

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 January 2010

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

UK: Fujitsu workers stage series of strikes

Workers employed by the computer giant Fujitsu are to stage a series of strikes in London in a long-running dispute over jobs, pay and pensions.

The union, Unite, is protesting at proposals for 1,000 redundancies, an imposed pay freeze and plans by the company to close the main final salary pension scheme to new workers. As a result its members in Belfast, Manchester, Crewe, Warrington and Staines walked out on strike January 7, to be followed by further action on January 8, 11, 14 and 15.

The latest developments follow a one-day stoppage in December, which was the first ever national strike in the UK's IT sector.

Fujitsu employs around 11,500 people in the UK.

UK: University staff strike looms

On January 5, the BBC reported that staff at the University of Leeds are to be balloted on industrial action if last-minute talks fail to resolve a dispute over job cuts.

University workers are campaigning against compulsory redundancies in the university's current efficiency review. Leeds has announced plans to make annual savings of ?35 million by 2011. If no agreement is reached, a ballot will be held January 11.

The University and College Union (UCU) said 54 jobs had already gone and a further 700 were at risk, which the union warned would lead to higher student-staff ratios and increased staff workload. The university has 8,000 staff. The institution stated that because of government cuts to the higher education budget, "severe cuts are a reality for the next academic year."

UK: Ticket staff at Virgin Trains in 24-hour strike

Around 200 Virgin Trains ticket office staff, working on one of the UK's busiest rail lines, went on a 24-hour strike in protest at planned cutbacks on January 4.

The action involved Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) members at 12 West Coast Main Line stations. The West Coast Main Line is a key route linking London with the major conurbations of Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. The TSSA also said all its members were out at the line's major stations of Euston, Coventry, Glasgow, Preston and Crewe plus seven other smaller stations.

It meant that some ticket offices were running a "bare bones" service having being staffed by members of another union—the Rail, Maritime and Transport union—and managers, said the TSSA.

UK: Hospital cleaners continue strike

Almost 200 cleaners, porters and cooks at a Devon hospital struck for a second day on January 6 over claims that the hospital trust and its contractor, Sodexo, have failed to enact a national agreement to ensure sick pay for all NHS workers.

The trust said it will implement sick pay from January, but it has refused to backdate the payments for three years.

Serbia: Bus workers on strike

Staff at Autoprevoz Transport Company in *Novi Sad*, central Serbia, struck at the end of December as a result of the company not respecting a collective contract. The city, suburban and intercity transportation was suspended. Around 30 workers blocked the exits and entrance to the bus station, with around another 200 employees reportedly in support.

President of the City Council of the Independent Union Vladimir Avramović said that the strikers had support from the employees of another three firms who have been protesting against the effects of privatization. "About 1,000 workers have been on strike for seven-eight months in *Novi Sad* now, but nobody is paying any attention to them. It shows that the government has not thought about this. They were selling the assets to anyone who came along, but nobody cares what happens to the workers and assets afterwards," he added. Autoprevoz was bought in 2007 by Israeli company Kavim.

France: Dockers strike at port reforms

AFP reported a January 4, one-day nationwide strike by French dock workers to protest the government's port "reforms" and press demands for compensation for workers exposed to asbestos.

The industrial action paralysed freight traffic at the country's two busiest ports, Marseille and Le Havre, port authorities said. About 16 ships were prevented from docking at Fos-sur-Mer and Marseille, according to Marseille port officials.

The CGT union said all 1,800 freight workers in Le Havre, France's largest container port, and most of the 1,500 employees of the port authority had honoured the strike.

Under a law adopted by the government in July 2008, the country's seven major ports are to be privatized.

The CGT has also called another nationwide strike for January 11.

Switzerland: Baggage handlers strike at Geneva airport

Dozens of baggage handlers employed by two companies, Dnata and Swissport, at Geneva's Cointrin airport took four days of strike action at the start of January, after negotiations broke down on their demands for wage increases and better work organisation.

Swissport employees from Zurich were sent to Geneva to do the baggage handlers' jobs and Geneva cantonal police and firefighters as well as customs police were also utilized.

Egypt: Food workers strike over non-payment

Around 2,000 workers employed at Honeywell Egypt for Food Manufacturing went on strike January 5, protesting at a two-year delay in distributing revenue shares among workers.

Another 10 workers staged a strike protesting a decision to transfer them from technical departments. The protest was accompanied by tight security measures.

Workers called for arbitrary transfer decisions to cease and demanded the distribution of the delayed shares. Workers say the company management intends to dissolve the firm and to fire workers without giving them their dues, under the pretext of global financial crisis.

Israel: Foreign ministry staff strike in solidarity with water authority workers

In a highly unusual move, employees at the Foreign Ministry took strike action January 6 in solidarity with water authority workers who are striking for a pay rise, according to *Haaretz*.

A Histadrut source said: "The idea is to put pressure on the Finance Ministry so it will finally sign a collective bargaining agreement with Water Authority employees—workers who apparently are beneath the notice of the treasury.... These are strikes organized by the State Employees Union together with the Water Authority workers, who have been working without a contract since structural changes were introduced in the agency about three years ago.

"We're not talking about Israel Electric Corporation or port employees, who don't need anyone's demonstrations of solidarity because of their great power. The [Water Authority] workers really need support for their struggle. We are positive that with every additional strike in a different ministry the treasury will sober up and start negotiating."

The solidarity strikes began December 30, when Department of Customs and VAT employees announced a four-hour work stoppage at the Jordanian border crossings, holding up cargo traffic. Income and land taxation employees suspended reception hours at Tax Authority offices.

The newspaper reported, "Treasury officials are hoping that the union's actions are not the start of a bigger battle to reopen salary talks for the entire public sector."

Jordan: Sacked employees protest outside Labour Ministry

According to the *Jordan Times*, scores of employees at Elba House—which specialises in bus production, development and maintenance—staged a sit-in opposite the Labour Ministry January 3, to protest their employer's decision to terminate their services.

The newspaper reported that the terminations were based on a decision by the labour minister to approve the company's restructuring request "due to alleged financial losses driven by the impact of the global economic crisis on the local economy."

The workers carried placards stating: "The country with the rule of the law should not see injustice practised against its citizens" and "most of us are sunk in debt and living in rented houses."

Kenya: Matatu bus strike

The Matatu Welfare Association (MWA) held a two-day nationwide strike earlier this week. Matatus are private buses driven by their owner drivers and provide the main means of public transport throughout Kenya. The MWA called the strike action in protest at harassment and extortion by police. The strike was called off after the Kenyan prime minister, Raila Odinga, promised to address the Matatu drivers' and conductors' grievances.

Tunisia: Ice cream workers in strike action

Around 100 workers at the Nestle factory in Carthage took three days' strike action at the end of December—a follow-up to two days of action at

the beginning of the month. The workers, who are members of the Federation of Food and Tourism Workers of Tunisia (FGAT), took the action after Nestle sold the factory to another employer. The workers are demanding to know the details of the deal and what it will mean for their terms and conditions.

According to the web site Uniting Food, Farm and Hotel Workers World Wide, many of the workers at the factory had recently been transferred there from other Nestle enterprises. They also report that the union's general secretary, Habib Ben Aifa, has been removed from his job as a sales rep for the factory and given a desk job where he is being subjected to constant surveillance.

This week marks the second month of strike action of workers of the Sun International Hotel chain. The workers, who belong to the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU), are demanding a 13 percent pay increase back-dated to July and a night shift allowance of R7 (US\$1) an hour, amongst other demands.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

Nigerian judiciary workers in ongoing strike action

Court workers belonging to the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) have been taking strike action for several weeks. Some state governments have been able to make temporary agreements with the union and the workers have resumed work. The Nigerian Bar Association in Abia state has said it would be willing to talk to union leaders in an attempt to settle the strike.

In Sokoto state the union leadership called off the strike three weeks ago. But some of its members are continuing the action. The workers say that only the National Central Working Committee has the right to call off action.

Ebonyi State academic staff take action

Academic staff in Ebonyi state, southeast Nigeria, began indefinite strike action January 5. The members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU) are demanding the university bring in the nationally agreed Consolidated Universities Accelerated Salary Structure, the establishment of a pension scheme and the reinstatement of sacked officials.

South African drinks workers spread strike action

Nearly 3,000 workers at Amalgamated Beverage Industries (ABI) belonging to the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) have been on strike since December 22. Amongst their demands are a 9.5 percent wage increase, a 45-hour working week and overtime pay. ABI distributes soft drinks throughout South Africa. Some 700 members marched to the ABI distribution centre in Pretoria.

COSATU and the National Union of Metalworkers have called for a boycott of ABI products in support of the striking workers.

From January 7 nearly 2,000 FAWU members working at the ABI's beer division SAB Miller were due to join the action. Talks between the employer and FAWU were due to take place this week, but they have been postponed until January 13.

Sun International Hotel workers strike enters second month