispute with Spanish airline Iberia over plans for a hiring and wage freeze, led to the cancellation of 184 flights, reported the BBC November 10.

The strikes were called by the CTA and Sitcpla unions, which are asking Iberia for a 4.1 percent pay increase. A further 184 cancellations are planned the second day of action, altogether affecting around 40,000 passengers. The international cancellations include flights to New York, São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Mexico City.

The walkout follows similar action on October 26 and 27.

Iberia says it wants to reduce costs to combat falling profit. The company lost €165.4 million (\$237.2 million; £145.7 million) in the first half of the year.

Unions met at the weekend to discuss Iberia's proposed measures, which include laying off all cabin attendants older than 55 years. The airline also proposes to make cuts of €37 million in 2011 and 2012.

## **UK train drivers to be balloted for strike action**

"Train drivers on some of the country's busiest rail routes are to be balloted on strike action in a pay row, threatening travel disruption in the run-up to Christmas," reported the *Guardian* this week.

The Aslef union said its members at First Capital Connect (FCC) "would vote in the next few weeks on whether to launch a campaign of industrial action over a two-year pay offer, which includes no increase over the next year."

The company has made a pay offer of 0 percent over the next year and around 3 percent in year two. Services in the south were disrupted November 8 as drivers decided not to work overtime due to the pay dispute.

## **Fujitsu staff to strike over job cuts in UK**

Workers employed by the Japanese IT giant Fujitsu are to stage a three-day strike on November 12, 13 and 16 in a dispute over pay, jobs and pensions. It will be the first-ever national strike at a UK computer company, according to the union, Unite.

The union is protesting proposals for 1,200 redundancies, a pay freeze and plans to close the final-salary pension scheme to new staff.

Around 12,000 workers are affected at sites across the UK, including Bristol, Belfast, Bracknell, Cardiff, Crewe, Manchester, Stevenage, Wakefield and London. It is not yet known how this will affect staff in Derry, Northern Ireland, who also joined the strike call this week.

The union says the firm is making huge cutbacks despite its substantial profits.

## **Zambian Copper miners take strike action**

Copper miners in Chingola, working for Zambia's largest copper-mining company Konkola Copper Mines (KCM), took strike action

November 10. A KCM spokesman said that the strike had halted operations of the tailings leach plant, Nchanga underground mine and the concentrator.

The miners, who belong to the Mineworkers Union of Zambia and the National Union for Miners and Allied Workers, took action over lack of progress in wage negotiations with KCM management. They were incensed at the lack of information about the status of the negotiations.

The striking miners clashed with police on November 11, and around 30 were arrested. They are accused of burning vehicles and damaging property. A KCM spokesman said the company was holding emergency talks with the unions to end the strike.

The mine, which is 380 kilometres (236 miles) north of Lusaka, is part of London-listed Vedanta Resources.

## **Construction workers strike over non-payment of wages in Gambia**

Around 100 workers employed by the Kuwaiti-based construction company Copri took strike action November 9 over non-payment of wages. The company has been contracted by the non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation GAMWORKS to work on the Sukuta Westfield Highway.

October's salaries have not been paid, and this comes on top of delays in the payment of wages in previous months. Strikers told reporters they will not resume work until the arrears are paid. The workers are also concerned that the proper deductions for social security payments are not being made, and there is confusion about overtime rates.

## **Nationwide strike of Moroccan teachers**

On October 29, teachers belonging to four unions in Morocco took nationwide strike action. The unions said the strike was supported by around 90 percent of teachers.

The teachers' grievances include staff shortages and overcrowded classrooms. They are also concerned over poor infrastructure and the current promotion process. The unions say the government has failed to uphold an agreement made in August 2007 over plans to increase promotion chances and reduce the number of years a teacher must serve before being eligible to take professional exams.

The strike was organised after attempts to resume talks with the government, over the promotion process, broke down in September. Abdelmajid El Gharss of the National Teaching Federation (one of the unions involved) explained, "We have not ruled out the possibility that the strike action will be intensified if the department in charge does not respond."

## **Polytechnic lecturers strike in Ghana**

Last week, lecturers belonging to the Polytechnic Teachers Association of Ghana (POTAG) at Takoradi Polytechnic took strike action over unpaid allowances, bringing the polytechnic to a standstill. Following the strike action, management at the polytechnic called for a meeting with the union to discuss the issue.



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