

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Workers at Carlsberg brewery, Denmark, end strike

On Monday, Danish workers at Carlsberg, the world's fourth largest brewer ended a three-day strike. Six hundred workers initially walked off the job in a pay dispute. Participation in the action eventually rose to 900 workers.

The members of the 3F union struck when Carlsberg announced there would be no pay increase for production workers this year due to its financial position. According to Carlsberg, employees returned to work of their own accord and said "no negotiations" took place.

UK: Hewlett Packard workers strike against pay cuts and job losses

On January 22, 1,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union struck Hewlett Packard in a dispute over pay and job losses.

The employees work at four sites in England on contracts for the Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Defence and General Motors—in Washington, Newcastle, Preston and the Fylde Coast. The strike comes after 3,400 job losses since 2008 and the imposition of a pay freeze. Hewlett Packard plans to shed another 1,000 jobs.

Greek farmers continue protests over state subsidies

On January 25, hundreds of Greek farmers held a rally in central Athens to demand additional state subsidies and higher prices for their produce. The action followed protests the previous week in which farmers blocked some of the main roads and borders with Bulgaria.

The same day the Greek agriculture minister, Katerina Batzeli, pledged that 2009 subsidies will be fully paid to farmers by the end of February and that subsidies for 2010 will be paid before the end of the year.

Shipyard workers in Finland in stoppage over job losses and outsourcing

On January 21, several hundred shipyard workers took strike action at STX Finland's Turku shipyard in south-western Finland. The workers struck to oppose planned job losses and the outsourcing of work.

STX Finland announced the previous week that it was to axe 370 jobs at the Turku yard and outsource some of its work. The announcement followed one in November in which the firm said 400 jobs would go and many of the yard's 2,300 workers would be temporarily laid off. Since then about 320 workers have been let go.

The latest announcement follows the completion of the world's biggest cruise liner by the workers at the yard—the Oasis of the Seas. STX Finland is part of an international conglomerate that has 15 shipyards in Norway, France, Romania, Finland, Brazil and Vietnam, employing 16,000 workers.

Public sector workers begin work-to-rule in Ireland

Public sector workers, members of several trade unions, began a work-to-rule on January 25 in Ireland. The action was taken after the Irish government announced pay cuts for state employees.

The workers are employed across a number of sectors, including the civil service, health, education and local authorities. Deputy Prime Minister Mary Coughlan refused to give an assurance that a further, third, public sector pay cut would not be imposed.

The following day Civil Public and Services Union General Secretary Blair Horan announced that members of the union would step up industrial action.

Treasury department and telephone equipment workers strike in Egypt

On Wednesday, employees at the Municipal treasury department from the Nile Delta province of Kafr el-Sheikh held a protest at the Cairo headquarters of the Finance Ministry. They demanded pay parity with their ministry-employed co-workers.

In another dispute 200 workers employed by the Telephones Equipment Company in the Helwan province, south of Cairo, held demonstrations to demand the payment of three months unpaid wages. According to one report security officers surrounded the demonstrators, preventing them from blocking the main road as they had done 10 days previously in their first strike of the dispute.

South Africa: Metrorail workers strike

Rail workers at South Africa Metrorail, which runs the rail network serving the urban areas of the wider Johannesburg area, took strike action Monday and Tuesday of this week. The members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU) struck to oppose the restructuring of work rosters.

According to Metrorail management they have still been able to maintain around a 70 percent service. Following a court interdict Wednesday, January 27, the striking

workers are expected to return to work. SATAWU spokesman Zenzo Mhlangu explained, "The interdict gave us 48 hours to talk to workers."

The interdict requires the union and management to recommence talks at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration on February 4. If no agreement can be reached the strike could resume.

Nearly 200 workers were dismissed for taking strike action. A Metrorail spokesman said they could re-apply for their jobs on a case-by-case basis.

Zimbabwe government workers seek living wage

Government workers could soon be involved in strike action in pursuit of a wage increase. Unions are seeking a monthly salary of US\$630, which they say is the minimum needed to subsist. The workers are paid in US dollars, because Zimbabwe's currency has been destroyed by hyper-inflation.

The three main unions involved are the Public Service Association, the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) and the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA).

Public Services Minister, Professor Eliphaz Mukonoweshuro, was due to meet with representatives of the three unions this week. However, this has now been postponed until Tuesday of next week. All have rejected the latest government offer of US\$236 per month. Other unions not currently scheduled to be part of the meeting with the minister next week are pressing to be included.

The unions have said they will begin strike action next week if their demands are not met. Although teachers reported for work with the opening of the new term in January, they are not carrying out teaching duties in protest at the slow pace of the wage negotiations.



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