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.*

Mass protests of Italian students in defence of education

Hundreds of thousands of students took part in the "Block Everything Day" November 30, demonstrating across the country as MPs debated a bill on education cuts.

Students have argued that the proposed cuts threaten the future of education. The Italian Student's Union estimated that up to 400,000 students participated in the protests.

Students blocked roads, major throughways and central squares in Rome, and hundreds surrounded the Chamber of Deputies as riot police enforced a tight cordon. The highways of other major cities, from Turin to Palermo, were blocked together with the tracks at railway stations in Milan, Pisa and Venice.

More than 2,100 buses and 13 chartered trains from across Italy brought the protesters to Rome.

Demonstrations in Athens against austerity cuts

Hundreds of demonstrators marched through central Athens November 25 to protest against deep government austerity cuts.

Some on the march held banners with slogans such as; "No layoffs. Write off the debt," and "This is far enough, we can't take any more."

The march, organized by umbrella groups ostensibly representing public and private sector workers, terminated outside the Finance Ministry.

The Associated Press also reported on a number of separate protests held the same day. Around 250 retired military officers demonstrated outside the Defence Ministry against pension cuts and health care reforms. Meanwhile, 30 disabled athletes, including Paralymic medalists, gathered outside the Culture Ministry, protesting the government's slashing of funding for sports involving people with special needs.

A further nationwide general strike is planned December 15.

Greek journalists strike over wage and job cuts

Thousands of Greek journalists staged a 24-hour nationwide strike November 30 to protest wage cuts and layoffs resulting from government austerity measures.

Hundreds of journalists marched through central Athens holding banners reading "No lay-offs, contracts now," before gathering outside the labour ministry.

The industrial action brought a halt to news programs, web site updates and newspaper publications, while state and private television stations broadcast cartoons and documentaries instead of news and scheduled programmes.

Some media organizations have imposed wage cuts of up to 10 percent and at least two newspapers have closed down this year.

The government has agreed with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund tax increases and cuts in exchange for €110 billion ($143 billion), placing the burden on Greek workers and students.

Greek ferry workers conclude eight-day strike

Ferry crews returned to work December 1, following an eight-day strike in defence of their jobs and unemployment entitlements.

Ferry and passenger ships raised anchor across the country after the Greek Seamen's Federation obeyed an emergency order by the government to return to work or risk arrest.

It is the second time in less than six months that the government has broken a strike using the threat of arrests, after facing down a three-week strike by truck drivers in the summer.

Media coverage concentrated on the disruption of supplies of food and medicine to hundreds of islands.

The seaman's union is nominally demanding the safeguarding of jobs with 10 months employment per year and the creation of an independent unemployment fund for seamen.

Striking Czech civil servants to demonstrate in 19 towns

Czech trade unions published a list November 30 of 19 towns where demonstrations are to be held during the strike of civil servants on December 8, according to a press release by the CMKOS trade union.

State and public employees declared industrial action in protest against the government's intention to cut pay in the public sector by 10 percent from next year. Also contested is the fact that the budgetary cuts will lead to overall deterioration of public services, especially the health service.

Along with the Palackeho Square, in Prague, the demonstrations will be held in all 13 regional capitals plus some small towns. Firefighters, prevented from participating legally in the demonstrations due to anti-strike regulations, are to hold a public rally on December 15.

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Cabin crew at main Finnish carrier strike over work schedules

The country's national carrier Finnair cancelled over 200 international and domestic flights December 1, on the second day of a cabin crew strike in a dispute over work schedules.

Cabin crew say that the airline is seeking to undermine the system of compensatory days off that employees get for bearing the difficulties of long-haul flights.

Finnair's CEO Mika Vehvilaenen told a press conference November 30, that unless the company could make significant cost-cutting measures and agree on a "favourable" labour contract, the company would look into outsourcing operations and jobs to countries with cheaper labour.

Belgian glass workers strike over job losses

On November 26, workers at two glass factories in western Flanders carried out a 24-hour strike in opposition to job cuts.

The workforce responded to the decision of Japanese-based Asahi Glass to downsize two AGC (formerly Glaverbel) plants, resulting in the elimination of 101 of 297 jobs (including eight temporary workers) at AGC Zeebrugge and AGC Seapane.

The ACG Zeebrugge factory produces automobile mirrors and high-value glass used in the furniture industry, and ACG Seapane is a producer of heat-insulated glazed architectural glass used in the construction industry. The recent announcement is the second major restructuring by Asahi in Belgium in just over a year and the fourth in 10 years.

In October 2009, AGC Automotive in the Wallonia region of Belgium made over 200 of 475 workers redundant. The company also announced between 60 and 90 job losses at glass production facilities in Kryry, Czech Republic, the AGC Klin factory near Moscow, and one in the Netherlands.

German pilots at Lufthansa subsidiary strike over job cuts

Pilots at Eurowings Luftverkehrs AG, the Dortmund-based subsidiary of national carrier Lufthansa, staged a half-day strike November 26, grounding 72 scheduled flights, in a protest at planned job cuts. The low-cost unit employs 305 pilots.

The Vereinigung Cockpit union says Lufthansa is planning to reduce the Eurowings fleet from 34 to 15 planes, meaning a loss of 180 pilot jobs. Eurowings flies high-traffic routes within Europe.

Last week, a labour court scuttled plans for a strike at another German carrier, Air Berlin, in a dispute over pay.

BA cabin crew to ballot for fresh strike action

Unite, the union representing 11,000 cabin crew employed at British Airways (BA), confirmed November 29 that a fresh ballot for industrial action at the airline is to be taken soon in an ongoing dispute over changes to working conditions and company victimisation of workers.

Among the demands announced by Unite, on disclosing the ballot, are a "restoration of staff travel concessions, in full, to the crew from whom they were taken by BA", and "restoration of the wages docked from crew who were genuinely off sick during strike dates."

The ballot will conclude in early January. Unite has repeatedly sabotaged any effective struggle against BA's offensive against working conditions and jobs.

UK casino strike looms

A consultative ballot is to take place amongst 36 workers at two prestigious casinos in Mayfair, London. They are asking the Central Executive Council to sanction an official strike ballot over the threat to sack staff seeking talks before changes to work rosters and work locations are made.

The Gentings Casinos announced the imposition of changes to the working hours and work locations of their door staff and car jockeys at the two company casinos, Crockfords and the Colony Club. The changes were announced without consultation with staff or the recognized union for the casino workers. Managers have threatened staff with disciplinary measures including firing, if they do not take up the new rotas and agree to move to other locations.

Italian football players in strike over contracts

Players in the nation's Serie A soccer league have called a strike for the weekend of December 11-12, after a breakdown in talks concerning the recent expiry of a collective contract between the players' association (AIC) and league bosses guaranteeing players' rights in the final year of their contracts with their employers.

Bahrain contractors strike

Around 50 workers at a Bahrain contracting company took industrial action November 28, claiming they had not been paid for up to eight months.

The *Gulf Daily News* reported that the Indian and Bangladeshi workers are refusing to return to work until the company pays their outstanding wages.

The workers are employed as carpenters and labourers at the Ali Bin Ebrahim Abdul A'al Holding Company, Khamis, where they earn BD70 to BD100 (US$186 to US$266) a month.

One of the workers said, "The company hasn't paid us for six to eight months... We will not go to work unless the management pays our outstanding salaries. They have already promised to pay us for two months… We have families to take care of and support. We are also facing problems, as we don't have money to buy groceries and other daily items. We don't know who to complain to, as the management is not listening to us. We will not go back to work unless we get our money, and we don't care how long it takes."

He said the workers went on strike in October for 15 days, but returned to work after the company paid them two months' wages.

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Construction workers protest in Tehran against annulment of insurance

Hundreds of construction workers staged a protest last week in front of the government's Majlis (parliament) building in Tehran, Iran, against the adoption of a bill annulling compulsive social insurance for workers, according to the state-run ILNA.

The protest took place as the Majlis intended to adopt a bill calling for the annulment of insurance for construction workers.

South African Metrorail workers strike

Workers at Cape Town Metrorail belonging to the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (UTATU) took strike action Wednesday, December 1. The action is in opposition to new shift rotas due to start December 4.

The strike led to a total shutdown of the service that normally provides 600,000 passenger journeys each day. UTATU General Secretary Chris Vos blamed management for unilaterally introducing the shift changes.

Sierra Leone postal workers strike

Workers at the Sierra Leone Postal Services (SALPOST) took strike action and held a demonstration in Freetown. Among their demands are a salary increase and payment of agreed previous increases that have yet to be paid.

One worker explained to the *Concord Times* newspaper that a backlog of pay from a 2006 settlement was due to be paid over a 16-month period. However, by October this year only three out of the agreed 16 payments had been made. In addition, a negotiated increase due to have been paid since January this year has not yet been paid.

Kenyan postal workers strike

Workers at the Postal Corporation of Kenya (PCK) have taken nationwide strike action, demanding PCK boss Hussein Ali steps down. The workers are members of the Communication Workers of Kenya.

Deputy General Secretary Ismael Noo explained that normally a salary review is held every two years. However, under Ali there has been no such review. Amongst their demands are a 50 percent pay increase, a review of housing and commuter allowances and promotion for long serving workers.

The strike went ahead in spite of an injunction from the Industrial Court prohibiting it.

Moroccan textile workers sit-in enters second month

Around 1,500 textile workers, of which two-thirds are women, have been conducting a sit-in protest at four factories in Sale, near the Moroccan capital Rabat. The protest has been taking place since October 29.

They began the action when the factory owners, the Mortanex company, wanted to close the factories. Mortanex is a subsidiary of Courtaulds Textiles, now owned by Hong Kong-based PD Enterprise Ltd. The workers suspect the company plans to move the operation to China.

Textiles is a key industry in Morocco, but since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008 up to 20,000 jobs have been lost.

Botswana hotel workers strike ends

Workers organized in the Botswana Hotel Travel and Tourism Workers Union (BHTTWU) working for Cresta began strike action at the end of last week, but were due to return to work Wednesday, December 1.

The strike action was in pursuit of a 13 percent pay increase. Cresta is Botswana's largest hotel chain.

Nigerian primary school teachers strike

Nigerian primary school teachers working in the Federal Capital Territory began strike action last Monday. According to the National Union of Teachers, the strike was universally supported by its members.

They are taking action over two months' salaries and fringe benefits owed to them by the government.

Nigerian petrol tankers drivers strike

Petrol tanker drivers in the Petroleum Tanker Drivers (PTD) branch of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union (NUPENG) began strike action Tuesday, which was due to last a week. However, the strike was called off after a day after a meeting with the labour minister, Emeka Wogu, in Abuja.

The action, which had been nationwide, led to long queues at filling stations. It was called in response to the killing of a driver in Jos. The drivers were also protesting the seizure of trucks by the military in Ibadan and Port Harcourt.

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