

# 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.

## Doctors in Luxembourg continue protest against health reforms

Thousands of health workers may strike indefinitely in Luxembourg later this month. They are seeking to pressure the government to abandon its health reform. Members of the Association of Doctors and Dentists in Luxembourg (AMMD) trade union have worked half their normal hours in recent weeks. Their action began on October 22.

Medical workers are concerned that the reform, which gives the state greater control, would mean an end to patients being able to choose which doctor to visit. There is also fear over a proposal to place the personal details of patients into a national database.

On Wednesday, AMMD General Secretary Claude Schummer said that the members of the union would continue to provide reduced services. Representatives of the union had “unanimously decided to carry on with the strike but would not enhance the measures taken so far”, she said.

## International Labour Organisation staff strike in Geneva

Staff at the headquarters of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva, Switzerland protested on Wednesday to oppose short-term contracts. The International Labour Organisation is the United Nation’s body that advocates better working conditions and produces research into labour relations globally.

Up to 600 employees staged a general meeting after talks with management broke down. The ILO employs some 2,800 people.

The union representing the employees issued a statement saying, “The ILO must practice what it preaches to the world. While we, the staff at the ILO research, write and travel the world over promoting a dialogue-driven response to the global financial crisis, here at home our own rights are being eroded”.

According to AFP, the workers lobbied a planned meeting of the ILO’s governing council, forcing its postponement. The union warned that the ILO had until November 16 to address its grievances. Industrial action was last held by workers at the ILO in 1991.

## Cyprus: Eurocypria Airline workers strike to protest airline closure

Around 320 workers employed at Eurocypria Airline in Cyprus began a strike on November 3 to oppose the closure of the airline and the loss of their jobs. The state-owned Eurocypria is set to close on November 13 and be merged with Cyprus Airways (CY).

The strike immediately led to the cancelation of a Moscow-bound flight from Paphos and further flights to Germany and Tel Aviv in the evening are also set to be cancelled.

The employees’ trade union has done nothing to defend its members’ jobs, despite being told last month that the airline was expected to close. The *Cyprus Mail* reported October 16 that, following a meeting between Finance Minister Charilaos Stavarakis and unions, the general secretary of the Eurocypria union said, “We received assurances from the Finance Minister that on November 13, when Eurocypria’s cycle of operations will end, the employees will not remain exposed.”

The union said it was not opposed to redundancies, only compulsory ones. “The Minister responded that we would not be faced with obligatory sackings”, general secretary Elisseos Michail commented to the *Mail*.

The main trade union at Cyprus Airways, SYNYKA, has responded to the plight of the Eurocypria workers by defending the interests of the airline. Union leader Andreas Pierides said, “The position expressed to transfer all employees to CY is something we do not agree with. The aim is to use this period from today until November 13 to come up with the correct solution. We will never accept CY being burdened with added staff on November 13.”

On November 7, the 320 Eurocypria staff staged a 30-minute sit-down protest on the roundabout leading to the airport after 9 a.m. The sit-down blocked the road leading to the airport and the entry to all the car parks. They held another demonstration in the airport’s departures lounge.

Finance Minister Stavarakis said this week the government would shortly announce its redundancy plans for Eurocypria workers.

## Croatian journalists strike for press freedoms and workers’ rights

Journalists at the Croatian daily newspaper *Voice of Istria* began strike action on November 7, the latest action in a long-running dispute over workers’ rights and press freedoms. The Croatian Journalists’ Union, representing 117 workers at the Glas Istre Novine company, called the strike. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has given its support.

For the past nine months, workers at the then Glas Istre Ltd. company have witnessed a company buyout, plans for massive wage cuts, job losses and internal interference in journalistic decisions.

In February Glas Istre Ltd. revealed a debt of more than €13 million—largely due to reckless property speculation. Loans were raised to pay wages in a deal benefiting from links between the company and the

local leader of the Istrian Democratic Forum, the party which has been in power for more than 20 years in the district. When journalists tried to write about these links, they were censored.

The company was subsequently sold to a local businessman, previously under legal investigation over his business practices, who restructured the organisation, nullified the existing and collective agreement and cut pay by up to 40 percent.

A recent court ruling has sought to limit the impact of the industrial action by insisting that up to 20 workers must be available to work.

### **Italian cultural workers to strike against budget cuts**

Museum, archaeological, theatre and library employees at other cultural sites in Italy are to strike nationwide today to protest the government's plan to slash arts and culture funding. The government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi approved cuts this summer cutting arts and culture spending by €58 million annually in 2011 and 2012.

The cuts are part of a €1.1 billion reduction in local authority spending to be imposed over the next two years.

### **Finnish postal workers dispute ends**

The strike action by Finnish postal workers officially ended on November 7 following an agreement between Posti, the Finnish postal operator, and the Finnish Post and Logistics Union PAU. The agreement ended an overtime ban that had been in place. PAU had threatened to strike if the dispute was not resolved.

The action began on October 29 following the expiry of the previous collective labour agreement on October 15. By November 9, the backlog of mail accrued by the dispute was almost cleared.

### **Dutch TNT delivery workers to strike against redundancies**

Workers employed by the Dutch mail and express group TNT (TNT.AS) are set to strike for 24 hours on November 16. The strike has been threatened by the unions as the company plans to impose redundancies.

The unions said the strike would proceed following the expiry on Monday of a deadline they set for management to reconsider its plans. The union is not opposed to redundancies in principle, only stating its opposition to compulsory ones.

TNT is planning to shed 11,000 jobs. It announced over the summer that compulsory redundancies could reach 4,500. It has since stated that this could be reduced by 1,400.

This week, TNT's mail division managing director Harry Koorstra expressed confidence that the firm and unions would settle the dispute, stating, "I understand the concerns over delays, but let's wait and see what happens. We have a good track record of resolving such conflicts."

The job losses being imposed at TNT are part of its restructuring plans, ahead of a possible sale of the firm.

### **Editorial workers at the *Southern Daily Echo* strike in Southampton**

Journalists began a 48-hour strike against publisher Newsquest in Southampton, England on Tuesday to oppose a pay freeze, the closure of the final salary pension scheme and the scrapping of loyalty payments.

The employees are members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). Newsquest publishes the *Southern Daily Echo* and other titles. About 40 editorial staff struck, and also participated in a protest outside the *Echo*'s offices.

The NUJ said that it held the action as a last resort and had been willing to accept virtually any settlement management would have put forward. Sally Churchward, NUJ chapel secretary, said, "Any serious offer from management—even a partial reinstatement of loyalty payments—would have been enough to avert a strike. We just wanted something, but were offered absolutely nothing."

Editor-in-chief Ian Murray claimed the strike did not affect the production of any of the group's publications. A further 48-hour strike is scheduled to be held on November 16 and 17.

### **Journalists at *Brighton Argus* in England vote to strike**

National Union of Journalists members at the *Brighton Argus* have voted to strike by a large majority to oppose owner Newsquest's plans to move the newspaper's sub-editing operation to Southampton. The NUJ claims that the move will result in the loss of seven jobs.

The union has set November 18 and 19 as strike dates. The previous two days could also see a strike action by NUJ members at the *Southern Daily Echo*, also owned by publisher Newsquest.

### **DHL Supply Chain workers in England to strike at Jaguar Land Rover plants**

Delivery workers employed by DHL Supply Chain in England and based at Jaguar Land Rover are to strike next week in a pay dispute. DHL Supply Chain is the main external parts delivery arm of Jaguar Land Rover. The 800 workers include forklift drivers and warehousing employees at Halewood near Liverpool, and Castle Bromwich and Solihull, Birmingham.

The action is set to go ahead on November 15.

The *Liverpool Daily Post* cited the comments of one worker who said, "It's been building up to this for months. We tried to do it last time but they came up with a little sweetener. They said we'd all get ?1,000 as a one-off payment, and that was supposed to be instead of the pay rise.

"We got told yesterday after a big meeting. We don't know how long we'll be out on strike for. They've given no justification for refusing the pay rise. Our drivers got one and the Jaguar workers did as well."

### **Iranian textile workers strike for owed wages**

Around 750 textile workers gathered in front of the governor's office in the northern Mazandaran Province November 3, to protest a 10-month

delay in the payment of their wages.

Workers in the city of Qaemshahr said they have not received regular bonuses for four months, on top of which they have not been paid three months' worth of regular wages this year.

Workers reportedly face problems such as refusal by local bakeries and grocery stores to extend them credit.

Approximately 90 percent of Iran's textile industries are on the verge of collapse, according to statistics recently cited in parliament.

### **Three-day general strike over minimum wage in Nigeria**

Nigeria's two major union bodies, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, called for a three-day general strike in support of an increase in the minimum wage. The strike began Wednesday, November 10, and ends today.

According to a BBC report of November 10, the streets of Nigeria's main commercial centre, Lagos, were "eerily quiet". The unions held a rally in the city.

The unions' demand is for the minimum wage, currently set at N7,500, or \$US50 a month, to be more than doubled to N18,000, or \$US120. The current minimum wage figure was set over a decade ago and has been eaten away by inflation.

Over the last few years inflation has been running at double-digit levels, as food and transport costs soared sharply. According to the World Bank, over 80 percent of Nigeria's more than 100 million people live on less than US\$2 a day.

According to the union bodies, the central government had agreed in principle to a N18,000 minimum wage, but had failed to implement it.

Various affiliated unions have given their support to the action. A leader of the Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies said, "We believe in the strike. We will shut down (electricity generating) plants in the country throughout the three-day warning strike."

The general secretary of the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees, Elijah Ola, said, "We call on our members to come out fully to support the struggle for... the agreed N18,000 minimum wage."

Members of the National Assembly (parliament) claimed to be in support of the N18,000 minimum wage, but called on the union leaders to restrict the strike just to the one day. In return they said they would speed up the passing of the minimum wage legislation in the Assembly.

### **Lecturers in Nigerian state of Kano call off long-running strike**

Academic staff at Kano's tertiary education establishments, including Kano Polytechnic, Audu Bako College of Agriculture, Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education, College of Arts and Science (CAS) and Aminu Kano College of Islamic Legal Studies, have called off their long-running strike. Kano is Nigeria's most populous state.

They began their strike action July 15, in pursuit of improved salaries and an improved working environment, amongst other demands.

According to the Kano state Commissioner for Higher Education, an agreement was reached with the unions "based on mutual trust."

The plan is for negotiations to take place over the next four weeks, during which time the lecturers will return to their posts.

### **Possible end to strike by Nigerian medical staff in Lagos state**

Around 400 doctors belonging to the Medical Guild working in Lagos state hospitals began strike action in August, demanding Lagos state implement the federally agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Scale (CONMESS).

Lagos State Governor Babatunde Fashola has now agreed to a 75 percent pay increase for the doctors and dental officers employed by the state.

However, the doctors were aggrieved that details of the government offer were made public before the doctors had had chance to discuss and come to a decision on the offer and have yet to return to work.

Lagos state authorities came under increasing pressure last week to settle the claim of the doctors of the Medical Guild, when doctors working in federal health institutions took three-day strike action in support of their colleagues.



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