

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.

Finland: Dockers protest scab labour

On March 25, Finnish dock workers took wildcat action to protest managements' use of strike-breaking labour during a strike, which shut down country's ports for two weeks and terminated March 19.

Hundreds of stevedores walked off the job, including 750 in Kotka, southern Finland, 500 from Helsinki's Vuosaari port, and several hundred more in Vaasa, Kaskinen, Kemi and Tornio.

The Transport Workers' Union, AKT, disclaimed responsibility for the walkout, insisting it had been organised at a local level.

Workers are also angry at recently reiterated comments by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen calling for restrictions on the right to strike in key sectors.

The Confederation of Finnish Industries EK condemned the walkout. It said employers would take the union to an industrial court over the wildcat action.

The harbour operator Steveco plans to lay off nearly 100 dock workers in Kotka. Stevedores in the town walked off the job March 30 to protest the layoffs. A total of 64 stevedores will lose their jobs. The cuts will also affect managers and other staff. The job cuts are expected to save the company around five million euros. About 500 dockers are employed at Steveco's Kotka port.

Finland actors stage strike

Almost all Finland's theatres were closed March 27, when actors held a one-day strike to spur negotiations on evening work and Saturday supplements. The industrial action was the first taken by the actors' union in its nearly 100-year history.

Ireland: Thousands in hospital protest

Up to 8,000 protestors took to the streets of Ballinasloe March 28 to protest at any downgrading of services at Portiuncula Hospital, said the *Irish Times*. People came from Athlone, Roscommon, Loughrea and

Banagher, as well as local villages.

The hospital is the biggest employer in the town, with a staff of over 700.

The paper reported on plans for a super manager to run Portiuncula, Roscommon and Mayo hospitals and the declared opposition to this by the three unions at the Ballinasloe hospital, Impact, Siptu and the INO.

The *Irish Times* quoted Dr John Barton, a consultant of 19 years at Portiuncula, who said morale was now very low. "It's the worst I have seen and I fear for the future of the hospital."

Italy: Alitalia's flight crew set strike date

A 24-hour strike by pilots and flight crew, employed by Alitalia-Cai, has been set for May 3 over unresolved staffing issues which have sparked a series of stoppages in recent weeks.

Israel: Workers at major telecoms firm strike over rights

Employees at Bezeq Israel Telecom, the country's largest telecoms group, announced March 28 that they plan to take strike action beginning April 11 due to the fact that the company's new owners have yet to negotiate an agreement securing workers' rights.

According to news agency *Reuters*, 012 Smile, which offers Internet and domestic and long-distance calling services, agreed to buy a 30.7 percent stake in Bezeq in October for 6.5 billion shekels." [\$1 = 3.75 shekels]

012 Smile is controlled by businessman Shaul Elovitch through Eurocom Communications.

Egypt: Series of workers' protests continue

According to *almasryalyoum.com*, "Scores of people demonstrating before Egypt's parliament building in downtown Cairo March 30 for a host of different reasons—threatened to step up protests if their parliamentary representatives failed to address their demands. In recent days, the sidewalk opposite the parliament building has become the site of six independent demonstrations."

Protesting workers, whose demonstrations have entered their second week, complain that they have worked for nine years without receiving health insurance or financial incentives. They were also angered by the recent dismissal of a colleague from his job at the Daqahliya Information Center for taking part in the demonstration, and threatened to resign from the ruling National Democratic Party.

A group of physically-disabled people staged a day-long protest to demand jobs in accordance with the law, which stipulates that both public

and private-sector companies must allocate five percent of job vacancies to those with special needs. They also demanded residential units in public housing projects and permits to open small-size businesses.

Workers at the Agriculture Ministry continued their protest in demand of wage rises, while 300 workers of Al-Maasara Company for Manufacturing Telephone Equipment urged the government to take over ownership of the company from its foreign owner, who, they say, plans to liquidate the firm.

As *almasryalyoum* reported, “30 young subscribers to the Mubarak National Housing Program—launched as part of President Hosni Mubarak’s electoral platform—also staged protests against the government’s failure to provide them with housing units on schedule.

“Employees of the public prosecutor’s office likewise maintained their protest against their planned transfer to jobs within the court system, for which they say they are overqualified.

“Similar demonstrations were also reported in several areas outside Cairo.”

In Tanta, around 1,500 railway workers brought trains in and around the city to a halt for more than two hours, in a strike triggered by the failure to receive promised bonuses.

Some 400 nurses at the Tanta University Hospital continued protests for a third day to demand higher salaries.

In Alexandria, employees of Ezz Steel agreed to call off their strike, after company officials promised to meet their longstanding demands for wage readjustments and bonuses.

Over 600 workers from the Tanta Flax and Oils Company in Gharbiya Governorate continued their sit-in March 29 for the fifth consecutive day, after the company’s administration refused to distribute severance pay in breach of an agreement brokered by Minister of Manpower and Migration, Aisha Abdel Hadi.

In Fayoum, four workers from the Fayoum Spinning Factory ended their hunger strike after 11 days, against attempts by the factory’s administration to halt operations and force the workers into early retirement.

In North Sinai, transportation in and out of the city was affected by a taxi drivers’ strike in Beer el-Abd to protest the imposition of large fines they said they have already paid.

South Africa: Bus strike called off at last minute

A proposed strike by around 15,000 bus workers due to start Monday 29 March was called off at the last minute. The workers belonging to the Transport and Omnibus Workers Union, The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the Transport and Allied Workers Union of South Africa were due to strike in support of an across the board 15 percent pay increase.

Talks between the unions and South African Bus Employers Association (SABEA) on the eve of the strike ended with a pay offer of 10 percent from SABEA being accepted by the unions. The deal covers the year 2010/2011.

South Africa: Road Toll workers strike action

Toll gate workers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) were set to begin strike action Monday 29 March. The toll workers man the toll gates of the N4 highway in the North

Eastern province of Mpumalanga.

The workers are seeking a 17 percent pay increase. Trans African Concessions (TRAC) are offering a 7 percent increase. TRAC CEO Arthur Coy told the press that the company would use non-union staff and casual workers to man the toll gates.

Nigeria: Anambra Varsity workers strike

Workers at the Uli campus of the Anambra state university began strike action last week. The workers organised in the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), National Association of Academic Technologies (NAAT) and Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) are represented by the Joint Action Committee of trade unions at the university (JAC).

JAC had been in discussion with university management over 20 demands of the workers. The strike began after the talks failed to address the workers’ demands, covering the failure of the university authorities to pay arrears from various agreements over the last seven years.

A Nigerian *Daily Champion* newspaper of 26 March, reports that academic staff may take sympathy action.

Uganda: Hospital cleaners stop work over non-payment of wages

Around 300 cleaners at Mulago hospital went on strike Monday 29 March, demanding payment of their two month salary arrears. Cleaners’ supervisor Paul Ddamba, speaking to the *Daily Monitor*, explained, “Our children are being chased out of school because of fees and landlords are demanding their rent.”

The cleaners work for Safi Cleaners Services. Safi’s executive director said that the hospital owed her Sh 90 million and so she had been unable to pay the cleaners’ wages. The cleaners took strike action when they learnt that a new company, Norema Services, was to take over the cleaning contract on April 1.

A hospital representative has said outstanding monies owed to the Safi Company will be paid as soon as possible.

Sierra Leone: Health workers win pay increase following strike

Doctors and nurses in Sierra Leone returned to work after the 10 days of strike action in pursuit of a pay increase. At the weekend the Sierra Leone President Ernest Koroma agreed doctors pay would increase six-fold from US\$100 a month to US\$600 a month.

In the course of the strike the country’s main children’s hospital was closed, as were several wards in Freetown’s maternity hospital.



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