

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## Finnish port workers strike over wages

Port workers in Finland began an indefinite strike on March 4 to demand a wage increase, more job protection and better severance pay for workers made redundant. The 3,400 workers are members of the Transport Workers Union. The union said that port management was attempting to withdraw basic job protection rights.

The strike had an immediate impact as Europe's two biggest papermakers, Stora Enso Oyj and UPM-Kymmene Oyj, were forced to begin to wind down production. UPM announced that it had closed one of its mills and that the strike would eventually lead to all mills being closed.

Sakari Tamminen of the Confederation of Finnish Industries denounced the strike, stating, "It can't be that a small key group dismantles an economy in crisis and destroys possibilities for a recovery." According to the confederation the striking port workers were costing the economy about €280 million daily in exports and imports.

Upwards of 70 percent of Finland's foreign trade passes through its Baltic ports, all of which have been halted by the strike. On March 9 the strike entered its sixth day and had become the longest port strike in two decades. On March 10, talks between the Transport Workers Union and management failed to reach an agreement. Further negotiations were scheduled.

## Italian workers plan four-hour strike

The Italian CGIL trade union federation has called a four-hour general strike for Friday. It will involve transport workers including those in rail, plane, ferry, local bus, subway and tram services.

The strike has been called to protest the level of income tax on workers and for increased protection of employees on

temporary contracts.

## French Total workers protest shutdown of Dunkirk refinery

On Monday several hundred workers and other protesters clashed with police at the Paris headquarters of the French oil company, Total. The protesters were demonstrating against Total's decision to close its refining operations at its Dunkirk site in northwest France. The Dunkirk refinery is one of six that Total operates in France.

The CGT trade union has called a 24-hour strike to be held at all French oil refineries on April 15. This is to coincide with talks involving the French government on the future of oil refining in France.

Workers in France held a week-long strike in February to oppose plans to close Dunkirk. The strike ended in defeat, after the CGT called it off as part of a tripartite deal with Total and the Sarkozy government. The agreement sacrificed the Dunkirk refinery for worthless assurances that Total will not cut production or close or sell any of its other refineries over the next five years.

## Romanian metro workers set to continue strike action

Metro workers in Romania are to strike nationally March 18 in an ongoing dispute. The last strike held by Metrorex staff was declared illegal in November. At that time the transport ministry rejected their request for a 26 percent pay increase.

The leader of the Union of Free Metro Trade Unions said that the action had been called against their will as "We did not have many options. The government has not held talks with the trade unions for four months—from 18 November 2009 to 18 March." This was despite the union agreeing to sacrifice members' bonuses and a 13th salary payment.

According to the union, the productivity of underground workers has increased by 30 percent from 2008. Four new stations have recently opened, with no increase in staff

numbers, significantly increasing Metrorex's profits. During the past year, the number of passengers has also increased from 300,000 to 650,000 per day.

### **Slovenian construction workers continue hunger strike**

Construction workers in Slovenia moved their hunger strike from Kocevje to the Labour Ministry in the capital Ljubljana. The workers are employed by construction firm Prenova and have not been paid for 15 months.

Following the move to the Labour Ministry, those involved held a meeting there to publicise their demands. The strikers also announced they are to sue their employer for the €50,000 to €60,000 they are owed.

### **Tanzania: Unions give notice of general strike**

The Tanzanian Trade Union Congress (TUCTA) has issued prior notice of nationwide general strike. TUCTA official Nicholas Mgaya gave notice of the action in a dispatch to Philemon Luhanjo, commissioner of labour to the president's office. By law unions are required to give 30 days notice.

The unions say the strike is set to begin May 5, following May Day celebrations. The unions have three main grievances and are calling on the government to address them: low salaries, high income tax deductions and low payouts on pensions to retired workers.

### **Nigeria: Secondary school teachers strike in Benue state**

Secondary school teachers belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Secondary School Teachers (ASUSST) have begun strike action in pursuit of a 27 percent pay increase. The strike was attacked by the Benue state section of the Nigerian Labour Congress. Its chairman, Simon Anchaver, described the ASUSST as an illegal body and called on the striking teachers to return to work.

The Benue state Universal Basic Education Board is currently in discussions with the Nigerian Union of Teachers over the 27 percent pay claim and is due to report back to the government in two weeks.

### **Nigeria: Oceanic bank workers protest**

Some junior staff at the Oceanic bank in Lagos staged an unofficial picket of the bank at the beginning of the week. They had discovered that pension deductions from their salaries had not been paid into the pension programme. They also protested against deductions from their salaries to a staff savings fund.

Peter Dio, secretary of the chapter of the National Union of Bank, Insurance and Financial Institutes Employees (NUBIFIE) at the bank, accused Oceanic of anti-labour practices, particularly affecting junior workers. He explained, "Any time the bank changes vendors, some of the workers lose their jobs. They are asked to reapply and this always leads to the underpayment of severance packages to workers."

Segun Ola, NUBIFIE general secretary, accused the workers taking action of being "over zealous." He said that talks between the union and management were under way and were discussing the issues that had been raised.

### **Morocco: Public sectors workers in national strike action**

Last week three public sector workers unions, the Moroccan Labour Union, the Democratic Labour Federation and the National Union of Moroccan Workers, took strike action. The unions had been involved in discussions with the government over the previous two months.

The workers have grievances over internal promotions and are pushing for pay rises in line with cost-of-living increases.

A report published on Magharebia states the strike "may paralyse public service activity in Morocco throughout the month. Union officials and the government plan to resume talks in April."



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