

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.

Dutch postal workers stage 24-hour strike over job cuts

Postal workers in the Netherlands employed by TNT staged a 24-hour strike Tuesday, in protest at plans to slash up to 11,000 jobs. It is the first nationwide postal strike since 1983. Around 8,000 striking postal workers protested in The Hague.

Unions had initially voted to accept job cuts rather than pay cuts, but rank-and-file anger made their position untenable. The strike went ahead after a compromise proposal of 3,400 forced layoffs was rejected. TNT employs around 37,000 at its mail arm.

In the third quarter, TNT's mail operations reported operating income had dropped by 31 percent, to €78 million. TNT, once a monopoly in the Netherlands, has been pushing for thousands of jobs to go in order to remain competitive after the Dutch mail market was opened to competition from Germany's Deutsche Post and major companies.

TNT employs some 160,000 workers around the world. The corporation plans to split its two core operations, post and express delivery, into two new companies by January 2011.

Heinz workers in Wigan, England in strike ballot over pay

Around 1,200 workers employed at the Heinz Baked Beans factory, in Wigan, England are to be balloted for strike action in a dispute over pay. Workers have been offered a 3.3 percent pay rise, followed by 3 percent in 2011, in the context that Heinz recently announced a big increase in profits.

The Wigan plant is the largest food-processing site in Europe, producing 1.5 million cans of baked beans a day.

UK paper packaging workers to vote on industrial action

Staff employed by Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) are to vote in the coming weeks on industrial action, following the rejection of a 2.1 percent pay increase.

The bargaining committee for the Unite union's corrugated paperboard industry, representing 2,500 workers at 50 UK factories, is to issue the

ballot details.

Workers in the corrugated paper sector voted nine to one to reject the 2010 pay offer from CPI. The offer was put forward after weeks of delay by the employers' organisation.

Strike shuts major Italian museums over planned funding cuts

The majority of Italy's main cultural attractions shut November 12 due to a one-day strike over government plans to cut their funding. Hundreds of museums, art galleries and heritage sites were affected. Those not fully closed had restricted hours.

The Italian government wants to cut €280 million from the culture budget over the next three years as part of its austerity programme.

The recent collapse of the House of the Gladiators at a 2,000-year-old site in Pompeii led to calls for the resignation of Culture Minister Sandro Bondi and raised questions over Italy's ability to maintain its heritage.

The BBC's Duncan Kennedy reported that critics blamed a lack of money for maintenance and say this proves Italy's cultural investment should rise, not fall. Italian heritage experts warn that many other monuments, including Bologna's twin towers, Florence's Cathedral and Nero's Golden House in Rome, are vulnerable to collapse.

Alessandra Mottola Molfino, head of the heritage charity Our Italy, recently told the AFP news agency, "With no maintenance and nonexistent funds, the whole of Italy is at risk of collapsing."

Italy has more World Heritage Sites than any other country.

Foreign workers end two-week crane protest in northern Italy

Four foreign workers have ended a two-week protest atop a 35-metre crane in the northern Italian city of Brescia to demand residency permits. The migrant workers were greeted with cheers when they climbed down from the construction crane after negotiations involving lawyers, local church officials, union leaders and police.

The workers are from Pakistan, Morocco and Egypt. They say residency permits have become impossible to obtain since a law made being an "illegal immigrant" a crime, even for migrants who have been working in Italy for years.

The law requires would-be migrant workers to have jobs waiting for them in order to receive a residence permit. Immigrant workers who lose their jobs immediately forfeit their residency permits under the legislation. The crane protesters claim a government amnesty granting residency permits to illegal immigrant domestic workers discriminates

against other categories of migrant workers.

The Brescia protesters survived their 16-day protest on the crane by sleeping in shifts and by receiving food hoisted up to them by supporters on the ground. Three foreign workers were continuing a protest November 16 atop a tower in the northern city of Milan, which they began on November 5.

Industrial action over union recognition at Malta Enterprise

Staff will take industrial action at Malta Enterprise over a dispute on whether employees at a managerial level should receive union recognition.

Level 4 managers are not to answer telephones or emails for work-related purposes, and will not deliver weekly progress reports.

Russian autoworkers strike over unpaid wages

Hundreds of autoworkers at several workshops at the TagAvtoProm plant in the city of Taganrog, southwest Russia, took strike action to demand their unpaid salaries.

On November 12, about 150 employees refused to work because they had not received their pay cheques from September.

They later agreed to start working after the workshop leader promised their salaries would be paid that week. But hundreds of workers again refused to start work because of the unpaid wages.

A lawyer representing TagAvtoProm's management and a member of a union established by management tried to persuade the workers to return to their jobs, saying the strike would affect their November salaries. The plant employs around 6,000 workers.

Egypt: Information workers renew protest

On November 10, some 1,000 Information Centre for Local Development (ICLD) workers were prevented from reaching the public prosecution office by police officers who penned them in outside Cairo's Lawyers' Syndicate.

A few days earlier, a delegation of ICLD workers rejected a new employment contract drawn up by the Ministry of Local Development, as it called for the contract to be renewed each year. It makes no provision for the annual social raises.

ICLD workers are demanding that workers be granted the health insurance benefits that have accrued in the nine years since they were appointed.

Last month they were informed that they would be transferred to the Ministry of Health. The decision was opposed by workers who saw it as an attempt to avoid implementing a May agreement that increased 32,000 ICLD workers' salaries from LE 99 per month to a minimum of LE 320.

"Protesting workers initially expressed their intention not to end the demonstration until they received a copy of the revised contract, but began dispersing after security officers demanded that they leave the area," according to the *Daily News Egypt*.

Protests outside Iranian parliament

According to *Kaleme* web site, hundreds of retired workers protested outside the parliament against the transfer of their health benefits from Social Welfare to the Ministry of Health. They also protested the 6 percent increase in their pay which they claimed should have been at least 15 percent.

Previously, retired workers from west of Tehran and Shar-e Rey had also staged a demonstration in front of the parliament.

"As a result the MPs voted down the plan to transfer the workers' health benefits to the Ministry of Health," reported *Kaleme*.

The Iranian Student News Agency reported that the parliament also witnessed a protest from truck drivers last week against overpricing practices of Iran Khodro Diesel in the sale of trucks.

Zambian port workers protest

Last week casual workers employed by Mpulungu Harbour Corporation held a protest over the lack of protective clothing and poor management. Mpulungu port is on Lake Tanganyika and deals with goods for Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Speaking to the press, one worker explained, "We have been asking for boots and overalls for a long time now... We need those safety cloths and gumboots because the work we are doing is hard."

Another worker said, "What we get is nothing compared to the work we do. We lift cement every day on our heads, but the money we get is not even peanuts ... the company makes a lot of money ... They say we are special casuals but even casuals deserve some respect. Some of us have been here ... a long time."

Ugandan miners hold sit-down strike

Last week nearly 400 miners at the Kilembe mine in Kasese held a one day sit-down strike. The mine produces copper, a material that has seen surging demand and prices in recent months.

The members of the Ugandan Mines Metal Allied Workers Union took the action over the failure of the company to conduct a wage and salary review last April. They were also protesting the actions of the general manager, who is accused of mistreatment and dismissing workers without good cause.

Kenyan union contests Del Monte sacking in court

The Kenya Union of Commercial, Food and Allied Workers (KUCFAW) has gone to the Industrial Court to contest sacking of 40 workers by the fruit processing company Del Monte.

Around 1,700 workers went on a week-long strike in October over unpaid allowances, the use of temporary work contracts and deteriorating conditions, which the union says led to the death of a worker.

Following the strike workers were locked out by the company. The lockout was only lifted following a court order. However, the company then pushed through the 40 dismissals of union activists, including all 17

shop stewards.



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