Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Finland: airport staff strike

On November 30 and December 1st, staff at Finnair took strike action in protest against the outsourcing of baggage handling operations to a company called Barona Handling. The Finnish Aviation Union (IAU) claims that permanent positions at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport would be transformed into short-term contracts with the move.

Finnair had to cancel over 60 flights due to the industrial action, with most of the cancellations being domestic flights. Around 500 workers continued their strike action past the official stop date of December 2.

The sale of baggage handling operations to Barona Handling was completed November 30. Finnair insists it is no longer a party to the dispute, maintaining that the striking employees now work for another company.

Finnish paperworkers strike over safety issues

Workers employed by pulp and paper producer, Sappi, Kirkniemi, members of the local branch of ICEM affiliate Paperiliitto, took industrial action November 19-23 over serious safety issues.

Earlier this year, Sappi cut 63 jobs from a workforce of 400 at Kirkniemi. The latest dispute centres on the fact that the remaining workers have been forced to take on more work duties and occupational safety has been jeopardised.

Sappi bought five European coated paper mills from M-real in early 2009 and intends to completely close one of those mills—Kangas, Finland—by the end of the year. This will mean the loss of 150 jobs at Paperiliitto.

Strike action has recently occurred in Europe against the paper producing conglomerate. Workers holding memberships in four Dutch unions continue to be in dispute with Sappi at two mills in Nijmegen and Maastricht over the company's refusal to meet minimal demands on a new labour agreement.

At a Sappi mill in the US, a labour dispute involving members of the United Steelworkers (USW), sought to oppose a "regressive Sappi contract proposal". An 82 percent majority voted against the new contract.

French strike over job fears shuts down Pompidou Centre

The Pompidou Centre was forced to shut down on November 30 after staff went on strike to protest planned job cuts at the world famous Parisian centre of modern and contemporary art. The museum staff and security guards fear that 400 of the 1,100 jobs at the centre will be cut over the next 10 years under a government plan to cease replacing retiring staff.

Strikers demanded to meet Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand for discussions about the future of the centre. Further industrial action could affect the Louvre—the world's most visited museum—the chateau of Versailles and several other popular French tourist sites.

France: truck drivers strike for wage increases

Truck drivers belonging to France's five main unions are to strike from December 13 over a wage demand. Their pay has been frozen for the last two years. The employers are attempting to use the current economic climate as an excuse to further attack the drivers' pay and conditions.

Mercedes-Benz workers in Germany protest outsourcing

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Workers at the Mercedes-Benz factory in Sindelfingen—the largest car factory in the country—protested against job losses on December 1. The company plans to move production of its luxury C-Class vehicle to the US by 2014. The move could mean the loss of around 3,000 jobs at the plant in Baden-Württemberg.

Several thousand workers participated, including many from carmaker Porsche, auto supplier Bosch, and other businesses that would be affected by the move. The Sindelfingen plant currently employs 20,000 workers, 4,500 of whom specialise in C-Class production.

Irish public workers strike over budget

Around 300,000 public workers took strike action December 1st against government plans to cut pay and reduce the large national budget deficit. It is believed to be the largest strike in Ireland for 30 years. See: “Ireland: 300,000 public service workers strike”

Ireland: Central bank staff stage strike

Around 600 members of the Unite trade union staged industrial action at the Central Bank and the Office of the Financial Regulator last week. The one-day strike was provoked by management’s withdrawal from talks over employment contracts. Pickets were placed on the Central Bank in Dame Street and at the Office of the Financial Regulator on College Green in Dublin city centre.

Turkish civil servants demand the right to strike

Civil servants took one-day strike action in defence of their right to strike. The strike, called by Turkish Public Workers’ Labor Union (Kamu-Sen) and the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) involved tens of thousands of public sector workers. Rail services, the postal service, schools and hospitals were involved.

Turkey’s two million public sector workers are allowed to join unions but are banned from taking strike action. Police used tear gas to break up a march of striking public sector workers in Ankara.

Nigerian newspaper workers strike

Workers belonging to the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the National Union of Printing and Paper Products Workers (NUPPPROW) took strike action this week against New Nigerian Newspapers (NNN) Ltd. The strike was over non-payment of salaries covering the last seven months and failure to make agreed increments.

The chairman of the joint unions committee at NNN explained, “This is just a warning strike. If they don’t settle us, we will embark on an indefinite strike.” The paper which serves the northern region of Nigeria is jointly owned by the 19 Northern Nigerian states.

Delta public employees carry out work to rule

Workers belonging to the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PSAN) working at the Delta state legislature began working to rule at the end of last week. The action is over a reduction in allowances, particularly, clothing allowances and also over the non-payment of allowances. Bateren Rukewve, the chairman of PSAN at the Delta legislature, threatened strike action if the work to rule did not result in their demands being granted.

Namibian fruit workers strike

Workers at the Namibia Development Corporation Naute grape project at Keetmanshoop in the south of Namibia took strike action recently. The action led to disruption of the grape harvest. Workers sent the ministry and union representatives a list of 30 grievances including non-payment of sick pay.

The workers returned to work after a promised joint visit to the project by Ministry of Trade and Industry representatives and Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union officials. The project covers an area of nearly 100 hectares and produces grapes and pomegranates many of which are exported to Britain.

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